

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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WHO WE ARE

We believe living an issue every day makes you an expert, and that leaders make better decisions when they can access and learn from those “everyday experts.”

Deep insights shouldn't just be for consumer products. Decision makers in government, anchor institutions, and major companies need the wisdom of lived experience to produce better results.

With our unique combination of outreach and facilitation, we bring decision makers and everyday experts together in forward-thinking focus group conversations and ongoing community advisory boards. Our work produces clear insights, actionable ideas, and innovative strategies for change.

Our Values



TRUSTING LIVED EXPERIENCE

Living an issue every day makes someone an everyday expert.



PROACTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement should be about getting more than just negative feedback. We facilitate idea-driven conversations where everyday experts brainstorm solutions.



PEOPLE CENTERED DECISION MAKING

Leaders will make better decisions when they incorporate the wisdom of lived experience.



ENGAGING A DIVERSE SET OF VOICES THROUGH GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

We utilize community organizing strategies to build a network of community “Bridgebuilders.” Our model brings new voices from marginalized communities to the table.

By The Numbers

	Bridgebuilder Network	New Bridgebuilders	% change from 2019
CINCINNATI	800+	300	+60%
COLUMBUS	75+	75	-

	Conversations & Events	% change from 2019
CINCINNATI	82	+64%
COLUMBUS	9	-



Letter from Dani

This past year defies summary, and contains so much resilience, relief, creativity and weirdness that it is hard to reflect too much on the 2020-ness of it. So I'll focus on what is more knowable: in 2020, despite everything and because of it, Cohear continued to elevate and empower the voices of people who live the issues every day. We held to our conviction that everyday experts need to be in every room when decisions are being made about their lives and communities. I am proud and grateful that we continued to pursue our mission successfully this year.

From Cincinnati to Columbus, we helped leaders of hospitals engage their neighbors about housing and healthcare needs, a school district improve its crisis response and approach to racial injustice, and transit systems adapt to the pandemic based on the wisdom of their riders. For the first time, we focused on issues of public health, ranging from addiction to reproductive services and HIV treatment. And when our communities were locked down in the depths of March and April, we rallied to make sure that the voices of parents, seniors, Black healthcare

providers, and the recently unemployed could shape emergency relief efforts.

All of this took place when our own team was dealing with the hardships of 2020, and I am so grateful for the incredible people who work at Cohear. Their dedication to the community is inspiring, and we were so fortunate to add another four wonderful people to the team.



None of our work would be possible without our amazing community of Bridgebuilders and everyday experts, who made sure to lift up their communities in the midst of hardship.

In crises, there is often a temptation to close the doors and make rapid decisions in the name of urgency. The more urgent the crisis, however, the more urgent the need for everyday expertise. As the pandemic persists, now is the time to deepen connection, establish trust, and change the culture of how decisions get made. If we can do that in our corner of Ohio, if we can change the way our communities work with leaders to shape their common futures, I can't wait to see what we can achieve together.

Dani Isaacsohn

Founder

**NOW IS THE TIME TO DEEPEN CONNECTION,
ESTABLISH TRUST, AND CHANGE THE CULTURE
OF HOW DECISIONS GET MADE**

Letter from one of our Bridgebuilders

I'd like to start this letter by saying "thank you" to Cohear. Their work has helped pull me out of some stressful times. By engaging with Cohear and sitting down with local leaders, my sense of greatness within myself and my experiences with using my voice has gone way up. Many times in the past I thought that insider knowledge and access to decision makers was reserved only for a select few. My time with Cohear has shown me otherwise.

The impact I have felt in my day-to-day life is really recognizable. It has been incredible to be a part of their work, whether it's something small like diversity in bus promotions or something life-changing like providing free PPE on the buses. I really look forward to seeing the little touches of impact within the city and surrounding areas that my engagement has helped support. I am excited to stay involved with Cohear and for the ways I can help others to become Bridgebuilders within their own communities. I will keep speaking out for those who have yet to see or understand the power of their own voices.



I WILL KEEP SPEAKING OUT FOR THOSE

WHO HAVE YET TO SEE OR UNDERSTAND THE

POWER OF THEIR OWN VOICES

Danielle

Member of the Metro Bus Rider Advisory Council and longtime Bridgebuilder

Staying True to Our Mission During COVID-19

In times of crisis, it is more important than ever to listen as closely as we can to the voices of those in need. That's why during the shutdown, our team got to work to support leaders and institutions by providing them with real-time insights and ideas from the people most impacted by the pandemic. In emergencies, there is no time to build new relationships or try to forge trust. Those are the moments that

test the strength of the connections that have already been built, and we were grateful to learn that ours were both deep and durable. Throughout the Spring of 2020, we convened conversations with everyday experts about what support they needed most. Working mothers, Black healthcare workers, daycare providers, senior citizens, and those in the service industry were just some of the people we connected with.



Top takeaways from our conversations in March, April and May:

- 1.** The need for housing affordability became even more urgent and clear during the shut down. Even as individuals returned to work, loss of income set many further back.
- 2.** Parents felt overwhelmed by the drastic change of not only having their children at home but being responsible for their learning in addition to personal employment changes.
- 3.** Ensuring that seniors had access to groceries, prepared meals, and medications was a high priority during the shut down and early months of the pandemic, and continues to be an issue.
- 4.** The beginning of the pandemic highlighted the opportunity for cities to get more creative in promoting and connecting individuals to part-time work and available jobs.

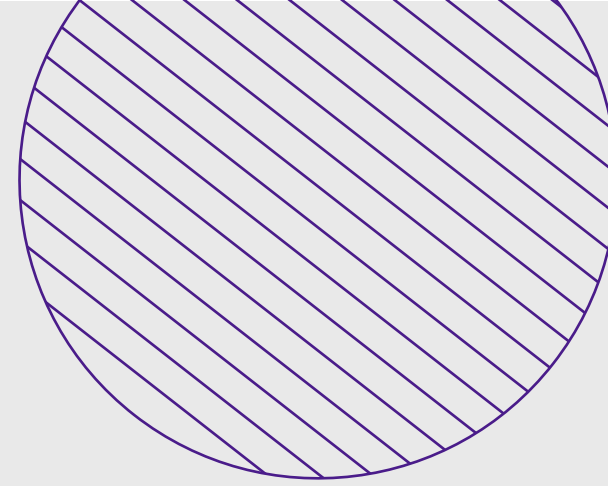
KEY TAKEAWAYS

We shared these findings to the public and presented in depth analysis to partner organizations: the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, Cincinnati Public Schools, the Urban League of Greater Cincinnati, and the Women's Fund. These insights informed their emergency relief decisions in real-time, helping produce more effective supports.



Expanding to Columbus

We believe that every city will benefit from changing its culture of decision making and having more leaders learning from the everyday experts. We have been thrilled to expand our team and model to Columbus, first partnering with City Council Pro Tempore Elizabeth Brown and then launching major projects with Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA).



Policy Pitch Night

Policy Pitch Night is an event unique to Cohear, which has been replicated by other organizations in a number of cities. They are innovative and fun opportunities for anyone who wants to improve their city to submit a policy idea and pitch that idea in front of three City Councilmembers at a public event. Cohear recognizes that everyday residents have great ideas for improving their city, and we loved partnering with Councilmember Elizabeth Brown to host Columbus' first ever Policy Pitch Night. The winning policy centered around landlord-tenant mediation in order to prevent eviction.

Public Health

Cincinnati Health Department:

Focusing on Women's Health

It is both basic and often overlooked: the key to effective government programs often rests in improving customer service. The Health Department recognizes that, and collaborated with us to learn directly from the women who have utilized Title X services, as well as those who would have benefited from them and who have referred others. Title X programs make it possible for individuals to get access to quality, affordable reproductive health care and family planning, which are critical elements of community and maternal health.

Those women - mostly women of color - stressed the importance of the patient experience in the provision of quality care. The Health Department heard about the need to create patient-centered environments that prioritize gender and racial representation, as well as the potential impact of promoting an environment that fully supports women's reproductive rights.

LASTING CHANGE

After a series of inspiring and challenging everyday expert focus groups, the Cincinnati Health Department decided to start a new Title X Community Advisory Board to provide consistent and real-time feedback around upcoming decisions, help shape ongoing priorities, and give creative solutions to persistent problems.



Hamilton County Public Health:

Addressing Addiction and Treating Disease in Black and Latino Communities

Cohear partnered with The Hamilton County Public Health Department (HCPH) on two powerful projects in 2020, both focused on bridging public health gaps for communities that have too often been left behind.

The first project explored how to improve addiction services and harm reduction in Price Hill, especially for Black and Latino communities. Ideas generated from the everyday experts included focusing on supporting family members of those struggling with addiction, prioritizing diverse representation among medical and community staff, providing bilingual or Spanish-language educational materials,

services, and counseling, and making services available at more varied hours.

The second project centered same-gender loving (SGL) Black men. They came to the table to use their lived experience to drive more effective policy making in HIV prevention, services, and testing. To tackle this persistent and deadly challenge, everyday experts focused on a range of ideas, including: better physician training in cultural empathy, at-home testing, and reimagined marketing campaigns to make Hamilton County a national leader when it comes to serving SGL Black men.

LASTING CHANGE

HCPH recently started renting a physical location in East Price Hill, and partnered with Cohear to launch a Price Hill Advisory Board that truly reflects the diversity, challenges, and immense potential of these communities.



PUBLIC HEALTH

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center:

Designing a Park that Builds a Bridge to the Community

Cincinnati Children's is a pillar institution in Avondale, and is committed to being a good neighbor and meeting the needs of their community. As part of the construction of its new tower and facilities, Children's is also building a park to function as a "bridge" to the community. In order to serve as a meaningful bridge to the community, the park needs to incorporate the ideas, concerns, and dreams of the neighbors and families who will use it. For this project, those dreams were of a park that serves seniors, provides engaging play and education opportunities for kids, and contains calming elements for mindfulness and relaxation. Above all, residents are hoping that the park helps weave Children's Hospital more intimately into the Avondale community.

LASTING CHANGE

Cincinnati Children's is currently in the process of developing the park with their architects and design team with the amazing ideas from the community baked in.

Green Umbrella and the Health Collaborative

Combining Healthy Food Access and Education

Problems of hunger and food access have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and it is critical that policy makers hear directly from those who are struggling to provide food for their families and who have waited in pantry lines. Insights from this partnership with Green Umbrella and the Health Collaborative included the need for a more streamlined combination of food education and access, as well as opportunities for seniors and kids to connect through urban gardens. Most importantly, our conversations highlighted the ways in which everyday experts want to play a more active role in the services being provided in their communities.

LASTING CHANGE

Green Umbrella and the Health Collaborative are in the process of setting up an independent community advisory board, and utilized our partnership as a springboard to new community relationships and insights for the effort.

Education

We had the incredible opportunity in 2020 to deepen our partnership with Cincinnati Public Schools and bring the voice of the everyday experts - students and parents - to the table with district leaders. From conversations about police presence in schools to how CPS might better serve their growing population of new Americans, we have integrated our organizing and engagement model to drive more inclusive decisions on the issues that matter most to the CPS community.

Developing a Parent Advisory Board for Consistent, Real-Time Feedback

After a series of targeted focus groups during the early part of the pandemic, CPS leadership wanted a more sustained and direct channel of qualitative engagement with parents. We assembled a Parent Advisory Board of 12 parents from across the district with a wide range of experiences and needs and a diverse set of backgrounds. This group has been meeting regularly to give CPS leadership meaningful feedback on how they can support and communicate with parents and their students with regards to the day-to-day management of COVID, enrollment, and planning for next year.

Deepening CPS' commitment to Anti-Racism

During the height of the national conversations around racial injustice in June, CPS leaders recognized the need to engage with students to both provide a venue for their reflections as well as a platform for their ideas. With that, Speak Up Speak Out (SUSO) was born. Each SUSO is facilitated by Cohear, and includes a live streamed focus group with high school students about issues of racial justice in schools, followed by a discussion between the students and various city and school leaders. SUSO led to a student list of demands on racial justice for the Superintendent. The demands include a more inclusive and updated curriculum and the reexamination of the role of SROs in schools.

LASTING CHANGE

In addition to student conversations, the CPS School Board launched an effort to create an Anti-Racism policy to implement District-wide. Cohear facilitated the process to create meaningful and useful guidelines related to CPS' stance on racism. The policy passed unanimously, and includes specific calls for stronger data tracking and more anti-racism training opportunities for educators.

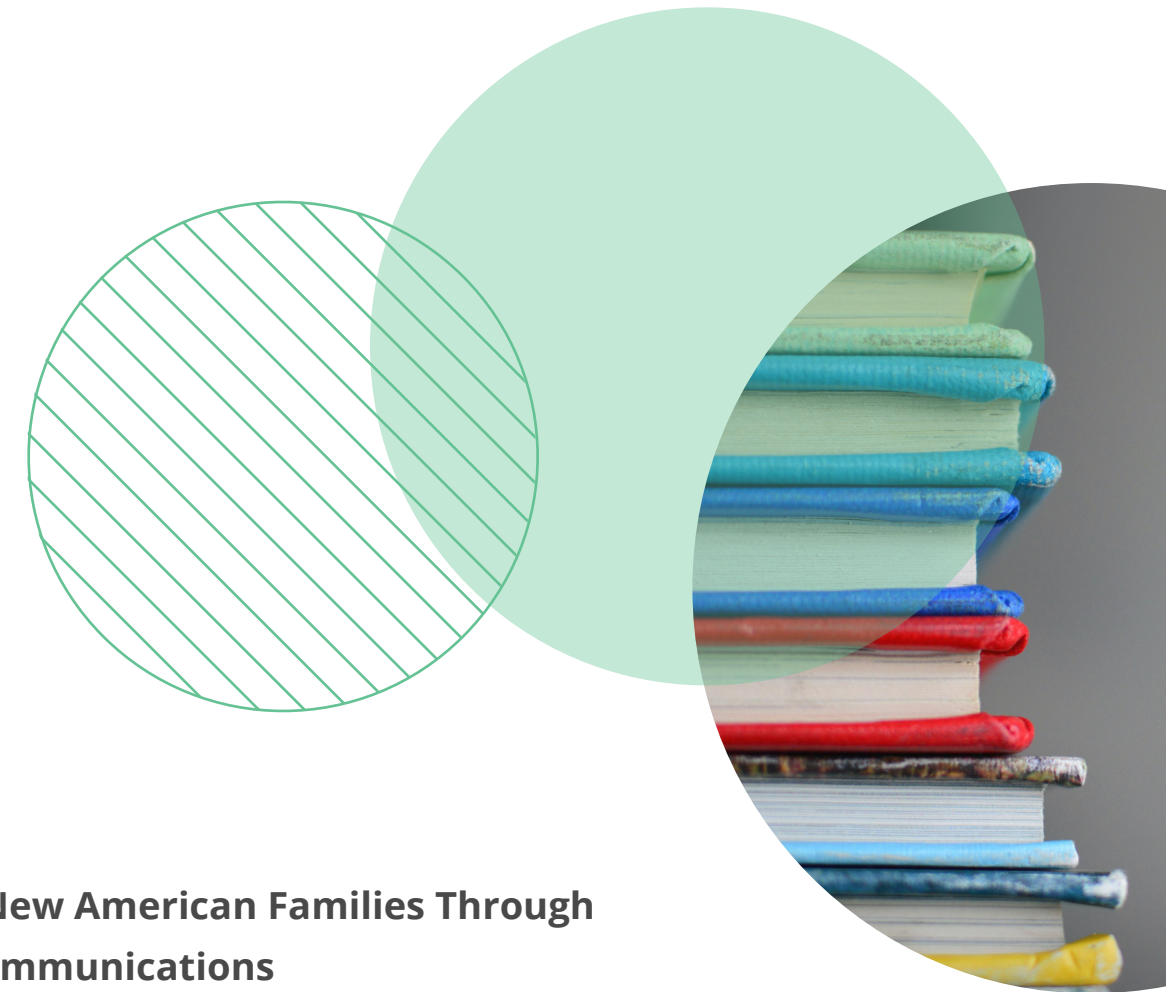
EDUCATION

Improving Student and Family Relationships with School Resource Officers

As the conversations around police-community relations and the unfair treatment of people of color continue to grow throughout the country, CPS began a series of conversations between the Cincinnati Police Department School Resource Officers (SROs), students, and parents. A major theme: relationship building and empathetic responses are absolutely vital to improve police-student relationships. For students and parents to trust their SROs, they want to understand why they are there and the role they can expect them to play in schools.

Creating a More Streamlined Enrollment Process

CPS leveraged our deep community network to give families a chance to turn their experiences into ideas by brainstorming how to improve the school enrollment process. The conversation highlighted how stressful the enrollment process can be and the importance of giving families enough time to feel prepared to make the best choice for their child.



Supporting New American Families Through Improved Communications

Communicating with families, caregivers, and students during the pandemic has presented unique challenges for the District, especially for those whose first language is one other than English. To assist CPS in their efforts to better reach these communities, Cohear has facilitated multiple focus groups between CPS administrators, parents, ESL professionals, and school principals. It was a good reminder of why we do what we do to see the way that parents from Nepal, Guatemala, Rwanda, Syria and other countries around the world became more empowered to present their ideas and concerns directly to CPS leadership.



Philanthropy

Many of the most innovative organizations and funds are shifting to incorporate the wisdom of lived experience into their strategies. This year we were thrilled to partner with two of the most forward-thinking funds in Cincinnati: The GreenLight Fund and the Women's Fund.

GreenLight Fund

The Greenlight Fund worked with Cohear to connect with everyday experts who have experienced poverty to brainstorm how to more effectively address economic barriers. The project also focused on how to integrate everyday experts into GreenLight's Selection Advisory Committee. Insights included the role that diverse social and professional connections and networking can play in driving economic mobility, as well as how more accessible and affordable mental health options for both students and professionals could catalyze stable careers.

LASTING CHANGE

GreenLight invited six of the everyday experts to join its Selection Advisory Committee and use their expertise to help choose the next organization GreenLight brings to Cincinnati.



Women's Fund of Greater Cincinnati

2020 was the second year of Cohear facilitating the Women's Fund Advisory Board. This group includes a diverse group of women with relevant experiences, and helps define priorities and identify opportunities for the Women's Fund throughout the year.

LASTING CHANGE

The group also is tasked with determining grant recipients on behalf of the Women's Fund. This year they awarded a few new organizations, after intense and thoughtful conversation about the importance of wrap-around services, access to transportation, and being able to connect with children while receiving addiction treatment. The wisdom from this group's lived experiences is profound - we love facilitating their conversations!

Public Transit

Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA)

In February of 2020, SORTA CEO Darryl Haley told the Bus Rider Advisory Council that SORTA had just had its best set of months in a decade in terms of ridership. He then credited the group as a major factor in that success, noting how their feedback and ideas has helped the SORTA team dramatically improve their processes and their services. That was a highlight of our year! We have been thrilled to continue to work with SORTA to help them navigate the pandemic with the best interest of their riders always top of mind.

Central Ohio Regional Transit Authority (COTA)

This is an exciting new partnership for us as we expand our work to Columbus. We are working with COTA leadership to help them connect to their customers on a range of issues, including a transition to more contactless payment options, safer bus stops, and the future of public transit in Central Ohio. These conversations yielded concrete ideas, and led to the formation of a COTA Voice Council.

Workforce Development

Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber:

Pursuing Inclusive Capitalism with the Workforce Innovation Center

Inclusive capitalism is a growing movement across the world, and we are excited that the Chamber has a new center focused on bringing it to more businesses in Cincinnati. The experiences and needs of employees - especially those in the most demanding jobs in healthcare, manufacturing, distribution, and retail - have to be front and center to any approach to make workplaces better and spur economic mobility. We spent our focus groups connecting major bank CEOs and business leaders directly with employees who know the challenges modern capitalism can pose in terms of inequality and lack of opportunity. These conversations were difficult but hopeful, and we're looking forward to continuing the partnership to build a more inclusive city for working people and innovative businesses.



Sustaining Engagement in 2021: Community Advisory Boards

Changing the culture of decision-making means that engagement, listening, and learning are sustained over time. We love it when our partners ask us to lead that sustained engagement between their leadership and everyday experts, and heading into 2021 we have more than doubled the number of ongoing community advisory boards that we manage.

Cohear Community Advisory Boards

Cincinnati Metro/SORTA - Bus Rider Advisory Council

Duke Energy - Customer Insights Committee

The Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation-
Women's Advisory Board

Cincinnati Health Department - Title X Advisory Council

Hamilton County Public Health - Price Hill Advisory Board

Cincinnati Public Schools - Parents Advisory Board

Nationwide Children's Hospital - Linden Advisory Board

Central Ohio Transit Authority - COTA Voice Council



Thank you to our Partners and Bridgebuilders!

The work we do at Cohear is possible because we have the best community of Bridgebuilders and partners: people who are passionate about empowering their neighbors and bettering their city. We are so grateful to all of the people who work so hard alongside us to lift up the voices of everyday experts.

Our Team



DANI ISAACSOHN

FOUNDER, CEO

"Most likely to randomly drop food off at your house"



NIA BAUCKE

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER

"Most likely to add a fresh perspective"



NIKITA ANDERSON

DIRECTOR OF ORGANIZING

"Most likely to lead the revolution"



JESSICA MOORE

COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

"Most like to have a story for every situation"



JASMINE AYRES

COLUMBUS LEAD ORGANIZER

"Most likely to be recognized at the grocery store"



AIMEE DIRIG

OPERATIONS & POLICY MANAGER

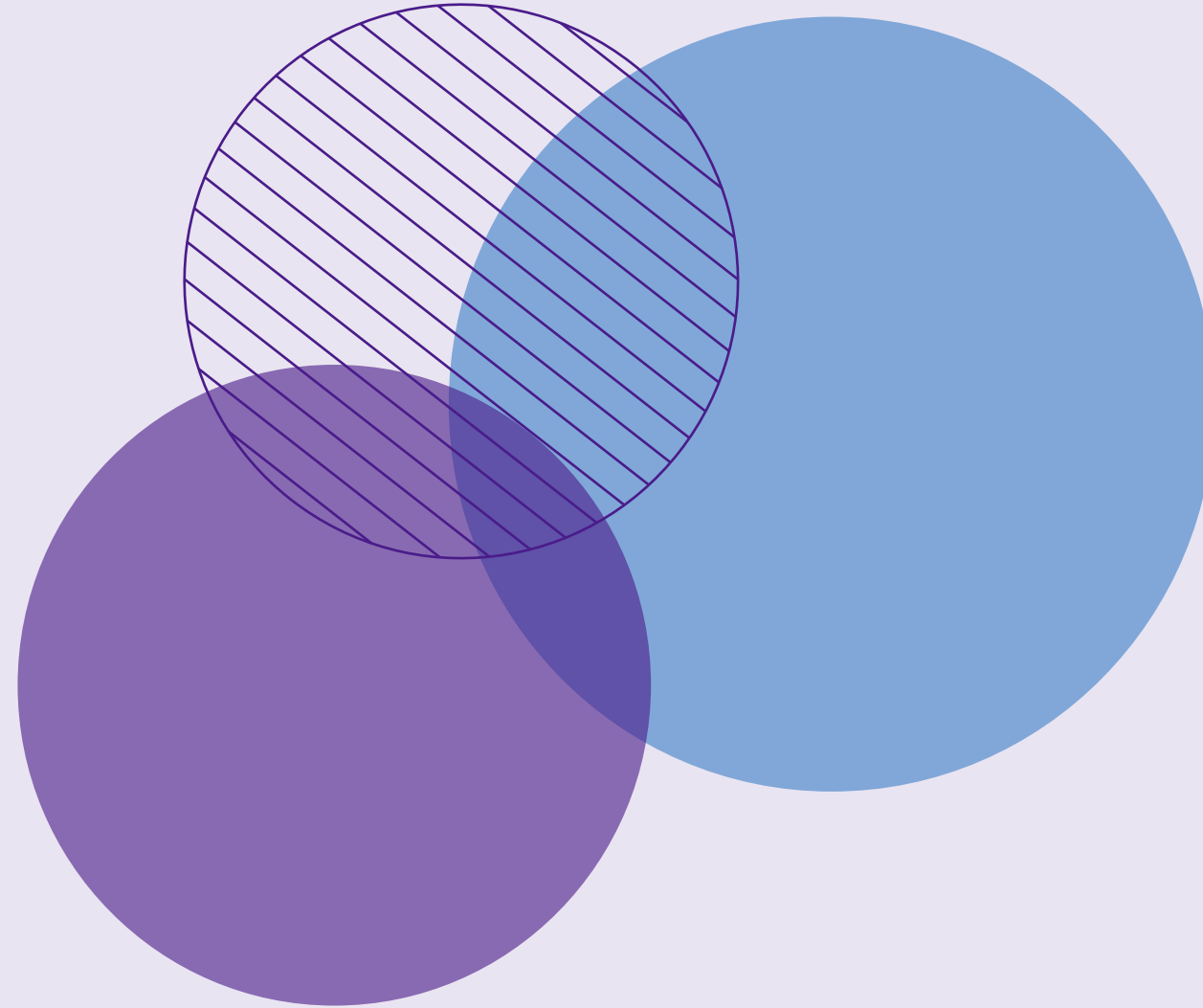
"Most likely to know where everything is"



ADAM DENNEY

COMMUNICATIONS LEAD

"Most likely to talk the least but says the most"



Thank you!

