

# Meet the 2020 Vanguard Greensboro Cohort, Who Will Convene in September

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Next City and the Greensboro Vanguard Host Committee today announce the newest class of 44 Vanguards who will gather in Greensboro later this year for our annual experiential conference of rising urban leaders who work to improve cities across sectors.

The Vanguard conference was originally scheduled for May 2020. However, in light of current COVID-19 related travel restrictions and social distancing mandates, Next City and the Greensboro Vanguard Host committee have decided to postpone the conference to September 14-17, 2020. The conference will immediately follow the North Carolina Folk Festival, which takes place in Greensboro September 11-13, 2020. This culturally significant event for the state of North Carolina will be a wonderful introduction to the city for the Next City Vanguards able to attend.

This year the conference will be run by Next City in partnership with the Greensboro Host Committee. Action Greensboro is the conference's official host. Action Greensboro, as a group of six local charitable foundations that work collaboratively with the Chamber of Commerce, serves as a national model for city-based collaborative philanthropic investment in the U.S. Action Greensboro is a catalyst for public-private partnerships and serves as an intersection of government, education, nonprofit sector, entrepreneurial community, arts & culture and young professionals. In addition to Action Greensboro, The City of

Greensboro, Downtown Greensboro Inc. (DGI), The Greensboro Convention and Visitors Bureau and Greensboro.Life have signed on as sponsors of the conference.

“Within our lifetimes there won’t be a more critical time to focus on developing communities that are equitable, safe and aesthetically pleasing,” says Cecelia Thompson, executive director of Action Greensboro. “The 2020 Next City Vanguard’s expertise is what we need to help shape our nation’s cities. Greensboro is looking forward to showcasing the unique work in progress here and capturing their collective input.”

“A focus on the most vulnerable among us has always been critical, but today more people are recognizing we’re in this together,” says Lucas Grindley, Next City’s executive director. “That’s why Next City is grateful to bring the Vanguard to Greensboro this fall to learn and share their experiences, as all of us will need inspiration for the change that must come next.”

The 2020 Vanguard fellows include philanthropic changemakers, community organizers, policymakers and planners working for influential organizations such as the United Way, Reinvestment Fund, and the Clinton Foundation. Vanguard from North Carolina work in state government and with other organizations such as the Self-Help Credit Union, City of Charlotte and the International Civil Rights Center & Museum.

Among this cohort of impressive and dedicated leaders are: an educator who has distributed 50,000 free books to “reading parks,” barbershops and other small businesses in an effort to end urban book deserts; an activist organizing mutual aid networks along the Texas-Mexico border for COVID-19 relief; a city planner designing landscape-based “floodplain benches” to mitigate riverine flooding; and the founder of a nonprofit that promotes bread-making and seeks to decolonize the regional grain economy.

From New Orleans to New Delhi, this class of innovators demonstrates ingenuity and resilience to tackle the regional challenges of our delicate urban landscape. View the entire Vanguard group [here](#).

The Vanguard initiative was launched by Next City, a journalism nonprofit with a mission to inspire social, economic and environmental change in cities through reporting and events around the world. For this international conference, we chose 44 Vanguards from a highly competitive

pool of applicants that came



from around the world.

Greensboro is North Carolina's third-largest city. Established in 1808 and named after the Revolutionary War general Nathaniel Greene, the city is known for its seven colleges and universities (a quarter of the city's population is made up of college students), its proud history in the early days of the Civil Rights movement, and its successful reinvention from a tobacco and textile town to one that offers a progressive, diversified industry base.

“DGI is honored and thrilled for Greensboro to host this talented group of urban leaders this fall”, says DGI President and CEO Zack Matheny. “It will be a great way to engage with emerging leaders while providing our city with a platform for demonstrating our unique attributes.”

The Vanguard conference will include workshops, tours and conversations about the newest innovations and most pressing questions in urban development, infrastructure and public policy. Vanguards will have the opportunity to work with organizations in the city to devise solutions to local challenges. The program will culminate in the annual Next City [Big Idea Challenge](#).

In this rapidly changing environment, Next City seeks the healthiest way forward, and the safety of our staff and Vanguards is of the utmost importance. We hope these new dates will allow us to host our

conference in person. Next City and the Greensboro Host Committee will continue to evaluate the situation related to COVID-19 and commit to providing up-to-date information regarding the conference.

For questions about sponsorship or press inquiries, please contact Sara Schuenemann by email at [sara@nextcity.org](mailto:sara@nextcity.org) or phone at 267-239-0762.