

Driving Systems Change Forward

Leveraging Multisite, Cross-Sector Initiatives to Change Systems,
Advance Racial Equity, and Shift Power

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Open Source Solutions, a series published by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, focuses on bridging the gap between theory and practice, from as many viewpoints as possible. The goal of this series is to promote cross-sector dialogue around a range of emerging issues and related investments that advance economic resilience and mobility for low- and moderate-income communities.

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Report Highlights

Over the past few years, a slate of multisite, cross-sector initiatives has emerged to address structural root causes of inequities by changing the systems that shape community conditions and individual well-being. These new, connected sets of activities were planned and implemented to achieve a goal that spans more than one site (e.g., a neighborhood, school, city, region) and involve a mix of institutions from the public, nonprofit, philanthropic, and/or private sectors. This report reflects on recent progress and shortcomings and provides strategies for those involved in all stages of the initiatives to evolve their efforts in ways that drive systems change forward. Our findings highlight the complex intersections of systems, racial equity, and power that can work for or against systems change. The power to influence decisions is not evenly distributed; it interacts with racism, a central root cause of the most widespread, urgent, and unjust disparities in life outcomes.

Our research revealed the following about how a **systems change** approach is shaping contemporary multisite, cross-sector initiatives and influencing results:

- The work around systems change is emergent. Initiatives are achieving components of systems change but not necessarily pursuing it comprehensively or intentionally.
- While operating at different geographic levels and scales, initiatives are pursuing systems change in ways consistent with FSG's Water of Systems Change framework of explicit, semiexplicit, and implicit levels of systems change, even if they are not explicitly referencing or following the framework.
- Working across sectors is a central component of developing shared goals across traditionally siloed actors, building relationships, and holding all relevant stakeholders accountable for change.
- Multisite design can foster learning and leverage power across sites to change systems at a larger scale.

- Initiatives are driving systems change by building on past initiatives and coordinating across current ones.
- Long-term commitments are warranted for achieving and sustaining systems change.

Current practice leaves room for improvement, both in elevating **racial equity** as a stated initiative goal and practicing it as individuals, organizations, sites, initiatives, and systems.

- For most initiatives, racism is explicitly identified—at an initiative's start or over time—as the root cause of the systemic problems they are trying to overcome, making racial equity a key goal of systems change.
- Initiative and site leaders provide impetus and resources to prompt local investigation of structural racism by making it an initiative goal and priority, listening to voices within sites, fostering learning across sites, building capacity within organizations, and shifting individual mental models.
- Strategies for advancing racial equity include building trust, acknowledging history, respecting local leaders, allowing time for individual and organizational journeys, tracking equity-related process and outcome metrics, facilitating training, and letting people most affected by the issue lead.
- Skeptics should be challenged to progress in their individual and organizational journeys to acknowledge racism and advance racial equity.
- Those who hold power may take on racial equity efforts in name only, without engaging in personal and organizational change; meanwhile, they may impose expectations that exact an emotional toll on people and communities of color who fight from positions of lesser power for transformational change.

Our findings show initiatives are making progress in **shifting power** to sites and community voices but have room to grow.

- Powerful people and groups can advance racial equity and pursue systems change by shifting power through four channels: reputation, resources, technical capacity, and reach.
- Funders can advance racial equity by investing in organizations led by people of color and women and in communities that have faced persistent disinvestment.
- Supporting community voice and control is key to shifting power, but these processes should not allow community groups with outsize influence to drive the agenda and drown out the voices of more marginalized groups.
- Intermediaries—initiative management organizations working between funders and sites—complicate initiative dynamics. Although they are accountable to the funder, they can support community power by doing translational work between funder goals and site desires. They also can serve as a trusted coach, rather than just a technical expert, to sites.
- At the site level, cross-sector initiatives bring powerful actors from the institutions that help maintain the status quo together with people who seek to disrupt and change it, so they need management structures that shift power.
- Evaluation can work more in the interests of sites by being structured as a learning process for them around progress and direction, rather than as a review of outcomes based on funder goals.

Overall, there are five key **areas for growth**:

1. **Building and balancing power:** Shifting power requires powerful actors to relinquish their outsize influence on decisionmaking. Implementing processes for shared accountability can generate trust, level power, and ensure that everyone’s goals are advanced.
2. **Prioritizing trust:** Building trust requires tolerating risks and being vulnerable on both a personal level and with resources and control, as well as making investments of time and resources into relationships. Initiatives can build trust by designing activities and structures that increase site funding security

and funder predictability—which allows funders, grantees, and participants to demonstrate risk tolerance—and by uncovering or fostering aligned interests, shared history, and similarities between sites and funders.

3. **Advancing racial equity:** Expanding racial equity means supporting people and organizations in their journeys exploring racial equity, power, and trust. Additionally, initiatives can embed racial equity into their practices by creating space for and facilitating learning, reflection, growth, and healing; establishing a shared framework/definition of racism and antiracism; and acknowledging that advancing racial equity is foundational to systems change. Reaching this goal requires examining institutional practices at each organization involved, making sure that the board and staff become more proficient in understanding racial equity and are accountable for advancing it.
4. **Learning for impact:** Equitably distributing the benefits from learning requires approaching evaluation as a learning and growing process that starts early in the initiative. Leveraging the evaluation plan to ensure that data being collected and analyzed are purposeful demonstrates respect toward site-level participants’ long-term goals. Initiatives can consider the learning and evaluation process as an opportunity for capacity building and inclusion among community members and stakeholders who are not typically meaningfully involved in the learning design, implementation, and assessment process.
5. **Changing systems:** Designing initiatives that create durable systems change in sites requires supporting initiative members in analyzing root causes and developing theories of change that include the components of systems change. Initiatives can avoid creating only downstream, project-based results by investing in longer-term time frames to allow sites to make progress on changing systems and by ensuring that project milestones reflect reasonable expectations for achieving results. Program designers should consider ways to leverage the cross-sector and multisite nature of initiatives to identify opportunities for effecting systems change and to increase the ability to influence key actors.

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, a slate of multisite, cross-sector initiatives (box 1) has emerged to address structural root causes of inequities by changing the systems that shape community conditions and individual well-being. However, the sharing of successes and challenges across initiatives has not kept pace with the advances made. This report addresses that gap by aggregating and organizing the knowledge that practitioners have gained on initiative design and implementation, particularly as it relates to the complex work of changing systems, advancing racial equity, and shifting power. The goal is to reflect on progress and shortcomings and to provide strategies for those involved in funding, designing, managing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives to evolve their efforts to drive systems change forward.

Box 1

What Is a Multisite, Cross-Sector Initiative?

For this report's purposes, a multisite, cross-sector initiative is a new, connected set of activities that were planned and implemented to achieve a goal, that span more than one site, and that involve a mix of institutions from the public, nonprofit, philanthropic, and/or private sectors. The definition of a site varies, but common examples are a neighborhood, a school, a city, or a region.

In 2015, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, funded research that resulted in a paper, "Pathways to Systems Change: The Design of Multisite, Cross-Sector Initiatives" (Siegel, Winey, and Kornetsky 2015). The paper leveraged literature, interviews, au-

thors' expertise, and an expert roundtable to capture what funders and evaluators had learned in key areas of designing and implementing multisite, cross-sector initiatives (Siegel, Winey, and Kornetsky 2015). Key recommendations from the report included the following:

- Decide the initiative's primary intent. Is it to replicate services across sites or to advance systems change (which is more sustainable but harder to track and achieve)?
- Select sites strategically based on attributes of readiness while allowing for diversity in focus, implementation, or target population.
- Include a planning phase with technical assistance for grantees before implementation and evaluation while allowing sites to progress according to their own timelines.
- Consider the opportunities of direct funder management of sites versus using an intermediary to manage grantees and/or to manage technical assistance or learning communities.
- Explore a range of models, from ones focused on community-based change through local implementation teams, to ones using an intermediary to synthesize and share learning across sites, to ones in which the same lever for change is selected by the funder and targeted across grants.
- Recognize the challenges of evaluating work when results emerge over time and are difficult to attribute to the initiative.

Study Overview

Our findings are based on 22 interviews with initiative stakeholders and two research convenings with initiative staff members, funders, intermediaries, and evaluators that took place from November 2018 to Au-

gust 2019. To supplement this work, the research team conducted a literature review and a document scan of 16 initiatives, including a review of their websites, blog posts, press statements, reports, and evaluations. Quotations used throughout this report come from the interviews and convenings unless otherwise noted. A full description of this study's methods is in appendix A.

We selected from initiatives launched since 2015, initiatives that began in earlier years but extended into or beyond 2015, and initiatives that released research or evaluations in or after 2014. Initiatives were selected based on recommendations from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, RWJF, Urban Institute staff members, and convening participants. The initiatives we selected were government- and philanthropy-led, and the list does not include all existing initiatives that would meet our criteria. The selected initiatives are as follows (listed by initiative launch year):

- New Communities Program* (2002–12)
- Purpose Built Communities* (2009–present)
- YouthCONNECT/Ready for Work* (2010–present)
- Sustainable Communities* (2010–15)
- Integration Initiative* (2010–19)
- Building Healthy Communities* (2010–present)
- Promise Neighborhoods* (2010–present)
- StriveTogether* (2010–present)
- Strong Cities, Strong Communities* (2011–17)
- Partners in Progress* (2014–15)
- Communities of Opportunity* (2014–present)
- Wellville* (2014–present)
- Working Cities Challenge* (2014–present)
- ReThink Health Ventures* (2016–19)
- Invest Health* (2016–present)
- Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge* (2017–present)

These initiatives have a range of budget sizes, number of sites, funding amounts, and funding sources. They also focus on change in different issue areas fundamental to shaping community conditions, including education, health, housing, economic development, transportation, public safety, and youth development. Appendix B contains descriptions of key stakeholders in multisite, cross-sector initiatives and the characteristics of the 16 in our study.

Key Intersections and Definitions

Participants consistently noted the complex intersections of systems, racial equity, and power that can work for or against systems change (see below for working definitions). The power to influence decisions about elements within the systems that affect one's life is not evenly distributed. Power also interacts with racism, which emerged in discussions as a central root cause of the most widespread, urgent, and unjust disparities in life outcomes. A central question across initiatives and among research participants was how to advance racial equity by shifting power through community mobilization. These interlinked concepts frequently came up as the motivation behind, as well as a sign of, systems change. Although each key concept—systems change, racial equity, and power—has a chapter in this report, these intersections are highlighted throughout.

Systems and Systems Change

Systems are “the set of actors, activities, and settings that are directly or indirectly perceived to have influence in or be affected by a given problem situation” (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang 2007). Systems can function at multiple geographic levels (neighborhood, city, state, region, nation). Examples include the stakeholders, policies, processes, strategies, markets, and political environments that shape an issue area like health, transportation, or education.

Systems change means shifting the fundamental conditions that produce many of the entrenched problems in society to result in explicit changes to



policies, practices, and laws; semiexplicit changes to relationships and power dynamics; and implicit changes to mindsets (Kania, Kramer, and Senge 2018).

Racial Equity

As a process, racial equity refers to

- using a race-conscious framework to identify and counter implicit and explicit bias and individual, institutional, and structural racism (Nelson and Brooks 2015);
- making antiracist decisions and taking antiracist actions against a belief in the superiority or inferiority of people according to race (Kendi 2019); and
- using tools and data to highlight and change harmful policies, programs, and practices and to measure the impact of change (Nelson and Brooks 2015).

As a goal or desired outcome, racial equity refers to

- “the systematic fair treatment of all people of color that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all” (Race Forward 2016), and
- race no longer being a predictor of opportunity or life outcomes (Nelson and Brooks 2015).

Power

Power is traditionally accumulated and wielded through expertise; access to information; charisma, networks, reputation, and legitimacy; and resources and money (French and Raven 1959). Those with power set the rules and control access to resources, information, social networks, and decisionmaking, which all in turn can be used to influence outcomes (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy 2018).

2. Changing Systems

Chapter Highlights

- The work around systems change is emergent. Initiatives are achieving components of systems change but not necessarily pursuing it comprehensively or intentionally.
- While operating at different geographic levels and scales, initiatives are pursuing systems change in ways consistent with FSG's Water of Systems Change framework of explicit, semiexplicit, and implicit levels of systems change, even if they are not explicitly referencing or following the framework.
- Working across sectors is a central component of developing shared goals across traditionally siloed actors, building relationships, and holding all relevant stakeholders accountable for change.
- Multisite design can foster learning and leverage power across sites to change systems at a larger scale.
- Initiatives are driving systems change by building on past initiatives and coordinating across current ones.
- Long-term commitments are warranted for achieving and sustaining systems change.

"We think of systems as frustrating and annoying, but they can be beautiful. We forget to be joyful in this work, that we're seeking that beauty when things do connect. Beauty could be an indicator that things could be right."

—Convening participant

The What and Why of Systems Change

The initiatives included in this study each strove to change deeply rooted, systemic problems that challenge our society. Although the initiatives may not have framed their work this way, their approaches have been consistent with prominent systems change models in the community development field. The types of problems they intend to tackle—coined as “wicked problems” by Rittel and Webber in 1973—include issues such as mass incarceration, disparate educational outcomes, employment gaps, homelessness, and urban

or rural poverty. Systemic problems are rooted in expressions of power that have long historical roots. They show up in many facets of our environments, including government, culture, economic landscapes, and the physical environment. Systemic problems are held in place by overlapping systems, which have complex relationships and interactions with one another and are constantly evolving.

Because of this complexity, systemic problems have no simple solution; instead, they require a “systems change” approach that acknowledges the many actors, processes, programs, and policies that affect an

issue and how they are connected and rooted in the preservation of the current power structure. Tackling just one actor or setting—such as public schools or the criminal justice system—will not shift outcomes around systemic issues. Instead, systems change requires a holistic approach to confronting the interactions between the systems (Abercrombie, Harries, and Wharton 2015; Kania, Kramer, and Senge 2018).¹

For example, the school-to-prison pipeline is perpetuated by multiple sectors, policies, practices, and public perceptions. Zero tolerance policies in school systems leave little room for mistakes and, fueled by racist perceptions, are disproportionately applied to boys of color. Schools often have on-site police officers who shift the setting of disciplinary action from the school to the criminal justice system (Nance 2016). And jurisdictions have passed laws that require more punitive legal responses for offenses committed on school property (Kajstura 2014). All these policies and practices interact to exacerbate the loss of opportunity for boys of color. Although initiatives might target one process or outcome—such as changing school systems’ policies around expulsion—most of our research participants had a broader understanding of how all the pieces fit together.

Our research participants generally agreed on what systems change is, reflecting current academic and other literature.² They emphasized that rather than focusing only on creating a program or service to address a symptom, systems change work strives to make larger, lasting shifts in society’s structure. Their views aligned well with the consulting firm FSG’s “Water of Systems Change” article, which identifies six conditions of systems change across three levels of observability (Kania, Kramer, and Senge 2018). These are described below and illustrated with an example from our research that highlights how initiatives targeted changes in these conditions.

Explicit: Three conditions—**policies, practices, and resource flows**—are the areas that nonprofits and other social sector actors have historically targeted. Changes in these conditions are observable and easily measured. Communities of Opportunity—a multisite, cross-sector initiative in King County, Washington, that aims to improve health, social, racial, and economic outcomes by focusing on places, policies, and systems changes—emphasized these changes, pushing all participants to understand how their work “relates to policy and rolls up into systems change,” according to an interviewee.

Semiexplicit: Two conditions—**relationships and connections, and power dynamics**—are semiexplicit and not commonly or readily tracked. Kania, Kramer, and Senge (2018) state that these conditions are often a greater challenge for funders because making progress in these two conditions requires relinquishing power and decisionmaking to other initiative actors. Yet by building connections across siloed actors and creating collective goals, initiatives can create synergistic efforts across sectors. Initiative leaders sometimes target a change in relationships among site stakeholders by brokering connections between these stakeholders and themselves or other powerful actors (e.g., government officials). The Building Healthy Communities initiative—a 10-year, \$1 billion initiative by the California Endowment to advance statewide policy, change public narratives, and transform the social determinants of health in 14 California communities—evolved from focusing on policy change to seeking “the ultimate goal...to build power and change the status quo power balance across the state,” according to an interviewee. Changes in the semiexplicit level often lead to or are indicated by changes in policy, practices, and resource flows.

¹ “Systems Grantmaking,” Systems Grantmaking Resource Guide, accessed September 30, 2019, <http://systems.geofunders.org/systems-grantmaking>.

² Based on Social Innovation Generation’s definition, FSG’s 2018 Water of Systems Change report defines systems change as “shifting the conditions that are holding the problem in place.” The 2015 “Pathways to Systems Change” paper similarly discussed the systems change approach as initiatives that focus on the “underlying causes that yield the current outcomes,” instead of directly striving to improve services and programs (Siegel, Winey, and Kornetsky 2015, 12).

Implicit: The final element of systems change—**mental models**—is an implicit, less observable change that involves addressing implicit biases; having leaders in power buying in to new concepts; and shifting the public’s perceptions to a new narrative. Elevated Chicago—one of six sites within the Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) initiative, which is focused on ensuring that new investments reduce racial disparities, build a culture of health, and prepare for a changing climate—noted that a main objective of its knowledge-sharing working group was storytelling and narrative change. It wanted to correct perceptions of black and brown communities in Chicago and elevate asset-based narratives that highlighted the potential of residents to motivate greater inclusion and investment for these communities. Mindset shift is primarily observed or validated through changes in the other more explicit levels.

“Because the process of behaving differently requires that people first think differently, and we understood and hypothesized that the acting differently might not happen, even within [the two-year grant time frame], we were attentive to shifts in mindsets and shifts in actions.”

—Convening participant

According to the FSG framework, “shifts in system conditions are more likely to be sustained when working at all three levels of change” (Kania, Kramer, and Senge 2018, 6, emphasis added). One leader in an initiative that included a focus on reducing school suspensions explained that working on many levels was key: “Our sites worked hard on [school] discipline reform in the state—we had great policies that got passed. But everyone knows...if a local principal doesn’t want to implement a policy, it is not going to happen.” Policy change needed to be paired with a mental shift among local leaders.

Strategies for Systems Change

While the FSG framework offers a general classification for components of systems change, the elements that hold systems in place vary widely based on the local context, geographic scale, and issue area. Therefore, theories of change for creating systems change looked different across and even within initiatives. However, designers saw initiatives’ *cross-sector* and *multisite* structure as crucial for creating systems change. In addition, participants shared examples of making progress on systems change working *across initiatives*.

Building Bridges between Sectors

Sites pull together actors across sectors from different parts of a complex system to drive toward systems change through deepened relationships and connections. These newly formed cross-sector groups can break down silos and promote a larger, shared vision for change, acknowledging how their work interacts with that of other organizations to hold problems in place. The theories of change or action of many initiatives—including StriveTogether, Promise Neighborhoods, Wellville, Invest Health, SPARCC, and Working Cities Challenge—highlight the importance of this work in strengthening civic infrastructure, or the capacity of sectors in a community to collaborate.

“[Civic infrastructure is defined as] how well different sectors of a community—business, government, schools, community organizations, etc.—recognize interrelated interests so they can function together, across their different goals and perspectives to achieve outcomes that would benefit the public at large rather than privileged groups.”

—Working Cities Challenge: Final Assessment of Round 1 Progress (Mt. Auburn Associates 2018)

Going a level deeper, the theories of change of several of the more nuanced initiatives highlighted that the

health of cross-sector partnerships depends not only on building the capacity of partners to work together but also on holding the stakeholders accountable for acting to change components of the targeted system. This means channeling power from traditionally powerful actors or sectors toward historically disinvested or disempowered communities to demand and create outcomes that benefit the broader public. StriveTogether—a national network of 70 communities committed to engaging residents, cultivating cultures of continuous improvement, and eliminating educational outcome disparities—serves as an illustration. The initiative has a detailed theory of action that defines a site's progress partially based on building and mobilizing civic infrastructure along with the degree to which the site uses disaggregated data to hold shared accountability between partners and their communities for creating results (StriveTogether 2019).

Building Power across Sites

The “Pathways to Systems Change” paper found that initiatives scaled their outcomes through *either* replication *or* systems change (Siegel, Winey, and Kornetsky 2015). Our participants did not view this as a choice but instead emphasized that replication, understood to be the multisite aspect of their initiatives, could be an important component of systems change but one that requires intentionally supported cross-site learning and exchange.

Initiative documentation emphasized that having multiple sites allowed initiatives to accelerate progress toward systems change as sites learned from one another and tackled common challenges and opportunities. Interaction among sites helped equalize site capacity, as sites that were early in their understanding of systems change were challenged and supported to catch up in their awareness and strategies by peer sites that had a fuller understanding of systems change approaches. Multiple site representatives noted that their interactions with other sites encouraged them to focus on how to pursue long-lasting or systemic change by addressing underlying challenges. For example, one

participant explained that the initiative team grasped the concept of systems change through exchanges with other sites: “These systems...I didn’t understand the interplay. I didn’t really understand what people meant by that. But then when I got into this work, I understood...there were so many factors that conspire to work against the interest of kids. That was a sobering thing.” Other site representatives described a similar experience of peer-learning around advancing racial equity. Cross-site learning thus could speed durable change by spreading awareness and passion while building the practical capacity to change systems. As an extension, cross-site learning creates long-term relationships of learning and support between sites, and those connections are examples of semiexplicit shifts in systems. Both SPARCC and Working Cities Challenge noted that the relationships, peer learning, and support among sites were a lasting system change that their initiatives aimed to create. However, cross-site peer learning and exchange does not necessarily happen organically; it was more common within initiatives that prioritized in-person convenings or virtual knowledge exchanges through partnerships or platforms.

“The power we’ve found of having a network of this size is the ‘network effect.’ In the last few years, we’ve been intentional about bringing subgroups of members together to share learning together to champion and challenge other sites. We’ve gotten good at creating a structure or container to facilitate that kind of learning exchange. The network effect has been a huge accelerant of progress.”

—Interviewee

Multisite design facilitates replication of tactics through cross-site learning, but this design also helps sites aggregate power to change higher-level or upstream systems at state or federal levels. By bringing actors from multiple sites together with common observations and goals, initiatives demonstrate broad-based

support and demand for policy or practice changes. Some participants noted the value of initiative-wide trainings, technical assistance, and convenings in helping them coordinate with other sites to target regional and statewide systems, in addition to their local ones. Within the Working Cities Challenge—a Federal Reserve Bank of Boston initiative to help low-income communities in New England states strengthen civic infrastructure, spur economic growth, and achieve maximum employment—five sites in Connecticut were experiencing similar challenges, so they jointly advocated for state-level policy changes. One participant said: “You can imagine that the systems these communities identify often have other influences beyond the city limits. Where we have five communities, for example, in Connecticut, they’ve identified some system challenges across sites. And that puts these cities in a place to get the attention of policymakers and find some state-level actors and levers that have influence to get these cities some progress on their local shared results. If we had one city, it would be harder, but we have multiple cities. That makes it a little easier.” Other initiatives like StriveTogether and Building Healthy Communities recounted similar state- or region-level policy successes that stemmed from demonstrating broad need and support for the desired change.

“As a single place-based initiative trying to do something, it’s hard to get the kind of leverage needed to press for policy changes without having collaboratives at the scale of the systems you’re trying to change.”

—Interviewee

Building on the Past, Coordinating in the Present

Multiple respondents noted that previous initiatives in their locations created lasting improvements in the civic infrastructure that they leverage in their current work. One example is Communities of Opportunity, which grew out of the 10-city Integration Initiative—a Living Cities-funded systems change effort to improve the lives of low-income people in areas such as work-

force development, economic development, equitable transit-oriented development, education, and health. But site leaders also referred to the importance of relationships built with community leaders through the prominent 10-year Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Connections initiative (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2013). Similarly, SPARCC’s Chicago site overlaps with some site boundaries and stakeholders from the New Communities Program 10 years earlier and may have benefited from the leadership and collaborative capacity developed through that MacArthur Foundation-funded work. Thus multisite, cross-sector initiatives can build systems change sequentially and collaboratively, although their efforts may not always come to fruition within their lifetimes.

By elevating similar challenges from multiple communities around the country, advocates can make the case for needed policy change. Some initiatives are coordinating with other initiatives that have similar goals. For example, one participant noted that Promise Neighborhoods—a US Department of Education-funded initiative in more than 60 communities to ensure access to great schools and strong family and community support systems—and StriveTogether, which are both focused on education, have partnered to show the importance of local organizations that are coordinating efforts in communities and driving change for residents. Working together, rural and urban sites from both initiatives helped create two Minnesota state policies funding education partnerships and changed city funding policies in Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, to cover universal preschool. Separately in Minnesota, the city of Minneapolis participated in two initiatives simultaneously. The city leveraged its collaborative work with the Integration Initiative and Sustainable Communities, a federal grant program to support inclusive regional planning processes, to achieve multiple goals around changing systems to advance racial equity.

Committing for the Long Term

In addition to the benefits of building on past initiatives, participants agreed that long-term investments are more likely to yield outcomes because changing

systems takes time, but most grants are short term (see appendix B). Research participants emphasized that many initiatives focused on changing systems that had been building for decades or centuries and would not be altered with three-to-five or even 10-year grant and evaluation windows. This is especially true for work related to racial equity (Assari 2018).

Not only can the benefit of an investment take many years to appear, but true systems change should be durable, with results lasting beyond the life of an initiative investment and years into the future. This complicates how initiatives incorporate learning into their work, as well as how they track and evaluate accomplishments. It could make sense to view evaluations conducted during an initiative as avenues for providing feedback throughout the life span of a project rather than as a benchmark or measure of progress at the very end. Some initiatives are using qualitative and quantitative data to track progress and provide real-time feedback using developmental evaluation

designs. For example, the Integration Initiative evaluation found that “providing real-time feedback gives initiatives an opportunity to incorporate learnings into later phases of the work.”

Accomplishments

To accomplish systems change, an initiative needs its wins to be durable enough to withstand changes in the institutional environment. Systems change requires a shift of thinking and practice that outlasts the leaders in power or changes in middle management or administrators involved in the initiative. As one convening participant noted, “You have to go through a couple administrations, a couple election cycles before we can say we’ve actually changed anything.”

Respondents identified examples of when initiatives yielded promising results across the six conditions of systems change. The examples in table 1, captured from interview anecdotes, show how organizations have shifted conditions, practices, and expectations in the US.

Table 1 Examples of Systems Change Impact

Policies		
<p>StriveTogether</p> <p>In Minnesota, StriveTogether and Promise Neighborhoods worked together to support the adoption of two policies that fund backbone partnerships through state budgets.</p> <p>In Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, StriveTogether sites shared resources. Both locations passed universal preschool funding in the same ballot years.</p>	<p>Strong Cities, Strong Communities</p> <p>Many SC2 sites ran into the same issue: Community Development Block Grant funding and Federal Highway Administration funding had opposite hiring requirements, meaning that funds from those sources could not be used together. SC2 national coordinators elevated this challenge to the federal government. The Department of Transportation introduced a local hiring initiative that allowed the funds to be used together.</p>	<p>Building Healthy Communities</p> <p>After gathering evidence on the lasting and disproportionately racialized harms of school suspensions, BHC persuaded the governor of California to sign eight bills over two years to address the problem. As a result, school suspensions dropped by 50 percent over two years. Suspensions of African American boys, Native Americans, and Latinos were cut in half. The rates in some school districts within BHC communities dropped to zero.</p>
Practices		
<p>SPARCC</p> <p>The city of Chicago’s Office of Public Engagement adopted the local partnership’s principles for community engagement, which highlight equitable methods of co-designing community work and changing public engagement practices to center the voices and needs of community members. Additionally, the SPARCC Chicago leader said, “the Chicago Department of Public Health is launching their next Healthy Chicago plan operating with those principles as well.”</p>	<p>Communities of Opportunity</p> <p>As a result of COO staff’s practices and modeling of community power and leadership, county officials have begun engaging community-facing agency staff in decisionmaking, asking them what needs they have observed in their interactions with the community and what services have been requested.</p>	<p>Integration Initiative</p> <p>People of color and equity advocates have joined governing boards that have affected communities of color and low-income communities across the Twin Cities region. The initiative created an environment in which such representation was not only welcome but expected. People who usually do not interact were sitting together once a month at a minimum.</p>
Resource Flows		
<p>Building Healthy Communities Site</p> <p>One BHC site began attracting capital investments because of its well-known access to reliable community needs data. Public agencies began funding the site’s work with schools, which expanded its possible solutions to improve youth health equity beyond “breakfast for all.” The site initiative team has been entrusted as a fiscal agent with Community Development Block Grant money distribution.</p>	<p>Invest Health Site</p> <p>The Invest Health site in Savannah, Georgia, garnered the resources necessary to establish a resource center for formerly incarcerated young people. The city provided real estate (leasing the building for three years to the county for \$1), and the county provided the budget for services. The county district attorney hired a facility director and assigned four staff members from the juvenile detention court, one from the school system, and two mental and behavioral health providers.</p>	

Power Dynamics

Building Healthy Communities

BHC shifted power dynamics through community organizing and collective organizing as one site's community members mounted a campaign for equitable park creation across the city. A leader recounted: "One city mayor went from saying, 'This will never pass; forget it,' to basically recognizing the political power of these residents who were able to gather enough signatures to put [park funding] on the ballot and then came to negotiate with these residents to leverage their political power with his agenda as well." Also, many community members who had worked for BHC moved into elected or appointed positions as mayors or city council members.

SPARCC Site

The Chicago SPARCC site's leadership initiative garnered participation from the city commissioners, representatives from the Office of the Mayor, business executives, and a couple of powerful civic leaders. This group of leaders comes together two to three times a year to listen and consider how they can help the Chicago SPARCC team advance its plans. The participants want to know how they can change their resource allocations, train their employees, or show up at city council meetings to support the site's work.

Communities of Opportunity

A funder in the COO initiative advocated for community representatives to have the majority role in the governance of the COO initiative even though that was not the expectation of other actors at the table. Community members were given the power to decide on the population of focus (moving from a geographic definition to a cultural one) and the allocation of resources. One leader said, "They allocate that funding in ways the county would never dream of" (e.g., by sharing grants among all applicants).

Relationships and Connections

Working Cities Challenge

Funders and private investors in Connecticut reported intensified interest in investing in WCC communities because of the strong relationships and learning shared between sites. Also, the sites want to hold the investors (and others) accountable, so they are leveraging their relationships to enter into contracts with these investors.

SPARCC

Working across sites has connected changemakers from different places. The peer-learning events and connections formed among site organizations, or "hubs," encourage resource sharing and support. A SPARCC intermediary staff member projected: "Long after SPARCC is done, those relationships among local leaders in these different regions will persist. Their ability to lean on each other, learn from each other, that will endure beyond SPARCC."

Integration Initiative

The regular meetings held among community representatives, powerful business leaders, and government commissioners resulted in strong relationships and trust among people who otherwise would not have interacted with one other. The site lead said, "They didn't know each other in the beginning, and by the end, they were collaborating."

Mental Models

ReThink Health Ventures

As a site within ReThink Health's Ventures program, the [Trenton Health Team](#) was pushed to move beyond a simple strategy of expanding primary care access to addressing the underlying social determinants of health. After the team's leaders received racial bias training, they changed the organization's hiring practices and focuses. They shifted from a race-neutral to a race-central understanding of health gaps and took on a comprehensive strategy to address upstream, racially biased causes of illness and disease, as well as to treat downstream immediate needs.

Building Healthy Communities

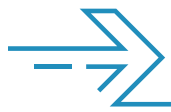
Young people participating in several sites brought the issues of school discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline to the attention of the California Endowment. This motivated an assessment by an outside evaluator who confirmed the connection between race, school suspensions, and graduation rates. The California Endowment shifted its perspective to see school discipline as a social determinant of health worthy of initiative attention. It allowed sites to pursue this work, resulting in [seven new state laws](#) and changes in local policies (Iton 2016).



Summary

Although systems change work is complex, multisite, cross-sector initiatives are making progress. Whether or not they explicitly set out to achieve systems change, many initiatives are doing so by altering mental models, building relationships and connections, transferring power from the privileged to the marginalized, and winning advancements in policy, practice, and resource flows (although not often all at the same time). To do this, they are tackling systemic problems

that powerful interests held in place over decades by reaching across sectors, sites, and initiatives to build lasting collaborations and durable change. Although progress is evident, changes such as bolstering peer learning, creating a strategic learning agenda, and making more long-term investments that are better aligned with the desired long-term changes could expand initiatives' impact on their sites and the systems targeted for change.



3. Advancing Racial Equity

Chapter Highlights

- For most initiatives, racism is explicitly identified—at an initiative’s start or over time—as the root cause of the systemic problems they are trying to overcome, making racial equity a key goal of systems change.
- Initiative and site leaders provide impetus and resources to prompt local investigation of structural racism by making it an initiative goal and priority, listening to voices within sites, fostering learning across sites, building capacity within organizations, and shifting individual mental models.
- Strategies for advancing racial equity include building trust, acknowledging history, respecting local leaders, allowing time for individual and organizational journeys, tracking equity-related process and outcome metrics, facilitating training, and letting people most affected by the issue lead.
- Skeptics should be challenged to progress in their individual and organizational journeys to acknowledge racism and advance racial equity.
- Those who hold power may take on racial equity efforts in name only, without engaging in personal and organizational change; meanwhile, they may impose expectations that exact an emotional toll on people and communities of color who fight from positions of lesser power for transformational change.

Introduction

The current initiatives are more explicit than previous initiatives about the importance of racial equity as both a core element of the systems change process and a crucial goal to be achieved. Participants pointed to structural racism—defined here as racial bias among interlocking institutions and across society, causing cumulative and compounding effects that systematically advantage white people and disadvantage people of color (Apollon et al. 2014)—as a root cause of racial inequities and a key driver of the systemic problems that initiatives target. Overlapping, historical systems of disinvestment and denial of opportunity hold racial inequity in place in communities across the country.

This includes intentional disinvestment in key public and private infrastructure and services, lack of credit for people of color, and predatory practices meant to strip assets and block opportunities from communities of color.

The symptoms of structural racism—specifically, racial inequities across numerous outcomes related to individual and community health and well-being—are easy to see. Yet achieving systems change means challenging largely invisible forces and addressing underlying racist ideas and practices. Work on the structural change that many multisite, cross-sector initiatives desire requires centering racial equity as a goal, em-

bracing it as a process, and tracking progress in both implementation and outcomes. As one participant put it, getting “to the idea of systems change, getting to the kind of scale of movement building we need to do, we can’t do that by soft-pedaling around the systemic and oppressive systems we’ve created in this country.” A growing number of initiatives are explicitly committing to advance racial equity. Yet current practice leaves room for improvement, both in elevating racial equity as a stated initiative goal and practicing it as individuals, organizations, sites, initiatives, and systems. Initiative stakeholders should consider in what ways a racial equity focus is being operationalized, acted upon, and measured at each level (figure 1).

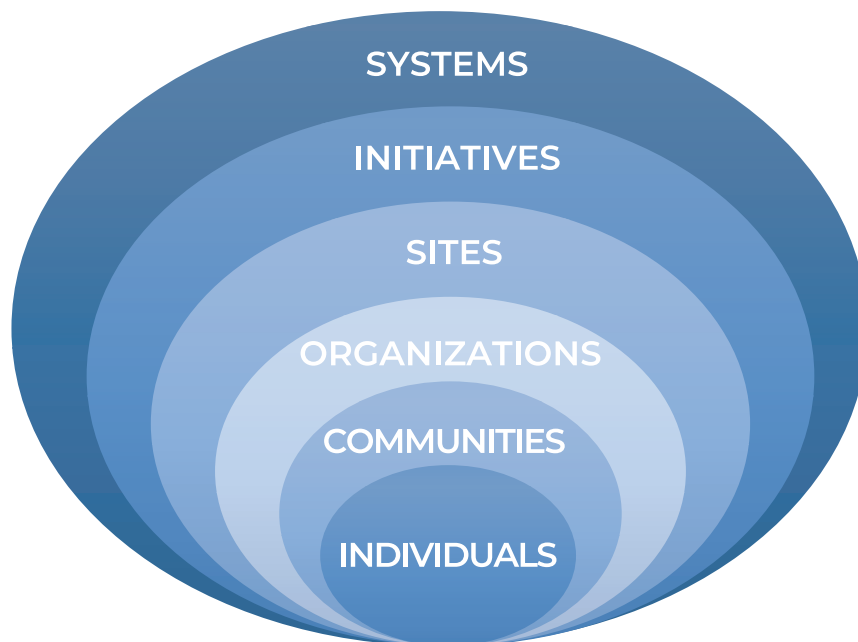
An Evolving Journey

“But you’re on a journey [about racial equity], and I call it a journey. And there are individual journeys going, there’s organizational journeys, there’s city journeys, and some people aren’t on the journey yet.”

—Convening participant

The recognition of the importance of racial equity in philanthropy has grown substantially in recent years.³ Funders and philanthropic support organizations are focusing on racial equity in their organizations and

Figure 1 Centering Racial Equity to Advance Systems Change within Multisite, Cross-Sector Initiatives
A focus on racial equity must permeate multiple levels, from individual to system, to be appropriately centered



³ Tom Wolff, Meredith Minkler, Susan M. Wolfe, Bill Berkowitz, Linda Bowen, Frances Dunn Butterfoss, Brian D. Christens, Vincent T. Francisco, Arthur T. Himmelman, and Kien S. Lee, “Collaborating for Equity and Justice: Moving Beyond Collective Impact,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, January 9, 2017, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/collaborating-equity-justice-moving-beyond-collective-impact/>.

grantmaking, and that is reflected in their initiatives. However, this initiative emphasis has emerged at different stages, with some having this as an explicit goal at the beginning and others adopting it during implementation.

Research participants who had worked on initiatives that took on racial equity highlighted that embracing and incorporating racial equity is a journey that takes place on both an individual and organizational level. Racial equity awareness is a continuum that necessitates people to persistently think critically about the impact of race and equity and their role in countering inequities—through adopting antiracist ideas and taking antiracist actions—or in reinforcing the status quo. Participants reported that within the initiatives, both the actors and the organizations vary widely on where they are on this journey. Some actors have not thought about how racism affects the outcomes they wish to address, while others are on the forefront of antiracism and are not only normalizing dialogue on racial equity but are implementing strategies for tackling racism.

Explicit from the Beginning

On their websites, several of the 16 initiatives—including Communities of Opportunity, the Integration Initiative, SPARCC, and Sustainable Communities—explicitly stated racial equity as a goal. One SPARCC leader said: “When we first started, we went through this whole process of the need to be explicit about racial equity. By the time we launched SPARCC, racial equity was a core pillar—one of the three lenses, and very explicitly, not just equity but racial equity.” Having a strong stance on racial equity from the beginning helped bring people together and built trust among the actors. One participant in Communities of Opportunity reported that “naming the structural injustices also brought us trust, because we’re not lying to each other about why some communities are underresourced.”

Evolving along the Way

Many initiatives evolved to include a racial equity focus over time. Some participants reflected that the initiative

would have been stronger if equity had been centered in the initial design. A Working Cities Challenge participant said: “For my initiative, [racial equity] wasn’t 100 percent pushed through the initial planning and grant funding. It wasn’t something that we talked about.... So we had to come through a learning phase.” Several research participants attributed their adoption of racial equity goals to grassroots influence on leaders and pressure from community partners, whose staff regularly observe racism’s impact on community members. One funder of an initiative that centered racial equity from the beginning highlighted: “As an organization, we are majority-minority, and we often think about problems with a racial lens. We are thinking about this because we live this, our communities experience it.” Thus, structures and practices that elevate the voices and power of people or communities of color seem to catalyze and reinforce a commitment to combat racial inequities. Initiatives that remain mostly dominated by white people and/or organizations that fail to engage substantively with the lived experiences of people and communities of color may have trouble grasping the multiple manifestations and implications of racism and may be less driven to pursue the systems changes that racial equity and antiracist practices demand.

Implied, but Not Targeted

Most participants emphasized the importance of a clear commitment to advancing racial equity from initiative and site leadership. However, a few initiatives chose not to overtly include racial equity as a goal. For example, one Working Cities Challenge site did not consider its community ready to lead with racial equity but advocated for targeted universalism, that achieving a universal goal required targeted strategies to reduce racial inequities. Another site used an alternative approach focused on human-centered design and empathy, believing that it resulted in racially equitable decisions without explicitly focusing on race. One funder noted that because their foundation was founded to promote racial equity, they did not feel the need for a public declaration about racial equity because it was baked into every facet of their work. Although these approaches were less common among the initiatives studied, they raise a question

about whether initiatives can advance racial equity and drive systems change forward if racism is not explicitly acknowledged. When initiative actors do not acknowledge or understand how racism, structural oppression, power, and privilege influence the issues they are trying to tackle or their own implicit biases and operating narratives, they will not be able to address the root causes of their community's challenges.

How Initiatives Advance Racial Equity

Supporting at All Levels

Participants reported many ways that initiatives and sites were influenced to acknowledge racial equity as a part of their narrative and practice. Champions within stakeholder groups play a crucial role in centering racial equity. These leaders provide impetus and resources to prompt local investigation of structural racism by making it an *initiative* goal and priority, listening to voices *within sites*, fostering learning *across sites*, building capacity within *organizations*, and shifting *individual* mental models.

INITIATIVE

At the initiative level, funders and intermediaries (i.e., initiative management organizations working between funders and sites) play a large role in setting a racial equity agenda. For example, SPARCC leadership was committed to incorporating racial equity into the structure of the initiative from its launch. By naming racial equity explicitly as both a process and a goal, the initiative enabled both intermediary staff members and site participants to assess how they could leverage SPARCC resources to operationalize racial equity principles. We also heard examples of initiative leaders who adopted a strong and vocal stance on racial equity to provide political cover to site actors who perceived they had less freedom to openly embrace the goal. With an initiative-level mandate, site actors can take aggressive approaches to addressing racism as a root cause without fear of retribution from their funder such as loss of funding. They also know they have a network of sites across the country supporting them.

WITHIN SITES AND COMMUNITIES

Within sites, community members pushed site leaders to embrace racial equity in their work. Just as the young people in the Building Healthy Communities initiative pushed the leadership to focus on racial equity in the school-to-prison pipeline, local networks and residents have driven sites to better understand the racial context of their work. In turn, the sites within SPARCC, StriveTogether, and other initiatives pushed initiative leaders to acknowledge the importance of racial equity to achieving their goals. One participant stated, "Our network [of sites] has consistently challenged us to be very explicit about racial equity, to embed it not just in what we do in the network but what we do internally."

ACROSS SITES

Across sites, peers learn from other sites that have a strong focus on racial equity. Some sites came into initiatives with a highly nuanced understanding of their work toward racial equity. Other sites that were newer to the concept saw these more advanced organizations as models for how to put racial equity into action during day-to-day operations. Those staff members reported that the chance to observe how other sites operationalized this abstract and rarely practiced concept was "as valuable, if not more so, than all the different conferences, podcasts, trainings, and literature that we read about race equity."

ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations engaged in site leadership and management gained insights into racial equity through coaching or technical assistance in racial equity awareness and practices. This support came from intermediaries, funders, and outside consultants. Several participants attributed their evolution in racial equity mental models to trainings done by Race Forward, especially those done with organizational leadership. One initiative brought in John Powell from the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society (now called the Othering and Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley) to conduct workshops on structural racism for sites.

Box 2

Trenton Health Team, a Site of ReThink Health Ventures

The Trenton Health Team in New Jersey has had a deep commitment to health equity from its beginnings 10 years ago but has more recently has taken explicit steps to center racial equity in its efforts. Although the team worked closely with Trenton’s diverse community members throughout its history, the team grew to appreciate that more authentic avenues for resident engagement were imperative if community voice and racial equity were to be more meaningfully embedded within its strategy and approach. With support from ReThink Health Ventures and other initiatives, Trenton Health Team engaged in systems analysis, racial equity training, and planning to build a shared vision with community members. Through these activities and driven by their commitment to equitable well-being, the organization shifted its approach to building community health and well-being, centering community voice and equity at the board level, within strategy, and in the ongoing implementation of their programs. Trenton Health Team reorganized the power dynamics in its community engagement, and the team continues to advance in its organizational journey toward racial equity and to explore shared community vision and strategies beyond initial initiative funding.

INDIVIDUALS

Shifts in the way people think about race, racism, opportunity, and power are crucial for both initiative actors and the broader community. ReThink Health’s Ventures initiative—which brought six teams in communities across the US together to see how multisector partnerships could transform health care delivery and address the social determinants of health—worked with sites with a range of experience in thinking critically about racial equity. Through its technical assistance, ReThink Health emphasized training for sites that were newer to the concept and cross-site learning from locations with more complex understandings of racial equity. Box 2 describes the journey of one ReThink Health Ventures team that made major strides in its understanding of racism as a root cause of distrust within the community with which it sought to build relationships. The initiative’s evaluation noted

that observable shifts in mindset had led to some practice changes, with sites altering the composition of their boards and committees and engaging residents differently. The mental model shifts led to systems analysis, which changed the initiative’s focus from simply helping people find a primary care provider to also focusing on upstream barriers to health care access within traditionally oppressed communities, such as a lack of stable housing, living wage jobs, and environmental quality.⁴

Setting Goals and Structuring Processes

Participants in initiatives with an explicit commitment to racial equity stated that it was core to their process and/or goals (closing racial gaps in specific outcomes like health, educational attainment, employment, wealth, or neighborhood investment). To set racial equity goals, participants noted that data must be

⁴ Tami Gouveia, “The Essential Components of a Comprehensive Transformation Strategy for Regional Health and Well-Being,” ReThink Health, October 30, 2018, <https://www.rethinkhealth.org/Resource/the-essential-components-of-a-comprehensive-transformation-strategy-for-regional-health-and-well-being/>.

disaggregated by race and ethnicity so community areas with the greatest racial disparities can be identified. Site teams used these data to make the case for the importance of closing gaps and then tracked and measured initiatives' progress in reducing disparities. Box 3 presents an example of the power of disaggregated data.

Having racial equity as a core focus of an initiative's process means altering how the initiative is designed, implemented, and evaluated. Many initiative actors felt that achieving racial equity goals required shifting how people think, organizations are run, goals are set, leaders are identified, and power is distributed. In short, to achieve racial equity goals, initiatives need to pursue the six conditions of systems change discussed in Chapter 2 within their own ideals, organizations, and partnerships. The community development field's thinking on how to operationalize and embed racial equity into the design and implementation of an initiative continues to evolve. However, some initiatives and sites tried the following methods to incorporate racial equity into their work (examples are from interviewee and convening participants' recommendations).

1. **Build common language and trust.** Several initiative actors noted that it is important to set aside time to get all participants on the same page about why they are coming together, what their goals are, and how they are defining terms like systems change, racial equity, and power. Many people emphasized that an initiative's success depended on having built up trust with the diverse communities and people whose fundamental conditions and well-being the initiative is trying to shift by changing systems. Developing authentic relationships with community members based on concern and care for personal experiences, rather than as a means to transacting business, can help foster trust. This trust enables residents or community members within initiative sites to share their insights

Box 3

Making Progress on Racial Equity in California

The Building Healthy Communities initiative successfully advanced racial equity in California. Annual school suspensions and expulsions in the state used to number around 800,000, more than the number of graduates in the state. These disciplinary actions were disproportionately applied to students of color. Research done by the Building Healthy Communities initiative found that one suspension after the ninth grade drops a student's chances of graduating on time by 30 percent.

By organizing across communities and elevating youth voice, the initiative convinced the governor of the negative impact that the school-to-prison pipeline was having on black and brown communities. Over a two-year period, Governor Jerry Brown signed eight bills addressing school disciplinary actions. According to one research participant, school suspensions dropped 49 percent statewide from 2010 to 2015 (Iton 2016). This shift halved suspensions for African American, Native American, and Latino boys. Some school districts dropped their rate of suspensions to zero.

and invest their time and energy. Although trust is a complex thing to build, using human-centered design (e.g., Building Healthy Communities' Del Norte approach)⁵ and having meeting settings and room arrangements (e.g., meeting in homes or community institutions and arranging seats without a head seat or focal point) that are comfortable and respectful for community members are examples of ways to promote trust and dialogue. Additionally, establishing a buddy system between community

⁵“Building a Healthy Community—Del Norte and Tribal Lands,” YouTube video, 10:00, posted by Wingspan Media, May 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XVw47K03Do&feature=youtu.be>.

members and site staffers and paying community members for their time help build relationships and establish respect.

“In retrospect, I recognize that is what constitutes an antiracist practice: to elevate those who are under threat in society and create opportunities for them to humanize themselves and to basically help set the priorities for our work.”

—Interviewee

2. **Acknowledge the historical factors that shape the initiative and influence partnerships.**

Structural racism is deeply rooted in our society, stemming from centuries of oppression. It shows up in all communities and has shaped the lived experiences of all actors. By openly discussing the historical and societal factors that affect a partnership—who has privilege and who does not—an initiative’s funder and its grantees can acknowledge and address issues and concerns that might keep stakeholders from fully participating.

3. **Respect existing goals and assets identified by affected communities.** Working on issues that community members within and across sites can see, are familiar with, or have already been working on can help build trust. Such a move demonstrates that an initiative’s interests are aligned with ongoing work. Additionally, acknowledging and prioritizing community members’ goals (which stem from their own experiences) demonstrates respect, accepts their expertise, and counters racist, sexist, or classist narratives. Initiatives can augment local assets and should take care not to discount them.

4. **Develop tools and data to support implementing and tracking racial equity in initiative oper-**

ations and decisionmaking. Initiative leaders can support the commitment to racial equity across the network by building tools to help facilitate conversations and shifts in practices. Communities of Opportunity reviewed its grant sizes by the race of the grantee’s leadership and discovered that it needed to adjust how much it granted to organizations led by women of color. As an outgrowth of the Integration Initiative site, Living Cities developed a racial equity and inclusion competency framework to push staff journeys and organizational culture forward (appendix C). The SPARCC initiative created its “capital screen” tool to help facilitate equitable distribution of resources.⁶ This tool scores investment options on 12 criteria related to racial equity, health, resilience, community ownership, and systems change. Beyond these tools and examples, participants recommended using Race Forward’s Racial Equity Impact Assessment tool⁷ to assess how the initiative functions and makes decisions (Keleher 2009).

5. **Provide training on skills necessary to facilitate challenging conversations, change organizations, and fight systemic racism.** Participants highlighted the need to develop skills for implementing racial equity change, such as adaptive leadership. Skill trainings on advancing racial equity and shifting power differ from trainings on combating racial bias or fostering personal and organizational journeys. Purpose Built Communities—a network of local member organizations that address housing, education, and community well-being in struggling neighborhoods to break intergenerational poverty cycles—invested in Race Forward training for six “equity ambassadors” to help them devise “strategies to advance conversations and action around race, equity, and inclusion across the Purpose Built network.”⁸ The utility of such trainings,

⁶ Brian Prater, “A New Tool for Rethinking Community Investment: The SPARCC Capital Screen,” Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge, March 20, 2018, <https://www.sparcchub.org/2018/03/20/a-new-tool-for-rethinking-community-investment-the-sparcc-capital-screen/>.

⁷ “Racial Equity Impact Assessment Toolkit,” Race Forward, accessed May 2020, <https://www.raceforward.org/practice/tools/racial-equity-impact-assessment-toolkit>.

though, will depend on the level of skill and awareness within each organization and site.

- 6. Let those most affected by the issue lead.** Traditionally, the people who have power are white, highly educated, wealthy, and male. Advancing racial equity means shifting leadership—including responsibility for setting goals, allocating resources, and choosing measures of progress—to people of color. This allows those without power to have a say in how and where power within and outside an initiative needs to shift. One initiative mandated that community members make up most of its governing board, with one convening participant explaining: “We wanted the decisions to be made by people who were closest to the point of pain—those experiencing inequity in their day-to-day lives: in their families, with their children.” Other initiatives selected site managers from among the communities covered by a site to build trust, reduce time spent on learning contexts and histories, and elevate local leadership. After Building Healthy Communities did this, it experienced almost no turnover and reported greater learning, clearer communication, and overall greater efficacy.

Challenges in Advancing Racial Equity

“[Our city] is very progressive, but racism still perpetuates itself in the way folks work because they are not changing the way their systems work.”

—Interviewee

Working with Skeptics

Some initiative stakeholders suggested that they might promote racially equitable outcomes while avoiding calling out racism and instead frame the initiative

around equity or inclusion more broadly. The goal was to gain support from leaders who may be uncomfortable with racial equity as an initiative goal. One participant shared: “There are a number of key leaders on the sidelines at the moment that need to be part of the effort, and the concern is that [if] we gather the data and evidence to present the disparities...we might further drive them away... How do you frame the work and present the evidence in a way that is welcoming for those that are reluctant to acknowledge that there may be racial equity issues embedded in the system?” A proposed alternative was to focus on specific outcomes, such as increased affordable housing supply or reduced health disparities, as a way to be more palatable to those not ready to take on racial equity as an explicit focus. One convening participant noted that using “targeted universalism” as an alternative framework could bring players who otherwise would be opposed to race-targeted policies into alignment with an initiative’s racial equity goals (powell, Menendian, and Ake 2019). He asserted: “They’ll be with you 98 percent of the way, and then you can bring them along to the final goal of racial equity. If you had started there, they wouldn’t have walked the journey with you. It may be deceptive to use that cover, but it gets them to walk down the path so you can show them the point.” These approaches are problematic in that they fail to point to racism as a root cause of the systemic problems that initiatives are trying to address and are therefore unlikely to result in systems change that requires undoing discrimination and embracing antiracist practices. Powerful leaders within initiatives need to challenge skeptics—either with training and dialogue or by modeling and setting standards of practice—to advance in their individual and organizational journeys and protect initiative-level goals of racial equity.

Avoiding True Transformation

Some participants said they had seen leaders and decisionmakers adopt the concept of racial equity

⁸“Exploring Equity in Community Development,” Purpose Built Communities, February 25, 2020, <https://purposebuiltcommunities.org/equity-ambassadors/exploring-equity-in-community-development/>.

⁹ Ann-Sophie Morrissette, “Five Myths That Perpetuate Burnout across Nonprofits,” Stanford Social Innovation Review, October 31, 2016, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/five_myths_that_perpetuate_burnout_across_nonprofits.

as a surface-level talking point, rather than taking on transformative work at the initiative and systems levels. Although many initiatives publicly highlighted the importance of racial equity, there was not much evidence that initiatives had adopted decisionmaking or resource allocation practices to embed racial equity in their organizational processes. Many funders did not seek out grantees led by people of color or in historically disinvested communities where capacity-building needs were high. Most also maintained control over initiative goals, which often failed to include advancing racial equity.

People also fail to advance on their personal journey toward understanding racism and pursuing racially equitable policies and practices. One participant hypothesized that some people saw training on implicit bias and equity as simply a box to check so they could “return to their normal work.” This example itself illustrates a fundamental principle underlying systemic racism: those unaffected by disinvestment and discrimination leverage their power by choosing to stop paying attention or failing to pursue antiracist decisions and actions. Such moves leave undoing racism to people and communities of color who fight from positions of lesser power for transformational change. To counterbalance this tendency, initiative leaders can establish mechanisms by which to track racial equity in practice to hold all parties (funders included) mutually accountable for advancing racial equity on an ongoing basis.

Emotional Toll

Fighting for racial equity is a long and arduous endeavor. It takes an emotional toll on those who strive for change full time. When initiative stakeholders shift their thinking around racial equity and commit to changing structural racism, they return to organizations whose environments may not be supportive of the concept. By

advocating for change, the stakeholders could put their careers and economic stability at risk. The burden of advocating for racial equity also commonly falls on people and communities of color. This weight only adds to the challenges created by structural racism in their everyday lives. Beyond promoting good staff management practices,⁹ initiatives can be a place for those advocates to come together for support and a way for white people to take on more of the burden and risk while using and shifting their power to advocate for racial equity.

Summary

For all the progress made in multisite, cross-sector initiatives toward centering racial equity, some initiatives are still encountering or expecting resistance. Structural racism requires persistent undoing, but many people will not acknowledge the role that racism plays in shaping community opportunities and outcomes. One participant said, “I can show people disparities that are five or eight times the normal rate due to racial disparities, and they hesitate to really take it on because it’s race.” For many white people, confronting the roots or even the symptoms of racial oppression and racism may seem too immense, intractable, sensitive, or distant to tackle. However, choosing not to name racism as a root cause is to perpetuate the status quo. As Ibram X. Kendi, a prominent historian and author, writes, “There is no neutrality in the racism struggle... One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities as an antiracist” (2019, 9). The mental models of many people still need to shift to fully comprehend the importance of racial equity. Initiatives can lead the way by setting explicit goals, providing concrete supports for necessary journeys, embedding racial equity in initiative design and structures, and demanding that tangible changes in systems be tracked transparently to highlight antiracist outcomes.

4. Shifting Power

Chapter Highlights

- Powerful people and groups can advance racial equity and pursue systems change by shifting power through four channels: reputation, resources, technical capacity, and reach.
- Funders can advance racial equity by investing in organizations led by people of color and women and in communities that have faced persistent disinvestment.
- Supporting community voice and control is key to shifting power, but these processes should not allow community groups with outside influence to drive the agenda and drown out the voices of more marginalized groups.
- Intermediaries complicate initiative dynamics. Although they are accountable to the funder, they can support community power by doing translational work between funder goals and site desires. They also can serve as a trusted coach, rather than just a technical expert, to sites.
- At the site level, cross-sector initiatives bring powerful actors from the institutions that help maintain the status quo together with people who seek to disrupt and change it, so they need management structures that shift power.
- Evaluation can work more in the interests of sites by being structured as a learning process for them around progress and direction, rather than as a review of outcomes based on funder goals.

Introduction

Changing systems and advancing racial equity require shifting power within initiatives. How initiatives are structured and governed reflects who holds power, what kind of power they hold, and how that power can and will be used. These structures determine who makes decisions, who gets resources, and how those with power are held accountable for their actions (or inactions). This chapter captures some ways that current and recent initiatives have shaped, shared, and built power through how they are structured and who is included.

In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose.... All of us have our moral convictions and

concerns, and so often we have problems with power. But there is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly.”¹⁰ Powerful people and groups can wield their power for positive purposes and advance a more equitable power distribution. Our research revealed the following channels of power, which we will refer to throughout the chapter:

- **Reputation.** Powerful actors’ reputation can help site actors open doors, attract and align partners, and lend legitimacy to requests or activities. Powerful actors can offer community members access to board members, who in turn put their resources and brand behind what community members say they need. Building Healthy Communities, for instance,

¹⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., “Where Do We Go from Here?” (address delivered at the 11th Annual SCLC Convention, Atlanta, August 16, 1967, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/where-do-we-go-here-address-delivered-eleventh-annual-sclc-convention>).

gave each site and its communities direct access to a board member at the California Endowment, the initiative's funder.

- **Resources.** Powerful actors' access to resources can serve long-term community priorities. These resources include physical, financial, social, or information capital. In the most direct cases of power sharing, initiative working groups composed of community members were given control over budget priorities. Transferring one type of resource (e.g., information) may also help actors access another resource (e.g., funds). For example, Strong Cities, Strong Communities—a federal initiative that aimed to strengthen the capacity of neighborhoods, towns and cities to develop and execute their economic vision and strategies—gave sites information on how to access federal dollars even though the initiative itself provided no direct funding. Having initiative participants acknowledge the multifaceted resources beyond money that community members bring to the table can counteract traditional power differentials.
- **Technical capacity.** Privileged groups have access to technical capacity that can create evidence or uncover resources to sustain an initiative beyond a grant. Convening participants noted that actors with knowledge and skills around capital investment, for example, can put those skills to work for communities' goals while transferring some of that capacity to sites.
- **Reach.** Powerful actors with broad connections to influential people or groups, or reach, can share lessons across sites and outside the initiative. They can also call in help from beyond the local ecosystem, as RWJF did in attracting other funders to invest in SPARCC.

Actors with control over these forms of power can use them to hold others accountable. Funders can hold grantees accountable for working with community representatives and elevating local control while still

holding sites accountable for progress toward goals. Funders and initiative managers can also set up structures through which they themselves are held accountable to sites and communities. For example, evaluators and learning partners can work with community representatives to hold funders and initiative managers accountable for doing all they can to support sites in achieving initiative goals (e.g., StriveTogether's member advisory council¹¹).

Overall, powerful actors can advance equity by lending the benefits of their power to build, legitimize, and augment power held within disinvested communities. The following sections lay out how actors have considered and balanced power through four phases of multisite, cross-sector initiatives: selecting sites and goals, managing across sites, implementing the work, and evaluating the initiative.

Selecting Sites and Goals

As the primary resource-providers for many initiatives, funders start from powerful positions. They traditionally choose all initiative participants, the roles they play, the initiative's governing structure, and the composition of individual sites. At this stage—selecting sites and setting initiative goals—they face numerous decisions about how to shift power to local sites and advance racial equity.

Selecting Sites

One of the first ways funders exercise power is in the selection of the sites and communities they want to target. Funders frequently look for sites with “enabling environments” (i.e., those with favorable policies and regulations, local resources and funding, human capacity, relationships and networks, platforms for collaboration, and data for decisionmaking) that would allow an initiative to both accomplish its goals and lower the perceived risk of failure. Although this project did not review site-selection criteria across initiatives, we did

¹¹ See “Member Advisory Council Application,” StriveTogether, accessed April 20, 2020, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A_I5gf3yDdv-vlz1z5kX9IVr6S164yv0tnVK4xdUMj2A/edit.

hear from convening participants that the assumptions about what constitutes a promising enabling environment are in many ways a reflection of the existing distribution of power and can be a catch-22. A site leader said: “It’s this notion of capacity. [Foundations say,] ‘We don’t want to give you ‘x’ amount because you don’t have the capacity to manage that.’ How am I going to get the capacity to manage that without more investment?” Convening participants emphasized the need for funders to prioritize equity in their decisions about where to invest, which means overlooking traditional risk calculations and thinking about investing in areas or organizations (particularly organizations led by people of color and women) that have faced persistent disinvestment. Initiatives can strengthen enabling environments in any place even though starting points and rates of progress may differ.

Setting Initiative Goals

In addition to selecting the site, funders exercise power by choosing an initiative’s overall purpose and focus, which in turn requires defining the communities that will be involved and affected (see box 4).

Box 4

Who Is the “Community”?

Initiatives frequently involve multiple and diverse communities. “Community” does not have a set definition. Initiatives have defined it in the following ways:

- residents
- bounded space (e.g., a neighborhood, city, or region)
- identity (race, sexuality, religion, and/or age)
- group of institutions (businesses, schools, anchor institutions, developers, or those affected by a common policy)
- those who would benefit from an initiative’s work, sometimes including those whose assistance would be needed to create that benefit

A small number of initiatives we examined set building community voice and control as a core goal necessary for redistributing power and advancing racial equity by letting those most affected by the issues lead the work on addressing root causes and changing systems. For example, SPARCC’s theory of change includes a core assumption that all its goals can be realized “by empowering communities and recasting systems to amplify regional public investments in housing, transit, and other impactful infrastructure so that their benefits can be shared equitably” (Kabel, Kenyon, and Roerty 2017). Similarly, Communities of Opportunity placed increasing civic participation and community capacity as one of its central aims and integrated it into its process by creating a governance board on which community representatives hold the majority. Convening participants echoed these sentiments, noting that community organizing and building up community voice “is at the heart of change.”

“Funders have the responsibility to create the space to openly discuss how these issues have historically impacted community partners, including becoming vulnerable to the role that philanthropy has played in contributing to these dynamics. In order to create an equal distribution of power, funders need to genuinely engage the community as partners in shared decision-making—a process that often requires dedicated and deliberate capacity building as part of the investment.”

—*The Art and Science of Place-Based Philanthropy*
(Fehler-Cabral et al. 2016)

Involving diverse communities within sites in goal setting upsets the status quo; it elevates expertise based on experience over academic or technical expertise, potentially challenging funders’ assumptions about what is needed and how best to meet that need. For example, Building Healthy Communities relied on the expertise of young people when it decided to pursue the goal of reducing school suspensions. One partic-

ipant admitted: “[The school suspension] issue did not come from us but from the grassroots. Had we pursued a policy agenda, we would have come in with our definition of what the policy agenda would have been. But because we shifted to more of a power first kind of mindset, we recognized that what people on the ground were willing to organize around was what we had to get behind.” This shift toward community-led goal setting leveled power dynamics; it afforded community members the opportunity to challenge funder decisions as equals. A convening participant compared inviting a community to share in the setting of an initiative’s goals with inviting guests to your home: “[Community members] are coming to your home, and they will rearrange not only your furniture. You are going to make your home their home. They can say, ‘I don’t like how you designed this.’”

“By joining efforts, we are lending ‘power’ that’s aiming at a North Star of what communities have established. That’s a pretty important exercise of power.”

—Funder interviewee

When listening to community representatives in setting initiative goals, initiative staff members should prioritize balancing power over agnostic or blanket support for community-set goals. Participants cautioned against engaging in community goal setting in ways that allow community groups with outsize influence to drive the agenda and drown out the voices of more marginalized groups. One convening participant shared that a wealthy community advocated to block affordable housing being developed in its neighborhood during the community engagement process. This participant said that engaging communities of middle and high socioeconomic status can impede progress on equity goals if residents focus on protecting their own social and economic interests.

After goals have been set, a funder’s responsibility becomes offering whatever power it has to achieve the identified goals. For example, in Building Healthy Communities, the California Endowment hired consultants to gather evidence that confirmed youths’ claims about the effects of school suspension and leveraged its powerful connections to change the policies that led to the suspensions.

Managing across Sites

Foundations may establish or hire an intermediary organization to manage implementation and ensure that initiatives achieve their goals, although some choose to manage initiatives with in-house staff instead.¹² Both approaches entail managing subgrants, fostering peer learning among sites, connecting sites to powerful actors, and providing technical assistance or guidance to sites facing challenges. Because they add another layer of accountability and communication between sites and funders, intermediaries complicate initiative dynamics, and their role can be multidimensional.

Several site-level research participants recounted having benefited from intermediaries’ assistance through their traditional roles, such as providing peer-learning opportunities. An emergent role for intermediaries, however, is that of coach or facilitator, rather than judge or expert. Some intermediaries have grown into coaching sites through setting goals, centering racial equity, and navigating transitions and sustainability. They can serve as go-betweens, often translating their work into what funders want to know about as well as sharing initiative-wide data with communities in a way that they actually want to use it. Recasting the role of the intermediary as a partner for sites, rather than as a compliance manager (which research participants noted funders can enforce), can help sites share struggles and needs without judgment and trust that the intermediary will share what the site wants to communicate with the funder. Intermediaries can advocate to the funder

¹² Across the 16 initiatives we studied, large and small funders—such as HICcup, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the California Endowment—took on staff in-house to fulfill the responsibilities of an intermediary. Other large and medium-sized funders—such as RWJF, the Ballmer Group, and the Seattle Foundation—used external organizations.

on behalf of sites for important, community-driven needs or convey why certain initiative ideas will or will not work in a given environment.

“And I think sometimes in the role of the intermediary, we can intermediate power. Because we’re literally in between a huge power source, which is the money, and the work on the ground. So what are some things that we need to think about as intermediaries reestablishing power imbalances, because we’re the only ones to do that.”

—Convening participant

However, without addressing power dynamics and the direction of accountability, intermediaries (as an additional grantee accountable to foundations) can inhibit an initiative’s equity goals. If tasked by the funder with producing nonnegotiable results, intermediaries may face incentives to dictate sites’ objectives and shift blame to underperforming sites. In some cases, funneling resources and decisionmaking through an intermediary may create tensions with site leaders who feel the resources going to an intermediary would be better allocated to local activities or who do not trust intermediaries to defend sites’ interests with the funder. Some funders that prefer more direct involvement in initiatives believe, as one shared, that “intermediaries get in the way of direct engagement and learning with local sites.”

Implementing the Work

Initiatives reflect either traditional or transformative norms around power in the ways they implement their work within sites. The following sections discuss various site-level stakeholders’ roles, responsibilities, and relative power, highlighting how initiatives have challenged traditional power and advanced equitable, adaptable, and effective management structures.

Selecting Site Leadership

Most participants emphasized the need for a flexible, charismatic, relational, and assertive “rock star” person, with reputational power, to lead sites’ work and to champion the interests of the community within their

region and within the initiative. They differed, however, on whether that person should come from within the community or outside it, seeing both as potentially countering to power imbalances. Some initiative designers highlighted the advantage of hiring or enrolling existing community leaders because they can use their reputation and local knowledge to quickly tap into resources and may be easier to retain over time than someone from outside the community. They also may have established trust with local power holders and could advance systems change through existing relationships. However, because many forms of power (e.g., relationships, information, expertise) and trust are held by individuals, sites require flexible timelines to rebuild relational resources if or when site leaders turn over.

Having the person leading the site situated within an existing organization also cuts down on time and resources needed to implement the initiative. It can also galvanize funder interest and attention within a single organization, as opposed to spreading focus and resources across several competing organizations, as reflected in learnings from comprehensive community initiatives, precursors to today’s multisite, cross-sector initiatives (Kubisch et al. 2010). Convening participants urged initiatives to not build “redundant tables,” or lead organizations, and to “start with what exists already and what you can build upon.” For example, SPARCC operates through collaborative “tables” composed of preexisting community organizations that were configured into new partnerships through the initiative; site leaders hail from one or more of the community organizations involved in the initiative.

“We’re using the relationships and the connections that we have when we enter into a place to identify who is the [local] initiative director that also has ideally trust with whoever those large players are within that city. So we like to believe and have experienced that the initiative directors that we have in our cities are oftentimes the rock stars of the city.”

—Interviewee

In some cases, initiatives chose to bring in an “outsider” or form a new organization. New people and entities can be seen as neutral parties that allow for more disruptive change than those with more vested interests, as they may be less beholden to existing relationships and preexisting power dynamics. One example comes from Invest Health—an RWJF-funded initiative that aims to establish a pipeline of community investments that improve the built environment and drive more equitable health outcomes in 50 small and medium-sized cities. A site lead in Savannah, Georgia, reported that initiative participants were more willing to consider her requests because she did not have an institutional history or “angle” as a newcomer compared with others who had been working within the targeted local systems for some time. These new organizations generally serve as a collaboration or coordinating mechanism and not as a direct service provider. One of the foremost examples of forming a new organization—which several other initiatives imitated—is Purpose Built Communities, which encourages creation of a “community quarterback” organization that hires local staff members and focuses solely on organizing and driving the work of the collaborative group forward.¹³

Structuring Local Governance

Most initiatives we examined created a group of community representatives and site stakeholders to govern the work within a site, often referred to as a “collaborative table”. Selecting who represents the community determines who gains power through the initiative. No matter how community is defined, initiatives cannot engage whole communities, nor can a single person represent a whole community. Instead, initiative leaders can identify representatives who can

stay abreast of and respond to the dynamic desires of and relationships between entities or people within the community targeted. Our participants emphasized the importance and difficulty of considering and navigating existing dynamics in choosing the “who and how” of community representation. This includes understanding historical conflicts, power dynamics, and overlapping identities and alliances between groups. The appeal of having community representatives who have relationships with large or powerful institutions or who are well-known was a common theme among participants. Initiatives were challenged in balancing the strategy of using existing power with efforts to increase the influence and roles of underrepresented groups. As one interviewee said: “There were times when we had codirectors—one with a relationship with the community, the other with relationships with the systems. But the money was directly going to the institution that was holding relationships with the systems and was more risk averse, and that continued to create a huge challenge with how we get to the systems change that centers community.”

Some initiative funders were prescriptive about the size and composition of the table. Funders often require representatives from issue areas that the initiatives intend to address or from the systems targeted for change (see box 5). While including targeted systems, there can also be a bias toward existing power holders in the community. Alternatively, this approach can benefit and advance equity when it includes community members who would have traditionally been left out because of a lack of political power or perceived capacity. As one funder noted, when talking about who to bring into a collaborative table, “there are some communities where I like having the power to decide.”

¹³ For more examples of roles that site leads can play, see Abt Associates 2014 and “What Does It Mean to Have an Embedded Program Manager in Each BHC Site?” California Endowment, accessed September 30, 2019, <https://www.calendow.org/what-does-it-mean-to-have-an-embedded-program-manager-in-each-bhc-site/>.

Box 5

Examples of Prescribed Collaborative Tables

- The Purpose Built Communities model expects engagement with the local school district, local developers, and landowners to pursue school, housing, and community facilities development.
- Round one of Invest Health prescribed five collaborative table members per site, including a community development financial institution and local anchor institution.
- The Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative formed federal “community solutions teams” that consisted of federal employees assigned to support each city’s goals, from serving in a limited advisory capacity to working on the initiative full time.
- ReThink Health Ventures sought to improve regional health systems and required participation from public and private health agencies and organizations, as well as community organizations.

The other side of the coin is determining who should be excluded from the table, including groups that may be the target of change. Convening attendees spoke of using exclusion from a collaborative table as a strategy when the community is trying to confront or change the behavior of people or organizations with long-standing power. Furthermore, respondents attested that their tables had excluded ineffective organizations or people who had “been doing [the same work] for years and nothing has changed.” Deciding whether to exclude some people or organizations and, if so, who requires careful preparation and research to determine which power holders at the site level will resist change and to structure site governance to address or navigate around this concentration of power.

“The flexibility that can be provided by having this [collaborative table] be a structure outside of government is a key asset, and yet we can’t really transform our communities if the government is not a fundamental part of the work.”

—Interviewee

Some sites recruited government agency officials to their collaborative tables and/or associated working groups, which presents both opportunities and challenges. Government can be vocal supporters, providing a public sector champion and lending its financial power and reach for an initiative’s cause. Respondents from Ready for Work—a Venture Philanthropy Partners-led initiative across three schools in Prince George’s County, Maryland, providing supports from multiple sectors to help develop career- and college-ready high school graduates—and the Integration Initiative noted that having government officials who see an initiative’s goals as aligning with their agenda was crucial for sites’ progress as these officials devoted time and resources to the project. In other cases, governments’ power can transfer to initiatives, pushing participants to engage in equitable practices (see box 6). One Invest Health site lead said government official participation lent gravity to meeting invitations and helped expedite access to data.

However, initiatives also frequently cited government as their target for change. Some site leads noted that they included local government officials in initiative tables to influence these officials’ mindsets toward equity and inclusion. Others noted the need to guard against government officials’ taking positions of power in a collaborative table, rather than elevating the voices of traditionally disempowered groups in decisionmaking. Government engagement can also slow down progress if initiative goals do not align with government priorities.

Box 6

Using Power to Advance Equity: Corridors of Opportunity in Minneapolis-St. Paul

Powerful actors, particularly government actors, can set standards on equity and shift power to disinvested communities. Within the Corridors of Opportunity initiative, the Saint Paul Foundation coordinated two grants (one from Living Cities' Integration Initiative and the other from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's Sustainable Communities initiative) that brought 25 actors from local government agencies, nonprofits, and businesses together to plan and develop transit corridors that fostered equitable opportunity for residents in the region.

As a federal funder with significant reputational and resource power, the Department of Housing and Urban Development placed requirements on the use of its money, including that the initiative hire community organizers to train and enable underrepresented communities to lead in disbursing a \$750,000 set-aside for the transit planning efforts. The department also set rules that enforced racially equitable standards that required the site team to conduct a racially conscious fair housing assessment before creating the regional plan. As the initiative site lead noted, "Having the federal government voice in the ears of locals pushed us harder than had a philanthropic collaborative come to town with expectations."

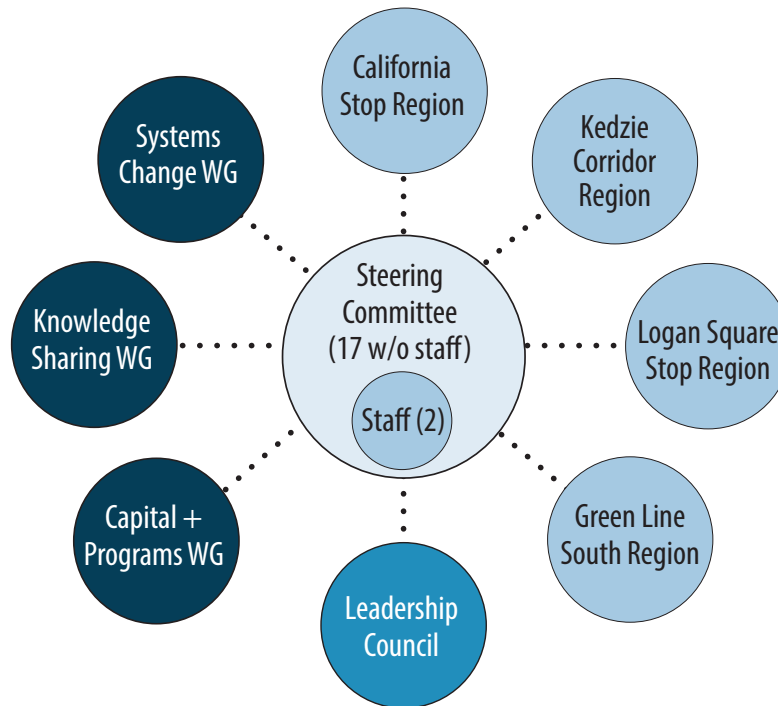
Designing Site Structures for Sharing Power

Cross-sector initiatives by definition require initiatives to navigate power imbalances because they bring together all powerful actors across sectors who play a role in maintaining a system, as well as those who desire and can design change. And yet a recent review found that "few of these partnerships have developed mechanisms to ensure that residents have both voice and power in the work" (Siegel et al. 2018, 33).

When designing the structure for bringing cross-sector actors together, most initiatives that this study

reviewed relied on a "hub-and-spoke" working group model in which each site has a central steering committee (made up of representatives of multiple sectors and initiative staff members) that oversees smaller topical, multisector working groups. SPARCC Chicago is one example of this model (figure 2). The geographic-based groups leverage the connections and expertise of community organizations and give them power in decisionmaking. Meanwhile, working groups bring actors who have the power to affect citywide systems together with local community leaders and technical experts.

Figure 2 SPARCC—Elevate Chicago Site Structure



[SPARCC's Chicago](#) site has two staff members who organize a 17-person steering committee made up of representatives from local businesses, government, and resident organizations. Three working groups (WG) with representatives from the steering committee and other partners address initiative-wide activities. Four regional or geographic-based groups composed of steering committee members, community-based partners, and other neighborhood actors address geographic-area-specific activities. A leadership council made up of key decisionmakers and investors in Chicago's built environment advises the committee.

Other initiatives began with a cross-sector collaboration that then partnered with sites or communities to bring the resources of the central cross-sector group into those sites or communities as needed (figure 3).

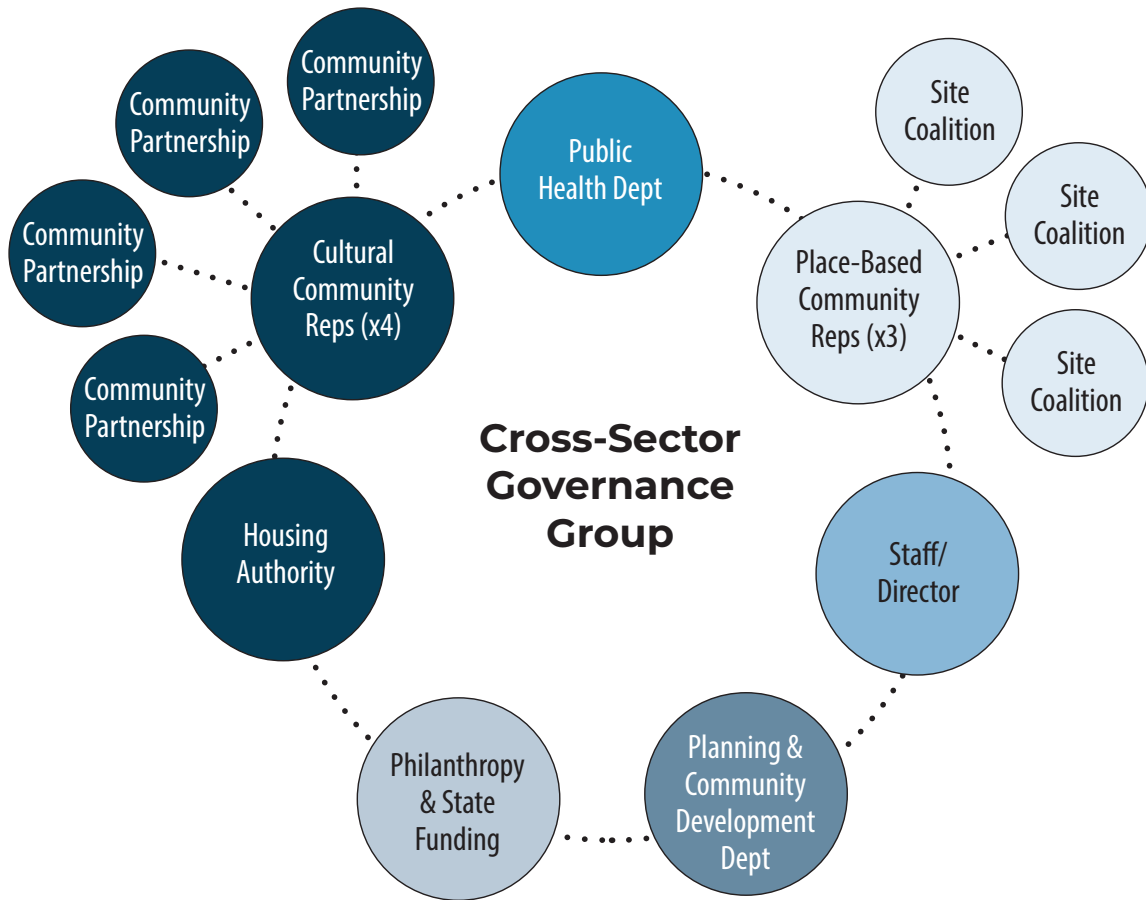
For both models, research participants emphasized their effort to ensure that their governance groups or steering committees were organized horizontally to facilitate shared power. This requires aligning participants' expectations and actions to elevate communities' desires and influence, particularly in cases in which racial equity is a goal. Initiatives operationalized having horizontal governance or steering committees in practice by not dictating goals that were irrelevant to residents, allowing for the creation of subgroups to work on topics that were

compelling to table members, and giving everyone equal votes (except in cases of conflict of interest). They also enacted practical measures, such as offering capacity building to participants, paying for participation, and holding meetings at convenient times and locations for community representatives to attend.

"[We decided] that the community leaders would have a majority on our governance group no matter what, and the [government representatives] almost fainted because they thought they would have the majority since they are putting up most of the money."

—Interviewee

Figure 3 Communities of Opportunity Structure



Communities of Opportunity runs a central, cross-sector governance table that brings together representatives from the Seattle Foundation, the Seattle and King County public health department, the Ballmer Group’s Washington State investment arm, the county housing authority, the Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development, four nonplace-based (or “cultural”) community partnerships, three place-based partnerships, and one executive initiative director. Each place-based and cultural community partnership applied to the initiative for funding and was granted a seat on the initiative governance board, which designs requests for proposals and allocates resources for support, training, and high-level, cross-community action.

Evaluating the Initiative

Initiative evaluations seek to answer research and learning questions, as well as monitor processes and outcomes. Participants had concerns about the power dynamics in setting this learning agenda for an initiative. Foundations typically pay evaluators to capture learning from their investment and/or to assess to what extent their money advanced the social change they desired. However, evaluators and site staff members expressed discomfort with how evaluations have been

framed in the past and confusion over whose learning matters the most. One convening participant said: “Who is our client? As an evaluator, we are directly contracted by the funder. Is our client the intermediary? Are we working on learning for the individual sites?” When funders use evaluations to hold sites accountable, it reinforces the imbalanced relationship between funders and sites and positions evaluators as hired informants. Funders with power can pull their resources if an evaluation does not show a site performing well;

sites have no such recourse if a funder does not fulfill its commitments. Without clear commitments to equitable partnership from the funder, site leaders may be reluctant to report challenges and needs that could reflect poorly on their performance.

Respondents recommended that evaluators shift their role to facilitate sites' involvement and leadership in setting the learning agenda and processing the results. As one evaluator reflected, evaluators rarely practice resident engagement, so "one of the most inequitable places [in our approach] is understanding and consuming the evaluation." Allowing sites to lead the learning agenda and participate in determining the desired or expected results not only improves equity but also ensures that the learning is put to good use. For federal initiatives that are expected to demonstrate a return on the investment of taxpayer dollars, adding in more formative and developmental evaluations during implementation can help sites benefit along the way and make adjustments, rather than waiting for a summative evaluation at the end.

"I would love it if we could talk to the sites about what they're interested in learning from the evaluation. That hasn't been possible so far. That would look like sites (everyone) at the table together, deciding what the evaluation should look like. What gets measured and prioritized. That's not what currently happens. It's most often directed by the funder, sometimes the intermediary. Then we fit things in on the edges that would benefit sites."

—Convening participant

One evaluator mentioned that funders should (and often do) allow for more adaptive evaluations, focused on learning throughout the implementation process to help sites pursue change within complex systems. Rather than focusing solely on outputs and outcomes, evaluation approaches can focus on key questions around whether and how processes are working toward

achieving desired outcomes or perhaps leading in unexpected directions. This can be a higher-risk strategy for funders. An evaluator said, "It was a tough decision to say, 'No, you're not going to get an answer to the question of whether or not something is effective.'"

Participants said some funders have taken a slightly different approach to giving sites more decisionmaking authority by paying for an evaluation planning phase. This is a capacity-building period for sites to learn how to digest and work with data and to have time and space for site-level reflection and learning, which allowed initiatives to iteratively "learn their way forward." Such flexibility is especially important for initiatives in which communities within different sites have set unique goals, decreasing the comparability between site processes and outcomes. Initiative stakeholders noted that they navigated this challenge by either emphasizing one unified element to evaluate progress around—such as a shared collaborative process or a prescribed site structure—or relaxing their requirement for explanatory or causal evaluation.

Summary

Woven throughout these examples of initiatives' seeking to shift power is a yet unacknowledged theme that was frequently emphasized by both convening and interview participants: power and trust are intimately linked. Where power has traditionally been used to ignore or override community members' activities or goals and to support systems of oppression or disinvestment, trust does not come easily. Funders that relinquish control over site-level goals, outcome indicators, or mandated progress demonstrate trust in the expertise and ability of site leaders and collaborative tables to use resources wisely, which in turn can help site leaders to trust that traditional power holders are working in partnership with community rather than controlling it. The same can be said for powerful site-level actors (e.g., government officials or business owners) who join an initiative and use their position to elevate community voices and interests.

5. Strategies for Stakeholders

The participants in this research covered a wide variety of initiatives and spanned multiple roles: funders, intermediaries, site leaders, and evaluators. Despite this diversity, they were clear that all stakeholders will need to evolve to change systems, advance racial equity, and shift power through multisite, cross-sector initiatives. This chapter lays out strategies, distilled across all interviews and convenings, for steps that each stakeholder can take to advance these changes within their organizations and initiatives. Although these strategies are not easy to implement, we hope that highlighting them will enhance mutual accountability across stakeholders for true change in how they work within their organizations and across partners to address root causes and drive systems change forward.

For Funders

Funders control the resources and often set the agenda and targeted goals. They need to share power while embracing mutual accountability (i.e., an agreement to be held equally responsible for making appropriate commitments needed to leverage/provide resources to meet goals and achieve desired results) with initiative sites. How an initiative is designed is an important test of a funder's integrity, or the alignment between its stated values or goals and *all* its actions. For example, funders that seek to advance racial equity or shift power for systems change must demonstrate their commitment to equity and power sharing. It is important to keep in mind that foundations may be restricted in significantly changing directions because of their accountability to their boards of directors, and government agencies may be limited by their appropriations and regulations. This presents challenges for engaging in course corrections and making long-term investments often needed for systems change. Funders have many opportunities to grow, including as follows:

- Educate foundation board members and government agency directors about the complexities of systems change and the importance of racial equity,

and provide opportunities for both individual and organizational learning and reflection.

- Advance racial equity when selecting sites, defining time frames, allocating resources, and assessing capacity-building needs. This may mean working with and investing in lower-capacity sites or organizations to overcome decades of disinvestment while providing flexible funds and/or long-term grants.
- Involve site leaders in decisionmaking about the initiative design, implementation, and evaluation to validate assumptions, rebalance power, and elevate the voices and expertise of underrepresented communities of color.
- Build extra time, money, and flexibility into grants for relationship building and goal alignment because initiatives are reliant on collaborative partnerships. Initiative stakeholders often come to the table with differing expectations, so space must be created during an initiative's formative phase for open dialogue about power, racial equity, and mutual goals.
- Build relationships with community representatives or those affected to encourage individual and organizational journeys toward racial equity. Create incentives or structures that encourage funder and intermediary staff members to attend community events and working group meetings and to visit community representatives in their schools, businesses, and community spaces.
- Encourage initiative stakeholders to provide authentic feedback and criticism by ensuring that honesty will not jeopardize their reputations or lead to a loss of funding.

For Intermediaries

Intermediaries traditionally work for the funder but are increasingly considering that their accountability to sites means that they need to play new and expanded roles in an initiative. They generally possess strong technical skills for building site capacity to advance policies,

practice, and resource flow changes but can find themselves stretched beyond their traditional skills set when it comes to building relationships, trust, community-level power, and equity-oriented mental models. They may also be inadequately equipped to tackle racial equity if they operate outside the community and/or from a place of privilege. Intermediaries can pursue dual strategies to address this by partnering with new players with the needed expertise and building new capacities within their own organizations. With these strategies, they can expand their role to include not only technical assistance delivery but also proactive management of the power dynamics and information flows between grantees and funders:

- Help balance power as the bridge between funders and communities by amplifying community insights, rather than just transmitting outside expertise to sites.
- Be less prescriptive with site goals, and instead support goals that align with the communities' expressed interests and have realistic expectations about progress. Encourage funders to do this too.
- Ensure that initiatives have technical assistance staff members and consultants who are equipped to provide services with a racial equity lens.
- Develop and offer tools to assist sites in integrating racial equity and power sharing into decisionmaking processes using clear structure and skilled facilitation.

For Sites

Site leadership and table members are the closest to the ground in establishing community goals and developing strategies to move levers for systems change. As the parties who oversee implementation, site leads and staff members are responsible for ensuring that an initiative acts with integrity using the approaches it wants to lead others to use. They are the front line for rebalancing power among community members and building strong working relationships, elevating and acknowledging atypical forms of power and expertise, and guarding against cooptation by traditionally powerful actors who wish to protect their interests. Sites can make progress on advancing their goals and achieving results in the following ways:

- Acknowledge and value community experience and needs by creating asset inventories, taking time to build trust and listen to ideas, and compensating site participants for their time.
- Set aside time and space for site actors to discuss the historical and contemporary context of the initiative, to explore stakeholders' different lived experiences, and to digest how these experiences relate to racial equity.
- Create agreements and practices within collaborative tables that encourage participants to balance power, including structuring agendas and meeting formats to encourage equity among participants.
- Anticipate and structure ways to handle conflict among communities and community members, especially where power imbalances exist.
- Encourage "early action" projects within the initiative that offer the opportunity to demonstrate progress to community members on an issue they care about to show value and create buy-in for the long-term systems change efforts.
- Challenge the initiative's internal practices to encourage evaluators, funders, and intermediaries to implement and spread processes that advance racial equity and power building as a central strategy for systems change.
- Partner with other sites with common interests to drive systems change beyond the local level.

For Evaluators

Evaluators play a crucial role in documenting systems change that initiatives and their sites achieve over time and providing real-time feedback to allow leaders to make adjustments along the way to achieve the desired change. Because sites are traditionally held accountable to funders, evaluators have traditionally documented progress according to funder goals. Although evaluators must still answer to the foundations that hired them, we heard a desire for evaluators to promote mutual accountability and work more closely with sites to prioritize and promote their learning agendas, rather than just measure funder-directed outcomes. Evaluators can shift from executing their role as accountability enforc-

ers over sites to putting their expertise to use *in service of sites* in the following ways:

- Embrace a learning approach to evaluation. Start early, consult all stakeholders on what they would like to get out of the evaluation, be as flexible as possible, and focus on ways to improve not only the initiative's outcomes but also the process by which it arrives at those outcomes.
- Develop racial equity metrics that capture changes in process (e.g., how is power being shared?) and outcomes (what shifts, disaggregated by race, are observable for the focus population?).
- Provide real-time feedback on progress and skill building for site participants to contribute their interpretations and learn from interim findings.
- Develop tools that track the quality and scale of community involvement and mobilization during the initiative.
- Collect qualitative data that illustrate community perspectives and perception shifts.
- View sites as the primary audience for evaluation, and ensure that lessons from initiative results are digestible for different stakeholder groups.

6. Looking Forward

Transforming the fundamental conditions that hold complex, systemic problems in place across the country is difficult work. This report highlights how many multisite, cross-sector initiatives are choosing to tackle this work against the odds by targeting systems change in ways that advance racial equity and shift power to communities. However, it also reveals opportunities for initiatives to further advance systems change. Here we summarize some of the biggest potential areas for growth, practical strategies that various initiative actors can use to drive systems change forward, and topics that were not explored in this report but are worth a closer look in future studies.

Areas for Growth

Building and Balancing Power

Any inability to achieve widespread, durable shifts in equity stems partially from the complex and underacknowledged role of power within multisite, cross-sector initiatives. Initiatives have multiple layers of power imbalances—within sites, between sites and intermediaries or evaluators, and between grantees and funders—that stakeholders increasingly seek to mitigate. These stakeholders could benefit from broader support and a deeper toolbox to take on these power structures, as well as the space to learn from one another’s progress and challenges. Some initiatives have made significant strides in sharing power and decisionmaking with the communities (e.g., residents) most deeply affected by the systemic problems that initiatives are trying to solve. Initiative designers should take note of models that share power—such as those of Communities of

Opportunity and Elevate Chicago, presented in Chapter 4—and consider whether their initiatives’ practices are moving toward community ownership, leadership, and decisionmaking. They can also consider creative ways to leverage the efforts across sites to shift power at a larger scale across multiple communities and issue areas, as in the examples provided in Chapter 2.

HOW TO GROW

- Shift power by making sure powerful actors relinquish their outside influence on decisionmaking.
- Implement processes for shared accountability, which can generate trust, level power, and ensure that everyone’s goals are advanced.

Prioritizing Trust

An important correlate of power, trust is core to initiatives’ success but usually is not formally prioritized or tracked. Unexamined distrust toward powerful actors among disinvested communities can stymie initiatives through combative conversations, unmotivated participants, and time wasted requiring and providing proof and assurances. Despite the costs that distrust incurs on overall effectiveness and efficiency, initiative designers have rarely prioritized investing the time or resources in formal activities and tools¹⁴ or restructured initiatives to foster trust building. Distrust will dominate when funders set priorities while overlooking sites’ and community members’ needs and failing to acknowledge shortcomings (or actual harm) from past initiatives and systemic injustices. However, initiative designers can avoid this by fostering respect and mutual accountability as a foundation on which trust can grow.

¹⁴ For example, Robert F. Hurley, “The Decision to Trust,” Harvard Business Review, September 2006, <https://hbr.org/2006/09/the-decision-to-trust>; and “overview” on “Resources,” Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org/resources-index>.

HOW TO GROW

- Tolerate risks (both in investment and in participation), and model vulnerability on a personal level and with resources and control.
- Invest time and resources into relationships among all stakeholder groups that uncover or foster aligned interests, shared history, and similarities in lived experiences.
- Design activities and structures that increase funding security and predictability to sites (e.g., through long-term grants with clear terms).

Advancing Racial Equity

Although a consensus exists that advancing racial equity should be a goal within initiatives and progress has been made to that end, operationalizing it requires deeply embedding racial equity in practice to undo structural racism. Most initiatives are struggling with what this means for design and implementation. In some cases, training elevates the effects of individual racial bias and centers racial equity as a goal, but a set of strategies to transform internal institutional processes and target specific outcomes is only emergent. Initiatives need to ask hard questions about the role that power plays in perpetuating the systems that created racial inequities and the best ways to shift the power dynamics toward community control within and across sites. This means requiring privileged actors to take a back seat to position leaders of color as agenda-setters and decisionmakers. It also requires rethinking how sites and initiatives are evaluated and successful outcomes are defined.

HOW TO GROW

- Support people and organizations in their journeys exploring racial equity, power, and trust. Create space for and facilitate learning, reflection, growth, and healing.
- Establish a shared framework/definition of racism and antiracism, and acknowledge that advancing racial equity is foundational to systems change.

- Examine institutional practices at each organization involved with the initiative, making sure that the board and staff become more proficient in understanding racial equity and are accountable for advancing it.

Learning for Impact

As we have touched on in all the chapters, learning must be incorporated intentionally to accomplish the ambitious goals of systems change, racial equity, and power shifting. Initiatives could be nimbler and readily adaptive; those with longer investment periods have room to change significantly during their implementation. Developing and implementing a collaborative learning agenda will encourage stakeholder buy-in to gather the needed information and provide feedback on which innovations are advancing the initiative's goals. Setting structured processes at the initiative and site levels for reflection provides the space to determine whether and how to shift directions based on interim results. Finally, our evidence demonstrated the payoff of a community of practice across sites to regularly share opportunities, models, successes, and challenges.

HOW TO GROW

- Approach evaluation as a learning and growing process that starts early in the initiative. Leverage the evaluation plan to ensure that data being collected and analyzed are purposeful.
- Consider the learning and evaluation process as an opportunity for capacity building and inclusion among community members and stakeholders who are not typically meaningfully involved in the learning design, implementation, and assessment process.

Changing Systems

We have evidence of growing success in achieving systems change. Changes in policies, practice, and resource flows are the most observable outcomes that can generally be linked to initiative actions. Efforts to change relationships, power, and mental models are

less developed. Having more initiatives target all levels of systems change—from explicit to implicit—would be significant progress. These initiatives should be supported with clearer ideas on what to target and how to address root causes such that initiatives create durable changes. Sharing more knowledge within and across initiatives on where and how systems change has been achieved could help advance effective strategies.

HOW TO GROW

- Support initiative members in analyzing root causes and developing theories of change that include the components of systems change.
- Invest in longer-term time frames to allow sites to make progress on changing systems, and ensure that project milestones reflect reasonable expectations for achieving results.
- Consider ways to leverage the cross-sector and multisite nature of initiatives to identify opportunities for effecting systems change and to increase the ability to influence key actors.

Supporting the Next Generation of Initiatives

This work helped answer some significant questions about how multisite, cross-sector initiatives can drive systems change forward and grow in the future while raising additional inquiries. Future knowledge development in some key areas would support initiatives as they continued to evolve. Building the evidence base is needed to shed light on the following complicated questions:

- How do we identify and spread promising strategies for implementing systems change across the six conditions (policies, practice, resource flows, relationships and connections, power dynamics, and mental models)? What is known about which condition to focus investments on for desired results? How do the answers vary across the types of systems targeted or the geographic scale of the initiative?

- How do we measure short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes in systems change endeavors to mark progress?
- What types of initiatives—and what systems change goals—are appropriate for different types of funders, whether national and local foundations or federal and local government?
- What factors should designers consider in deciding whether to use intermediaries? If an intermediary is chosen, how do initiatives structure the different grantee roles to maximize the ability to achieve systems change, advance racial equity, and shift power to community?
- Given the fast-evolving field and the ongoing challenges that initiatives face, what mechanisms can ensure ongoing learning across cross-sector, multisite initiatives for all stakeholders?
- How do initiatives include and support sites with lower levels of readiness and capacity, such as small and medium-sized cities and rural places, that are often overlooked?
- For initiatives in which sites compete to be included, how can unsuccessful applicants benefit from applying? What type of givebacks (e.g., comments on applications, invitations to participate in peer-learning events) can build capacity for future rounds?
- What governance structures and local actor responsibilities promote racial equity? What are the most effective strategies for putting communities into positions of power? (Initiatives have tried a diverse array of options, but the community development field needs more evidence on what models work and why.)
- What does a commitment to racial equity imply for the process of and criteria for selecting partners for investment? (Advancing equity may mean overlooking traditional risk calculations and investing more in organizations, particularly organizations led by people of color, that have faced persistent disinvestment.)

Appendix A. Methods

Data collection for this report began with a convening in Atlanta in November 2018. That meeting was followed by interviews with initiative funders and intermediaries. In May 2019, researchers held another convening, in Denver, and then conducted a smaller set of follow-up interviews with site leads and initiative designers.

Review of Initiative Documents

The research team completed a document scan for 16 initiatives, reviewing their websites, blog posts, press statements, reports, and evaluations. For each initiative, the research team was interested in the number of sites, the funders, the amount of funding, the years of operation, the initiative's purpose, and whether the initiative had a focus on racial equity. The researchers chose the 16 initiatives based on their knowledge of the field and recommendations from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, RWJF, colleagues at the Urban Institute, and convening participants. The 16 initiatives were:

Building Healthy Communities

Communities of Opportunity

Integration Initiative

Invest Health

New Communities Program

Partners in Progress

Promise Neighborhoods

Purpose Built Communities

ReThink Health Ventures

StriveTogether

Strong Cities, Strong Communities

Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge

Sustainable Communities

Wellville

Working Cities Challenge

YouthCONNECT/Ready for Work

Convenings

The research team held two convenings: one in Atlanta in November 2018 and another in Denver in May 2019. The first convening's purpose was to surface new topics of interest and lessons learned related to systems change since 2015. Twenty participants—including funders, intermediaries, evaluators, and site leads—gathered to discuss community engagement, racial equity, systems change, initiative governance, initiative structures, and implementation strategies around deploying capital, sharing knowledge, measuring and building capacity, and evaluating progress. The second convening explored themes that emerged from the Atlanta convening. This time, 35 participants (site leads, academics, funders, intermediaries, and evaluators) gathered to discuss how to select communities and how to engage them, how racial equity can guide an initiative's process and outcomes, how to design effective collaborative tables, how to build trust and navigate power dynamics, how to define and identify enabling environments, and what systems change might look like.

Interviews

The team conducted 22 formal interviews with people who have been involved in the funding, planning, or managing of multisite, cross-sector initiatives. The interview protocols are listed in appendix D.

Literature Review

The research team conducted a review of the literature on topics raised by interviewees and convening participants. These topics included place-based philanthropic practices, participatory grantmaking, community engagement, collective impact/multisector partnerships, racial equity in nonprofit work, and systems change.



Appendix B. Characteristics of Selected Multisite, Cross-Sector Initiatives

The research team conducted a literature review and a document scan of 16 initiatives, including a review of their websites, blog posts, press statements, reports, and evaluations. Initiatives were selected based on recommendations from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, RWJF, Urban Institute staff members, and convening participants. Most initiatives started in the early 2010s and were active in 2015 or launched after 2015. We also included two initiatives that ended slightly earlier (New Communities and Sustainable Communities) because they were deemed significant in the field. The initiatives varied in the number of sites, duration, level of funding, issue areas covered, and approach to racial equity.

Sites and Funding

Although the initiatives shared a commitment to supporting multiple sites and working across sectors, the types and number of sites differed dramatically. Sites could be anything from neighborhoods, communities, or schools to cities or metropolitan areas. Some initiatives mandated a uniform site definition (e.g., all schools or all regions), while others allowed for diversi-

ty. The number of sites within an initiative ranged from 3 to 74 (figure B.1). The federally sponsored initiatives were larger (33 to 74 sites), but the philanthropic ones spanned the full range.

Initiatives' durations, which influence sites' expected scope of work, varied greatly. The funding rounds of almost half the initiatives were short, just two or three years; almost another half had durations of nine or more years. A few—such as members of the networks of StriveTogether, Purpose Built Communities, and Promise Neighborhoods—launched with a fixed grant period but aspire to be ongoing initiatives, pending sustainable funding from other sources. Almost half the initiatives had multiple rounds, sometimes renewing original sites and/or selecting a new cohort.

How much money each initiative had dedicated (and how much went to each site) also varied based on the size and type of funder. Most of the initiatives we chose were funded through private philanthropy (sometimes in partnerships), but the largest initiatives had government funding, private sector investors, or a mix of the three. The amount of initiative funding ranged from

Figure B.1 Number of Initiatives, by Number of Sites



Source: Urban Institute scan of 16 initiatives as of September 2019.

\$3 million to \$1 billion: five initiatives worked with between \$2 million and \$10 million, three with \$11 to 25 million, and five worked with \$40 million or more (table B.1).¹⁵ Some initiatives gave the same amount of money to each site. Other initiatives varied funding across sites, with some sites receiving multiple rounds of funding and others being offered only a single grant.

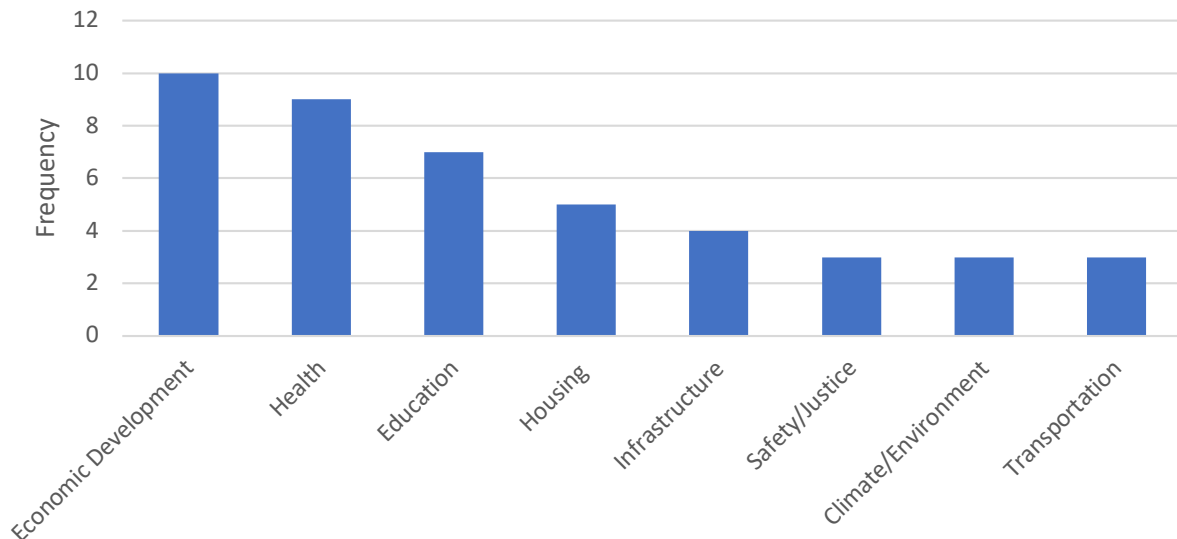
Goals and Issue Areas

A scan of public documents revealed that 14 of the 16 studied initiatives characterized their work as a form of systems change. Within those 14, 11 used the words systems change or changing systems to describe their work, while three others used slightly different language to signal a similar concept, stating they focused on “tackling deeply rooted issues” and “big, complicated urban challenges.” The two initiatives that did not have an explicit focus on systems change aimed instead to work within current systems to get the best outcomes for their communities.

When looking at what systems initiative leaders sought to change, some consistent themes emerged. The most common issue areas or systems of focus were economic development, health, and education (figure B.2). A few initiatives tackled other issues, such as safety and justice, climate and environment, and transportation. Most initiatives worked across multiple issue areas.

We did not include racial equity as an issue area because it is a system that stretches across all other issue areas and creates differential outcomes within them. As mentioned in Chapter 3, initiatives are moving toward addressing structural racism, naming it to address the factors that contribute toward disparate racial outcomes. From a review of public initiative mission and vision statements, six of the 16 initiatives named racial equity as a focus of their work. However, interviews revealed that many more initiatives were thinking and working toward racial equity even if it was not reflected in their print materials.

Figure B.2 Number of Initiatives, by Issue Areas of Focus



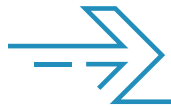
Source: Urban Institute scan of 16 initiatives as of September 2019.

¹⁵ This funding may not include in-kind technical assistance and support, which many initiatives provided. In three cases (Purpose Built Communities, youthCONNECT/Ready for Work, and Wellville), the funding amount was not publicly available.

Table B.1 Select Initiative Characteristics

This table summarizes initiative characteristics available from public document review. As initiatives are ever evolving, some information may be out of date.”

Initiative	Geographic Scope	Primary Funder(s)	Intermediary	Number of Sites (as of Sep 2019)	Multiple Rounds	Acting Dates	Total Funding (may not include all in-kind technical assistance)
Building Healthy Communities	California	California Endowment	None	14 places, including neighborhoods and cities	N	2010–20	\$1,000,000,000
Communities of Opportunity	King County, WA	Seattle Foundation, King County government	None	6 cultural communities and 3 subcounty areas	Y	2014–present	\$15,000,000
The Integration Initiative	National	18 foundations and financial institutions	Living Cities	10 cities	Y	2010–19	\$21,000,000
Invest Health	National	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	Reinvestment Fund	50 small and midsize cities	Y	2016–present	\$3,000,000
New Communities Program	Chicago	MacArthur Foundation and Local Initiatives Support Corporation–Chicago	Local Initiatives Support Corporation–Chicago	28 subcity planning areas	N	2002–12	\$50,000,000
Partners in Progress	National	Citi Foundation and Low Income Investment Fund	Low Income Investment Fund	14 grantees in 10 cities	N	2014–15	\$3,250,000
Promise Neighborhoods	National	US Department of Education	Local intermediaries	64 neighborhoods	Y	2010–present	\$363,061,000
Purpose Built Communities	National	Varies by site	None	23 neighborhoods	N	2009–present	Not publicly available
ReThink Health Ventures	National	Rippel Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	ReThink Health	6 cities	N	2016–19	\$5,200,000
StriveTogether	National	Ballmer Group, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and several others	StriveTogether	Partnerships in 70 cities and counties	N	2010–present	\$3,350,000
Strong Cities, Strong Communities	National	US Department of Housing and Urban Development; U.S. Department of Commerce	HUD	70 cities	Y	2011–17	\$11,000,000
Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge	National	Ford Foundation, JPB Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and California Endowment	Low Income Investment Fund, Enterprise, and National Resources Defense Council	6 regions	N	2017–present	\$40,000,000
Sustainable Communities: Regional Planning Grant Initiative	National	US Department of Housing and Urban Development	None	74 regions	Y	2010–15	\$165,000,000
Wellville	National	Health Initiative Coordinating Council (HICcup)	None	3 counties and 2 cities	N	2014–present	Not publicly available
Working Cities Challenge	Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut	Multiple funders for each state	The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston	33 cities	Y	2014–present	\$7,700,000
youthCONNECT/Ready for Work	Regional	Capital Kids Portfolio, Prince George’s County Public Schools, Peterson Family Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, Washington Redskins Charitable Foundation, Economic Club of Washington, DC, Bank of America	Venture Philanthropy Partners	3 schools	Y	2010–present	Not publicly available



Appendix C. Living Cities Racial Equity Competency Framework

Living Cities developed a competency framework from an internal process to operationalize racial equity within the organization. As Living Cities reviewed structural inequality and the role that racism has played, the organization decided to be very clear about the skills and competencies that staff members needed to develop and apply in their work. The following framework presents those competencies and metrics. It is reused here with the permission of Living Cities.



LIVING CITIES COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK- RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION

COMPETENCY	SKILL AREA	ACTIONS, BEHAVIORS & SKILLS				
		Coordinator/ Assistant	Associate/ Senior Associate	Assistant/ Director	Managing Director/ Executive	
Foundational Knowledge and Core Concepts	Commitment to REI	Understands why racial equity is an integral part of Living Cities' approach inside and outside the organization Displays clear willingness to learn ideas, concepts and history	Understands the history of racial inequity in America: the idea of race as a social construct and the manifestations of personal, institutional and systemic racism Critically examines and learns about the invention of "race" and its role in systemically isolating, separating and disempowering groups of people Is familiar with relevant amendments, laws, regulations, and policies (e.g. 14th amendment, Federal Indian Policy, Immigration policies, criminal justice and policing policies) and understands connection of REI to mission of Living Cities	Intentionally surfaces data disparities and connects REI to the work and mission of Living Cities		
	Engaging in crucial conversations	Speaks comfortably and fluently about what REI means at Living Cities and in the world Engages with curiosity, humility and openness in discussions about race, equity and power inside and outside of Living Cities Critically examines social issues and messages for racial biases and inequities and their impact on oneself and others' thinking, emotions, and behaviors	Leads with vulnerability and openness; initiates and facilitates conversations at the organizational level and with external stakeholders to deepen mutual understanding and learning			
REI Practice and Analysis	Applying REI to work	Understands the role that racial equity plays within individual projects and Living Cities' broader portfolio. Writes with nuance, clarity, and humility about racial justice topics	Applies a racial equity and inclusion impact assessment tool in decision-making Applies an REI lens to inform discussion and decisions Upholds racial equity outcomes, goals and performance measures with team and on projects Incorporates REI ideas, concepts and history into project work and methodology	Sets racial equity outcomes, goals, and performance measures at organizational level Incorporates REI ideas, concepts and history into organizational philosophy, strategy, and execution		



LIVING CITIES COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK- RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION

COMPETENCY	SKILL AREA	ACTIONS, BEHAVIORS & SKILLS			
		Coordinator/ Assistant	Associate/ Senior Associate	Assistant/ Director	Managing Director/ Executive
RBI Practice and Analysis	Power Analysis	<p>Understands how the construct of race has impacted the distribution of power and the recognition o innovation, creativity and voice throughout history</p> <p>Looks critically at existing power structures and is mindful of power dynamics in inter-personal and professional situations</p>			
Empathy and Compassion	Extending Mutual Acknowledgement and Respect	<p>Fosters an environment in which people feel respected and valued</p> <p>Recognizes the personal nature of RBI work and the importance of honoring individual's personal experiences and perspectives regardless of how they align with one's own</p>			
		<p>Approaches team members with patience, kindness, respect and compassion in all interactions</p> <p>Offers support through open-minded discussion, listening</p> <p>Offers compassion without judgment</p>			
Awareness of Self and Others	Self Awareness	<p>Demonstrates awareness of own emotions, thoughts and feelings; uses these to guide decision making</p> <p>Is able to realistically and accurately assess own abilities and growth areas; Possesses well-grounded sense of self-confidence;</p> <p>Checks assumptions against facts; considers multiple interpretations</p>			
		<p>Establishes a culture within the organization of trust, integrity, respect and compassion</p>			

LIVING CITIES COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK - RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION

COMPETENCY		ACTIONS, BEHAVIORS & SKILLS			
SKILL AREA		Coordinator/ Assistant	Associate/ Senior Associate	Assistant/ Director	Managing Director/ Executive
Awareness of Self and Others	Self governance	<p>Handles own emotions such that they facilitate, rather than interfere</p> <p>Demonstrates ability to regulate reactions, esp. in the face of stress; can stay "in control" even in charged discussions, situations and environments</p> <p>Focuses on responding to people, rather than reacting</p> <p>Holds self accountable and shows commitment to integrity and personal values; is seen as a trustworthy member of team regardless of personal connection</p> <p>Perserveres in service of goals; recovers well and relatively quickly from set-backs</p>			
	Interrogating Own Biases	<p>Demonstrates willingness to reexamine existing understanding and points of view</p> <p>Acknowledges own biases; uses new information, perspectives and knowledge to critically examine own opinions and stances</p> <p>Seizes opportunities to learn from others and share/modify personal worldviews</p> <p>Modifies own behavior on a regular basis</p>			
	Ability to reflect on identity, roles and interactions	<p>Identifies, confronts and works to understand one's own role, power and relationships to interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism</p> <p>Demonstrates awareness of personal identity and sensitivity to how others express, define and identify themselves; understands how identity and intersectionality has informed our personal experiences</p>			



Appendix D. Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

1. To begin, can you verify that you are the [title] at [organization/initiative name]?
2. How long have you been connected with this organization/initiative?
3. What are your primary responsibilities at the organization/initiative?
4. Did you work in multisite, cross-sector initiatives prior to your work at [organization/initiative]?
- a. If so, what was your role in that work?

BUILDING BLOCKS OF MULTISITE, CROSS-SECTOR INITIATIVES (SITE-LEVEL RESPONDENTS)

1. How did your initiative get started? Who were the main parties that initiated the partnership? Who determined what the goals would be of the project?
2. Would you say that “systems change” was a goal for your initiative? If so, what systems did the initiative aim to change?
3. Who determined who should start at the table? How did you/they decide?
4. What prompted any changes in composition over time [if any]?
5. Was there anyone not at the table(s) who should have been or vice versa?
6. What was the role of the community? (probe for strategy of reaching goals)
 - a. How did the initiative involve them? (probe for empowerment)
 - b. How did the roles change over time?
7. What factors make a table effective?
 - a. How do you build trust?
 - b. How do you navigate power differentials?
 - c. Who decided on the initiative’s/sites’ goals?
 - d. Who decides how initiative resources are invested or allocated and how?

- e. How did you manage table participants’ varying (potentially conflicting) interests?
 - f. How did you manage the differing capacities among table participants?
 - g. What about the environment of the site (outside of the table) affected table effectiveness?
8. Did you engage with other sites/tables in the initiative? If so, in what capacity?
 9. How did you relate to the intermediary organization with this multisite, cross-sector initiative (if you had one)?
 - a. What opportunities and challenges are there with using/not using an intermediary organization?
 10. Next, we are interested in the role of trust among the initiative participants. How well did the individuals or groups know and trust each other at the start?
 11. Did you explicitly plan time, activities, and/or resources for building trust? What did that work look like? (e.g., retreats, onboarding, setting group norms, giving space for sharing and hearing about participants’ interests). Did these activities change over time (e.g., at the beginning, once the initiative was under way, for new partners, etc.)?
 - a. Were there other informal or unexpected ways that trust was developed?

MULTISITE, CROSS-SECTOR STRUCTURE FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

1. What are the potential advantages of having multiple sites in an initiative? (probe for learning, testing in different environments, broader systems change)
2. How does a multisite design influence:
 - a. initiative-wide activities (probe for peer learning, technical assistance, knowledge sharing, goal setting, community engagement, system targets)
 - b. individual site implementation (e.g., whether it is similar or different across sites)



3. Do sites have a collective influence on the initiative's design and implementation? If so, how?
4. How do you identify progress across sites? (probe for timing)
 - a. What factors are local versus more universal?
 - b. What role do measures/metrics play in identifying progress toward systems change?
 - c. What factors are associated with the initiative versus other factors beyond the initiative? How do you acknowledge this in attributing/evaluating results?
5. What are the mechanisms for multisite initiatives to influence systems change/field-level outcomes?

RACIAL EQUITY

1. Do you see racial equity as a goal of your initiative?
 - a. *Probe:* Has it been explicitly adopted by the initiative?
 - b. *If yes:* Why is it important to have racial equity be an explicit goal?
 - c. *If no:* Was racial equity discussed as part of your initiative? How was it discussed?
 - i. Did your initiative particularly decide to not have racial equity as a goal? If so, why?
2. How do you see racial equity affecting or shaping:
 - a. the decisions about what goals the initiative would target?
 - b. the way the initiative/site decided who would participate?
 - c. the way the initiative interacted with other members involved in the initiative?
 - d. the way the initiative interacted with your funder and intermediary?
 - e. the way the initiative interacted with the broader community?
3. Did you see any of these racial equity considerations change over time?

POWER DYNAMICS

1. We are interested in the different ways that power dynamics affect initiatives.
 - a. What examples, if any, do you have where power played a positive role in your initiative?
 - b. What examples, if any, do you have where power played a negative role in your initiative?
 - i. How did you address this challenge?
 - c. How did your initiative address power differentials among the initiative actors (e.g., in decisionmaking or conflict resolution)?
 - i. Prompt: At the table/among the local site partners? With the community involved in the initiative? Between the funder and the initiative participants? And the intermediary and the participants?
2. How would you recommend power dynamics be taken into consideration in the future?
 - a. *Probe:* In the funder relationship? Structuring the intermediary role? In the way decisions are made? In the way the meetings are run and the work is distributed? In the way conflict is handled between parties?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

1. What about this initiative do you feel was particularly successful or worked the best?
 - a. Did this represent an advancement to field practices compared to other initiatives at the time? If so, how so?
2. If you were designing a new initiative, what would you do differently?
 - a. How would you set your goals?
- b. Is there anything you would do differently based on what you learned around race and building racial equity?
- c. What key components would you include to make sure that each site's work summed up to field-level outcomes?

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