

# EVALUATING COMMUNITY CHANGE: A FRAMEWORK FOR GRANTMAKERS

This publication offers a framework for thinking about how to measure progress and results in place-based and community change initiatives. The framework, developed by GEO's Embrace Complexity Community of Practice on the Evaluation of Place-Based Initiatives and Community Science, consolidates a variety of specific indicators related to:

Political, Economic and  
Cultural Context

Baseline Conditions

Funder Levers of Change

Immediate Program Outcomes  
and Potential to Scale

Capacity Outcomes and Changes  
to Systems Conditions

Systems-Level Changes

Scale and Sustainability

Population-Level Impacts or  
Outcomes

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# INTRODUCTION

Philanthropy works to improve conditions in communities so that life is better for the people living in them. Grantmakers, including government funders, community foundations and private foundations that fund both locally and nationally, are investing in place-based community change efforts that take many forms. They include efforts to promote youth development and educational achievement, strengthen community health by improving housing and the environment, increase economic stability and jobs, and develop systems of care for children and families, as well as initiatives that take on multiple goals.

These initiatives are complex and long term. They feature multiple grants or other investments (such as program-related investments) to nonprofit organizations or municipal governments, work to build community capacity and often involve public-private and other partnerships. Many include intensive coalition building, resident engagement and advocacy efforts in addition to the grants and other investments they make to support in-service delivery systems.

Although funders have invested in community change initiatives for more than 20 years, many of these initiatives haven't seen the progress that they seek. Just as it's far from easy to change the factors that contribute to poverty, poor health, injustice, insufficient educational opportunities and other barriers to success for community residents, it's also difficult to measure changes that occur at the level of individuals, organizations, communities and larger systems. Often, many assumptions (and long periods of time) lie between the funding, convening and technical assistance that a grantmaker contributes and the community impact that funders and communities seek from their efforts.

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# HOW TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK

Grantmakers have many opportunities to reflect and learn over the course of a community change effort — ideally, they do so collaboratively with grantee organizations and community stakeholders. Grantmakers and their partners are increasingly focused on the use of data, performance measurement and evaluation for learning to assess and improve progress and to understand the impact of their contributions. This framework can be a tool not only to think about measuring results but also to plan an initiative, design an evaluation, promote coordinated action and support learning by funders and other stakeholders.

Grantmakers that fund complex place-based or community change initiatives may find the framework particularly helpful. This includes grantmakers focusing on multiple issues in a region or in a particular geographic community, engaged in collective impact efforts, seeking to scale solutions in a community or any of the above. Grantmakers can use this framework in the following areas:

- **Guide analysis of baseline conditions, identification of problems to be addressed and development of performance targets.** The framework can promote discussion and consensus among stakeholders (funders, public officials, practitioners, affected residents, the business community and others) about the key problems that the initiative will address and the results that it seeks to achieve. This framework can also help to surface places where stakeholders may expect unrealistic outcomes in order to help establish more reasonable expectations.

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- **Monitor progress.** Funders and other stakeholders can use the framework to structure analysis of actual experience against what was initially planned, including whether implementation is proceeding as planned, outcomes are consistent with the expected timing and levels, external factors are having unanticipated effects and strategies are powerful enough to produce the desired change.
- **Identify midcourse corrections and adjustments.** Based on what they learn as they implement, stakeholders can use the framework to identify necessary midcourse corrections and refinements to the initiative's underlying theory of change.
- **Increase the relevance and effectiveness of evaluation.** The framework can help the initiative's evaluators identify key process and outcome milestones, and ensure that the evaluation uses metrics that the funders and other stakeholders will find most relevant. The framework can also help a funder consider often overlooked elements of evaluation, including immediate outcomes at the program level, outcomes from capacity growth, and policy and systems changes that contribute to population-level results and sustainability.
- **Serve as a reference point to discuss evaluation.** The framework provides a shared language for funders, practitioners and evaluators to discuss the conditions an initiative addresses, the implementation challenges it encounters and the results it achieves. In addition, some communities have multiple funded initiatives, so the framework can provide a common vocabulary to identify common areas of interest and help align what is collected and measured.

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The pages that follow propose a set of measurable components of change efforts and a wide — but not all-inclusive — range of potential indicators and measures. The examples of indicators and measures were drawn from the evaluations of place-based initiatives across the country as well as community systems change research. A set of stories from different grantmaking initiatives illustrates connections between real work and the categories depicted in the framework.

*These indicators and measures are examples of the types of things a funder might track and measure. Grantmakers and their partners can use these examples and categories to develop their own data collection plans, selecting indicators and data that best represent the initiative they are supporting and the changes they want to measure.*

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# A FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING PLACE-BASED GRANTMAKING INITIATIVES

This framework emerged from the work of GEO's Embrace Complexity Community of Practice on the Evaluation of Place-Based Initiatives. The group of private grantmakers and government agencies that invest in place-based initiatives gathered over the course of three years to discuss the effective evaluation of these complex efforts. The framework began as an exercise in which group members compared indicators across their initiatives, looking at areas of overlap and difference. The research and evaluation organization Community Science, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, consolidated the specific indicators into the common categories reflected by the framework. The Community Science team incorporated the lessons of prior evaluations and research as well as its extensive experience evaluating these initiatives into the framework's organization and content. Community Science has developed a more detailed and technical article on this framework; for more information visit [www.communityscience.com/changeframework](http://www.communityscience.com/changeframework).

Because this framework was developed from the perspective of funders, it is funder-centric in that it presents funder interventions as a point of departure. In fact, many community change efforts begin with residents and nonprofit organizations.

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The framework reflects emergent thinking about the ways in which grantmakers seek to learn from and assess the performance and impact of place-based or comprehensive community change initiatives. It reflects an idealized and generalized theory of change for place-based and community change initiatives; it doesn't represent individual initiatives and should be adjusted to reflect each initiative's specific theory of change. Rather, as Embrace Complexity Community of Practice founder Tom Kelly, of Hawai'i Community Foundation and formerly of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, noted, it is "a set of elements or components that funders should consider examining, assessing and tracking as part of their learning and accountability when evaluating these complex initiatives."

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# Three Crucial Pieces — Community Capacity, Sustainability and Scale

Recent place-based initiatives have demonstrated the importance of community capacity to achieving scale and sustained impact.<sup>1</sup> Most of these efforts work to build the *capacity* of organizations, agencies, civic institutions, resident groups and businesses to achieve the systemic and environmental changes needed at a sustainable *scale* that can improve the well-being of all targeted residents in a particular place. Scale, sustainability and capacity need to be part of the plan from the beginning, and evaluation can be used to understand whether the initiative is making progress.<sup>2</sup> An effort that doesn't pay attention to indicators of capacity, scale and sustainability risks backsliding on all other accomplishments once grantmaker investment ends.

**Community capacity** is the ability of public, private, nonprofit and civic organizations to create effective and lasting change through their relationships and actions. It includes myriad elements, including the ability of community organizations and individuals to collaborate, advocate, communicate, collect and use data and implement programs that are effective for the community.

**Sustainability** means that the community has sufficient and appropriate long-term resources, support and capacity to sustain and grow changes over time. This isn't just a matter of long-term funding. It also requires that changes become institutionalized as policies and practices and become community and organizational norms.

**Scale** refers to growth in impact. An initiative has achieved scale when it has enough reach and sustainability to produce the intended impact for a majority of affected residents in a community.

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1 Amulya and Chavis, "Emerging Action Principles for Designing and Managing Community Change," *Community Science*, 2011; Fiester, "Measuring Change while Changing Measures: Learning in, and from, the Evaluation of Making Connections," *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*, 2010; Galster, Verma and Williams, "Dynamics of Neighborhood Quality in Chicago: An Analysis of the Interaction among Quality-of-Life Indicators from the New Communities Program Evaluation," *MDRC*, 2012.

2 Chavis and Trent, "Scope, Scale, and Sustainability: What It Takes to Create Lasting Community Change," *The Foundation Review* 1, no. 1 (2009): 96 – 114.

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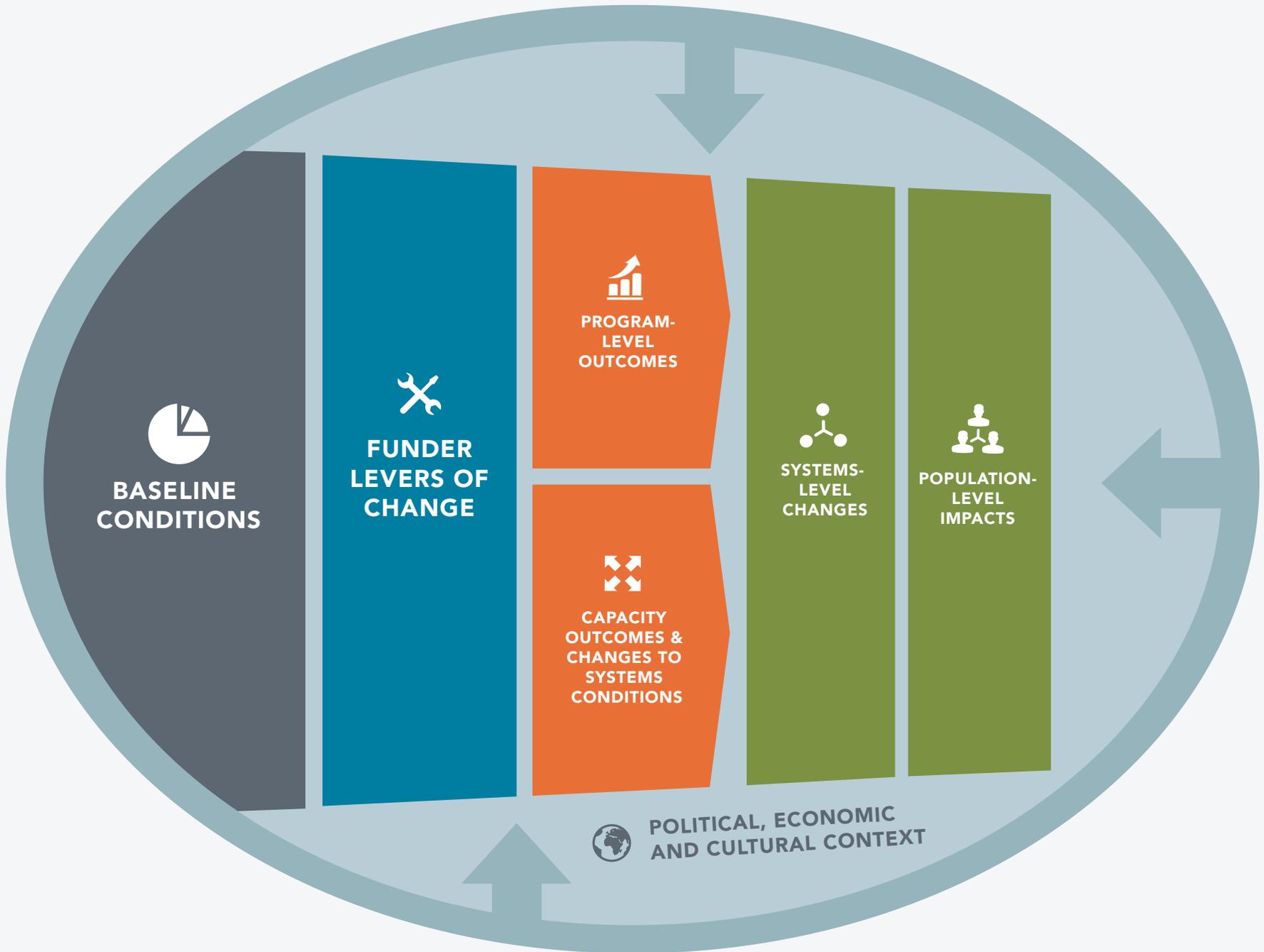
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# POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Place-based initiatives operate within the political, economic and cultural context of their communities, and that context frequently influences whether the effort can succeed. Contextual factors provide invaluable data for understanding whether a community is capable of taking on an initiative, improving and customizing the strategy and planning future evaluations. The context can be in constant flux. While it may shift as a result of a place-based effort (indeed, a change at the systems or population level will change the political, economic and cultural context of a community), it may also change in ways that have nothing to do with — but greatly affect — the place-based effort.

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Political will: support for the approach among top city or county leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relevant language in speeches</li><li>• History of collaboration among political and economic leaders and leaders across other sectors</li><li>• History of financial or other engagement in similar programs</li></ul>
Regional economic and other related conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regional employment opportunities</li><li>• Transportation systems available to connect residents with economic opportunities</li><li>• Availability of appropriate workforce development, health systems and other vital systems</li></ul>
Historic relations and trends among ethnic and racial groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conflicts and collaborations among ethnic or racial groups</li><li>• Trends in immigration</li><li>• Organized civic engagement and advocacy by ethnic or racial communities</li></ul>
Culture of civic participation and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ongoing structures and mechanisms for civic participation</li><li>• Experience with and capacity for community organizing</li><li>• The sense of connectedness among residents across communities</li><li>• Experience within and across sector collaboration</li></ul>

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# BASELINE CONDITIONS

Baseline conditions are a snapshot of what exists at the starting point for the initiative, particularly in relation to what the initiative is seeking to affect. Many grantmakers use baseline data to select sites for investment or to tailor the support they provide. If baseline conditions are documented early, the evaluation can track changes in these indicators.

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Community or neighborhood conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Population size</li><li>• Poverty rates or levels</li><li>• Public health problems</li><li>• Educational achievement</li><li>• Concentrations of children and youth living in poverty or other conditions</li></ul>
Alignment with grantmaker's vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whether the community's vision, goals, strategies and resources align with the expectations of the funder</li></ul>
Preexisting public system landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Existing comprehensive service systems</li><li>• Capacity of service delivery systems to reach residents in the target neighborhoods</li><li>• Engagement of public systems</li><li>• Public-private partnerships</li></ul>
Implementation capacity and readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Readiness and current capacity to implement approach</li><li>• Evidence of elected and civic leadership's engagement</li><li>• Data collection capacity</li><li>• A record of success with similar initiatives</li><li>• Existing cross-stakeholder governance groups</li><li>• Level of resident leadership and organization</li></ul>
Potential for sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ability to secure matching funds</li><li>• Feasibility of long-term sustainability, leadership and institutional support</li><li>• Civic infrastructure</li><li>• Anchor institutions</li><li>• Strong resident-led organizations</li><li>• Economic engines</li></ul>

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# FUNDER LEVERS OF CHANGE: FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS

Grantmakers make direct investments (of funds and other support) to launch place-based strategies and to build community capacity to implement and sustain the efforts. These investments often leverage additional resources from other sources and can also have immediate impact by funding new or existing programs that test new models or community infrastructure that coordinates efforts. Grantmakers also make technical investments by providing consultants, peer learning, convenings, trainings and other technical assistance. Understanding the effectiveness of these direct investments in different contexts can help a grantmaker to course correct and set appropriate expectations for impact.

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Seed or demonstration funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Amount of seed funding provided</li><li>• Pilot projects undertaken</li><li>• Appropriateness of projects for community needs</li><li>• Successful implementation of projects with well-articulated goals, roles and so forth</li></ul>
Direct service support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Amount of funding provided to improve existing programs</li><li>• Implementation of new models or practices within existing programs</li></ul>
Funding of community infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technical resources provided</li><li>• Shared data systems</li><li>• Interagency coordination</li><li>• Funding of intermediaries and consultants</li></ul>

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# FUNDER LEVERS OF CHANGE: CAPACITY-BUILDING INTERVENTIONS

Capacity building is a vital lever of a long-term place-based strategy. Place-based initiatives use a wide range of activities to build the capacities in individuals, organizations and communities considered necessary for successful population-level change. Grantmakers contribute to building capacity by providing training, using their influence to help develop connections between organizations, creating peer learning opportunities, hosting convenings and enabling access to technical assistance. Capacity-building interventions can have immediate impact on the success of the initiative as well as contribute to longer-term and sustainable changes in the community systems.

Even when funders do measure capacity outcomes, they often neglect to collect data on the quality or effectiveness of their efforts to build capacity. A funder's own capacity to support and evaluate an initiative is also an important factor, and one that is often overlooked in conversations about capacity building and measuring the effectiveness of capacity building.

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## TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR LOCAL PARTICIPANTS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Provision of information on best, evidence-based or promising practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number and type of guidelines on best, evidence-based or promising practices</li><li>• Relevance of that information to community conditions and cultures</li><li>• Perceived usefulness of materials and information</li></ul>
Group or cross-site training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number and type of sessions held in person or through media</li><li>• Perceived usefulness, increased confidence</li><li>• Follow-up assistance and whether assistance is needed</li><li>• Site satisfaction</li><li>• Delivery mechanisms and consultants</li></ul>
Site-specific technical assistance and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number and type of contacts across community</li><li>• Ability to work across community conditions and cultures</li><li>• Appropriateness of technical assistance</li><li>• Responsiveness to technical assistance requests</li><li>• Application of technical assistance to practice</li></ul>

## INFLUENCE AND ADVOCACY TO ENGAGE PARTNERS, FUNDING SOURCES AND POLICY MAKERS

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Growth of networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connections to new partners, development of relationships</li><li>• New funders</li><li>• Relationships with the private sector and other sectors</li><li>• Participation in political decision-making processes</li></ul>
Peer support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exchange of information</li><li>• Site visits</li><li>• Mentoring relationships</li></ul>
Leveraging additional funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of potential co-investors approached or engaged</li><li>• Dollars leveraged for initial demonstration or seed efforts</li></ul>

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# The Connection between Initiative Implementation and Evaluation

If essential activities, projects and interventions fail to happen, or don't happen as planned, then a place-based initiative won't make a difference. Successful initiatives use performance measures of activities and outputs to allow a community and funder to track the implementation of planned activities, whether they are direct service, coalition building or advocacy related. The indicators for this category are very specific to any given initiative: Did members of the community meet? Was the playground built? Were services offered? Were the petitions circulated? Was state policy legislation drafted?

This type of implementation management and measurement often constitutes the extent of evaluation for funders that focus on individual grants to specific organizations and projects. Measuring implementation is a critical step before trying to look at program or systems outcomes. Otherwise, funders try to hold themselves and communities accountable for achieving impact when implementation isn't far enough along.

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# IMMEDIATE PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND POTENTIAL TO SCALE

Immediate program-level outcomes are the effects of funded programs and services on clients and participants directly touched by the demonstration project or early implementation of improved services and practices: in other words, the actual changes in the conditions of beneficiaries and participants in funded programs.

Often funders invest in programs that seem promising and measure their outcomes and growth potential to decide what makes sense to fund at a larger scale. These programs alone do not serve enough people to achieve the scale necessary to show impact on the relevant population, but they provide an important learning and capacity-building opportunity as well as the opportunity to adjust programs or services to local conditions before scaling up.

## *IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS IN DEMONSTRATION OR SEED PROGRAMS*

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reach of services: number and types of children and families reached</li></ul>
Health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participant and family health and well-being including social development</li></ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of participants receiving diplomas or other certification</li><li>• Number of participants completing higher education opportunities</li></ul>
Employment, earnings and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New employment connections</li><li>• Job placements</li><li>• Employment in specific sectors such as health care</li><li>• Earnings and health benefits</li><li>• Retention rates in employment</li></ul>
Asset building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial literacy</li><li>• Number of residents claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit</li><li>• Number of residents opening new savings accounts</li></ul>
Children prepared to succeed in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of children entering kindergarten assessed as ready for school</li><li>• Number of children in third grade reading at grade level</li></ul>

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## ABILITY TO SCALE OR GROW IMPACT

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Changes to institutional and public policies that are supportive of bringing initiative to scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policies that direct uniform application of an effective program to all in need</li><li>• Allocation of line item public funds</li></ul>
Replication, adaptation or expansion of programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New program sites and additional residents being served by programs</li></ul>
Ability to deliver program to a significant number of residents at a sustainable cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public or large institutional assessment of potential for sustained funding</li></ul>
Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of leaders from influential organizations that support and promote the place-based initiative's strategies</li></ul>
Community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Representation of residents on boards in decision-making bodies and number of community volunteers</li><li>• Increased number of residents and other community members engaged in decision-making, strategy implementation and services</li></ul>
Increased engagement of the private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Private-sector leadership participation and financial support</li></ul>

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# CAPACITY OUTCOMES AND CHANGES TO SYSTEMS CONDITIONS

Capacity outcomes are the changes to individual, organizational or community capacity that can result from a funder's capacity-building interventions as well as from other changes and efforts. Increased capacity at the individual, organizational and community level is important for long-term, sustainable systems change. Ideally, this increased capacity creates an environment, or systems conditions, that makes sustained systems change more feasible.

## CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Strengthened civic and institutional leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emergence of champions</li><li>• Movement from allies to champions</li><li>• Leadership capable of managing any change process</li><li>• Effective cross-organizational communication skills</li></ul>
Public sector and institutional engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of engaged partners</li><li>• Engaged local partners and champions</li><li>• Demonstration of commitment by public and private partners, especially local government</li><li>• Adoption of and local investment in best practices</li></ul>
Leadership development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased participation in initiative and civic bodies by residents, youth and other underrepresented community leaders</li><li>• Emergence of representative resident leaders</li></ul>

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# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Institutional engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participation of community institutions such as schools</li><li>• Levels of civic involvement by large and small businesses, faith and other community groups</li></ul>
Multisector stakeholder voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Systematic and inclusive methods for providing input in initiative and other community decision-making processes</li></ul>
Resident civic participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of residents engaged in activities such as neighborhood meetings, public hearings and school boards</li></ul>
Resident networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of resident mutual support networks within a place and among places</li></ul>
Development of new resident-led organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New neighborhood, tenant, youth or advocacy groups</li></ul>
Strengthened existing resident-led organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved performance, stronger leadership and increased membership</li></ul>

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# ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Capacities of participating organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved organizational performance consistent with community change plans and clear operational procedures</li> </ul>
Participatory and data-driven planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Comprehensiveness</li> <li>• Integration of community input to plans</li> <li>• Use of research-based and practice-proven information</li> <li>• Strategy design and use of logic modeling</li> </ul>
Fidelity of program implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficiently trained strategy implementers</li> <li>• Consistency with proven program design features</li> </ul>
Responsiveness to community needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of multiple data sources for goal setting and prioritization of actions</li> <li>• Addressing issues of equity and disparity</li> </ul>
Resident engagement by nonpublic partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outreach efforts by businesses and nonprofits</li> </ul>
Use of appropriate practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of participating providers adopting practices promoted by the place-based initiative</li> </ul>
Data and evaluation capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased capacity to use data to promote continuous improvement</li> </ul>
Service mix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service resources available to residents</li> <li>• Coordination and communication among service resources</li> <li>• Comprehensiveness of assistance provided to residents</li> </ul>
Influence on larger systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational influence on changes in public policy</li> <li>• Collaboration with other organizations to effect change for the benefit of the neighborhood</li> </ul>

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## GRANTEE COLLABORATION

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Power sharing with other organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to make decisions and take action with other organizations in the community both within and across sectors</li> </ul>
Leveraging new partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common understanding of respective organizational roles</li> <li>• Developing new partners</li> </ul>
Coordination with other organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of memoranda of understanding with other service providers</li> <li>• Exchange of information among service providers</li> </ul>

## ORGANIZATION-LEVEL NETWORK CAPACITY

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Commonly used systems to coordinate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of partners using coordination system</li> <li>• Increased diversity of services provided to residents</li> </ul>
Decision-making capacity of coalitions and partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making that includes all participating organizations</li> <li>• Use of available knowledge and data</li> <li>• Development of decision-making documents and procedures</li> </ul>
Individual and collective accountability for results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared planning process</li> </ul>
Data and learning capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and type of data collected</li> <li>• Shared use of data</li> <li>• Establishment of systems of common accountability</li> </ul>
Advocacy and influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases in resources for collaboration</li> <li>• Evidence of links between coalition activities and new policy adoption or systems changes</li> </ul>
Effective and comprehensive service systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation in service networks</li> <li>• Comprehensiveness of service networks</li> <li>• Expansion of referrals among providers</li> <li>• Number of families receiving referrals</li> </ul>

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# SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGES

A system is a set of interacting and connected parts that has a shared purpose and functions as a whole. Systems change involves shifting the status quo (often represented by the baseline measures) by altering the form and function of that system.<sup>3</sup> A place-based initiative's success in affecting the entire community depends on its ability to make changes in the community's systems of care and its physical, social, political and economic environment. When a community starts to see these systems-level shifts, its change effort may be reaching sufficient scale to contribute to significant population-level outcomes.

Because systems changes often affect whole populations and are sometimes manifested as changes in systems of care, this category of measures can be conflated with population-level impact or immediate program outcomes. The difference is that systems-level changes affect how the organizations, political bodies, community communication, physical landscape and so forth operate in connection with each other. Improvement to systems makes it possible for outcomes to be different for larger swaths of community residents. For example, a systems change might involve improvements to methodology, access, coordination and follow-up from health screening services, enabling significantly more residents to have access to quality health screening. The resulting population-level impact might be measurably fewer complications from diabetes and other diseases.

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<sup>3</sup> Foster-Fishman and Watson, "The ABLe Change Framework: A Conceptual and Methodological Tool for Promoting Systems Change," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49 (3/4), (2012): 503 - 516.

# Using a Systems Scan

An intentional scan of a community system can help change agents understand how local conditions are aligned or unaligned with promoting more equitable outcomes for all children and families. By gathering multiple perspectives on a range of interacting system characteristics, change agents can better understand what is driving current patterns of outcomes and the best levers for change. The systems scan developed by Dr. Pennie Foster-Fishman and Dr. Erin Watson of Michigan State University, proposes six systems characteristics:

- *Mindsets* are attitudes, values and beliefs that shape behavior.
- *Components* are the range, quality, effectiveness and location of services and supports.
- *Connections* are the relationships and connections across people, organizations, settings and programs. They include information referrals, data sharing, learning and resource exchanges.
- *Regulations* are formal and informal policies, practices, procedures and daily routines that shape system behavior.
- *Resources* are human (skills, knowledge, etc.), financial and community (transportation, living-wage jobs, etc.) resources that are used or available within the system.
- *Power* includes how decisions are made, who participates in decision-making and the structures in place to support inclusive voice.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Foster-Fishman and Watson (2012).

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## CHANGES IN PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Policies that enable physical changes that promote health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The implementation of health-promoting policies such as the use of health impact assessments</li></ul>
Physical environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Air quality, land contamination, water quality, quality housing availability, neighborhood physical improvements and forested areas</li></ul>
Facilities and amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of high-quality educational facilities, number of libraries and access to high-speed Internet and computers</li></ul>
Physical mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy access to jobs, education, food stores and health care facilities and the availability of walkable paths</li></ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number and quality of units, turnover rates, number of public housing units demolished, provision of replacement housing and number of units rehabilitated</li></ul>

## CHANGES IN SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Community awareness of initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Neighborhood residents' awareness of the initiative and its goals</li></ul>
Sense of community and mutual support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of active mutual support networks for residents</li><li>• Effectiveness of those networks</li><li>• Support systems for community organizing and other collective action</li></ul>
Civic participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Residents participating in civic activities and decision-making processes</li></ul>
Neighborhood culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changes in neighborhood cultures that demonstrate greater investment in the systems that support residents</li></ul>
Housing income diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ethnically or racially diverse tenants in public housing</li><li>• Development of mixed-income housing</li></ul>
Crime and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Types and frequency of crime (various)</li><li>• Perception of crime by residents</li></ul>

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## CHANGES IN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Responsiveness of policy makers such as elected officials and public agency leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy makers who know and have relationships with target neighborhood leaders and residents</li> </ul>
Power sharing and responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration and joint decision-making among elected officials or public agencies and resident leaders</li> </ul>
Coalition influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of coalition or collaboration on public policy and positions of governmental leaders</li> <li>• Powerful alliances</li> </ul>
Formal roles for neighborhood leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood leader representation in decision-making bodies</li> <li>• Number of resident leaders participating in public- and private-organization governance</li> </ul>
Institutionalized processes for obtaining resident voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies and procedures influenced by residents' participation</li> </ul>

## CHANGES IN ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Changes in marketplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to healthy food outlets</li> </ul>
Business-sector development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives and support for small-business development</li> <li>• Policies and practices that promote fair lending opportunities and eliminate predatory practices</li> </ul>
Employment access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in labor market supply and demand</li> <li>• Employment rates</li> <li>• Number of jobs in the neighborhood or accessible by neighborhood residents</li> </ul>
Housing market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of affordable housing</li> <li>• Median sales price of housing by type sold</li> </ul>
Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private funds invested in capital projects in neighborhood</li> <li>• Public funds invested in infrastructure</li> <li>• Evidence-based economic strategies</li> </ul>

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## CHANGES IN THE PERFORMANCE OF SYSTEMS OF CARE

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Changes in funding for system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grantmakers engaged in strategic investing, alignment and adequacy of funding</li><li>• Increased funding</li><li>• Strategic funding of proven strategies</li></ul>
Focus on results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extent to which service providers and local grantmakers emphasize data and results</li></ul>
Service delivery capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of individuals, families or neighborhood households served</li><li>• Providers capable of implementing best practices</li><li>• Adoption of place-based approaches</li><li>• Increased collaboration and coordination</li><li>• Common data systems</li><li>• Cross-cultural competence</li><li>• Customer satisfaction and trust</li></ul>
Systems addressing basic needs of families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Basic health, safety and economic security needs of families and children being met</li></ul>
Youth development system improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expansion of youth services</li><li>• Improved service quality, increased comprehensive range of high-quality youth activities taking a youth development approach</li></ul>
Health-related policies and practice improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Substance abuse prevention programs, healthy school food, school-based health services, medical homes, home visitation and increased use of locally produced foods</li></ul>
Educational achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved school performance, school choices, quality teaching and access and participation in quality preschool and other early childhood educational activities</li></ul>
Housing management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quality of property management and housing repair and maintenance</li></ul>

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# SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funders do not often measure progress toward sustainability, but changes to the community's systems and environment need to be sustained at the appropriate scale to have population-level impact.

## ACHIEVING SCALE

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Tipping point: percentage of affected residents in a place needed to provide momentum for continued change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 percent to 30 percent of the target population is reached by full dosage of changes<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>
Saturation: maximizing the percentage of the population exposed to the initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A majority of the target population is exposed to place-based initiative's efforts</li> </ul>
Target percentage: percentage set as part of organizational or community goal setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whatever is feasible, acceptable or big enough to matter</li> </ul>

## SUSTAINED COMMUNITY CHANGE INFRASTRUCTURE

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leaders with clout from different sectors who actively promote, support and participate in the change initiatives</li> </ul>
Institutionalized collaboration structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stability of coalition membership and leadership, stability of funding, coalition participation and use of the coalition by new grantmakers to address additional issues</li> </ul>
Support for resident-led organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased funding and other support for community-based organizations representing diverse populations</li> </ul>
Community-embedded capacity-building system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality technical assistance, training and other capacity-building support provided by local organizations with decreasing direct services from national and other external intermediaries</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> Card, Mas and Rothstein, "Tipping and the Dynamics of Segregation," Working Paper 13052 for National Bureau of Economic Research, 2007; Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000); Korniss, Lim, Sreenivasan, Szymanski, Xie and Zhang, "Social Consensus through the Influence of Committed Minorities," *Physical Review E* 83, no. 7 (2001).

## SUSTAINED FUNDING CAPACITY

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Leveraged funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Additional funding received to continue work initially supported by seed funding</li></ul>
Leveraged funding for scaling up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leverage for both private and public resources to scale up promising practices and sustain long-term systems</li></ul>
Support by local public and other large institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding by local or state government and other organizations capable of long-term support, such as United Way</li><li>• The adoption of the initiative by a larger and more financially stable local institution</li></ul>

## MAINTENANCE OF SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITY CHANGE EFFORTS

Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Programs implemented with continued fidelity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Long-term assessment of consistency with or appropriate improvement of the program model</li></ul>
Multilevel integration and penetration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changes in practices by top leadership, middle management and frontline staff</li></ul>
Formal ongoing relationships among multiple organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Existence of ongoing relationships</li><li>• Perceived effectiveness of relationships</li></ul>
Replication of program model throughout system as well as collaborating systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Additional program replication locations</li><li>• Increased resident participation</li><li>• Completion of service programs</li></ul>
Public demand outside of the place for the approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participation of leaders and residents from other communities</li><li>• Media support and promotion</li></ul>
Adoption by community systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Program model represented as system wide approach</li><li>• Implementation of program model throughout system</li><li>• Support without initial seed funds</li></ul>

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# POPULATION-LEVEL IMPACTS OR OUTCOMES

At the end of the day, place-based initiatives seek to improve the lives of members of the target community. Changes to population-level indicators are the ultimate evidence that the quality of life has been improved. While there are many straightforward measures of population-level indicators, there are big methodological and practical challenges to understanding how to attribute the shifts. Because changes at this level may have little to do with the intervention of any single (or even group of) funders, it can be very challenging to isolate and capture the particular impact of any given contribution. As a result, many funders now talk about their contribution to change rather than try to figure out what they can claim credit for changing.

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Type of Indicator	Examples of What Can Be Measured
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy birth weights</li> <li>• Parental emotional well-being</li> <li>• Incidence of obesity</li> <li>• Disease prevalence</li> <li>• Children eating healthy food at home and at school</li> <li>• Physical activity</li> <li>• Health service access</li> <li>• Health insurance coverage</li> <li>• Children with medical homes</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in various types of crimes, violence and accidents</li> </ul>
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety belt use</li> <li>• Substance abuse</li> <li>• Unprotected sex</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School readiness</li> <li>• Parental knowledge of child development and involvement in schools</li> <li>• Development of social and cognitive skills</li> <li>• Early school success</li> <li>• Graduation and certificate completion</li> <li>• Postsecondary credentialing</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career readiness</li> <li>• Adult employment rates</li> <li>• Household income</li> <li>• Employer-supported health insurance</li> </ul>
Financial assets and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of households with savings accounts</li> <li>• Assets saved</li> <li>• Homeownership</li> <li>• Rate of foreclosures</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stability</li> <li>• Reductions in evictions and foreclosures</li> </ul>

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# FRAMEWORK IN ACTION: GRANTMAKER STORIES

## THE KATE B. REYNOLDS CHARITABLE TRUST

### **THE INITIATIVE: HEALTHY PLACES NC**

[The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust](#) works to improve the quality of life and health for the financially needy of North Carolina. Healthy Places NC is a 10-year place-based initiative designed to improve health outcomes in economically disadvantaged rural communities across North Carolina. HPNC began operating in three counties (Beaufort, Halifax and McDowell) in May 2012. Rockingham County was added in November 2013.

The trust made a careful study of comprehensive community change initiatives and decided to take an approach very different from the traditional for several reasons. First, it wanted the community to focus on “how much change” rather than “how much money,” so the trust chose an iterative, emerging strategy rather than a formal community-planning process at the beginning of the initiative. Second, the trust was interested in an alternative to the widely used coalition model, which wasn’t necessarily a good fit in rural communities without a robust nonprofit infrastructure. It also did not know the communities well enough yet to pick the best organization, if there was one, to lead a coalition and wanted to avoid establishing a gatekeeper between the community and the trust. The trust wanted to involve constituents across a broad range of sectors and knew many wouldn’t sign on to a health coalition at the outset. Most important, coalitions rarely had been successful in reaching population-level results, so the trust wanted to build something different.

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Instead of working through existing organizations and supporting the growth and capacity of a cross-sector coalition, program officers spend multiple days per month in the county meeting with individuals and organizations interested in health promotion, encouraging them to develop projects, connecting people across sectors and cultivating ideas to improve community health. The program officer's role is supplemented by regional, state and national providers of capacity building and technical assistance to individuals and organizations.

HPNC is designed to spark local actors to take more initiative, to think more strategically, to move to action, to work together in ways that go against convention and to learn from their experience. The trust expects the shift in community attitudes and increase in community capacity to yield long-term benefits, especially in residents' ability to identify and solve health problems and design and implement health-promotion programs and policies. HPNC also hopes to set in motion new thinking and behaviors that will translate into a more health-promoting community culture.

In the long term, the trust expects that this increased attention and support will generate new health-promotion efforts in line with its funding priorities:

1. access to primary care (increasing coverage, providing a medical home),
2. diabetes (access to medical care, self-management),
3. mental health and substance abuse (continuum of care, integrated care, evidence-based prevention and treatment), and
4. community-centered prevention (built environment, safe environment, food access, physical activity).

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## EVALUATION FOCUS: FUNDER LEVERS OF CHANGE

The trust's evaluation questions for HPNC's first phase pertain to constructs such as awareness, activation, social capital, networking, collaboration, new projects, engagement of new faces, leadership and collective efficacy, as well as local perceptions regarding the trust's role and actions within HPNC counties.

An evaluation team from Duke University is using key informant interviews and community surveys to assess how the trust's various inputs are affecting thinking, planning, doing and collaborating among local actors in the first three HPNC counties. Based on conversations with the HPNC design team, the evaluation will focus on five outcome areas: (a) individual actors involved in health-improvement work (especially leaders), (b) organizations involved in health-improvement work, (c) networks and relationships among actors doing health-improvement work, (d) the nature of the work that is carried out and (e) the community-level context within which the work is carried out. Specific features of these five outcome areas are listed in the next section. Social network analysis serves as an important means of assessing whether HPNC is leading to broader, more diverse, more activated and more functional interactions among local actors.

Findings from this developmental evaluation will help refine the HPNC model and point to more effective approaches to engaging and supporting local partners. Later evaluation activities will look at the longer-term outcomes of HPNC within the full set of counties that are eventually included in the initiative.

“We're using evaluation for learning. It will help us build the model and learn and improve as we go.” – Doug Easterling, external manager for HPNC

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## EXAMPLES OF CATEGORIES AND INDICATORS

- **Political, Economic and Cultural Context:** The trust analyzed context to select the four initial counties. In addition to narrowing eligible rural counties to those with the greatest need, the trust also looked for existing energy, will and the presence of some positive activity.
- **Funder Levers of Change:** The phase 1 developmental evaluation looks at the disruptive influence of Healthy Places, including the effectiveness of program officers on the ground and HPNC's ability to reach out to and engage local actors.
- **Implementation:** HPNC will look at whether local actors are taking new initiative around health improvement, coming up with new ideas for increasingly strategic projects and implementing those projects effectively. It will also assess the growth of networks in the targeted communities to understand whether networks are expanding, becoming more dense, connecting diverse actors and becoming less centrally controlled.
- **Capacity Outcomes:** HPNC evaluates the changes in individuals and organizations that participate in capacity-building programming and in individual actors who have been active in HPNC work.
- **Changes to Systems Conditions:** HPNC seeks to change community context, so it will evaluate changes in social capital, connections in networks to support large-scale mobilization and the growth in sectors engaged in building healthy communities.

“ We regularly circle back and remind ourselves that everything we do needs to be in service to the long-term population-level impact. We're not forgetting about it, but we're not focusing our evaluation on this yet. ” - Lori Fuller, the trust's director of evaluation and learning

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# FRAMEWORK IN ACTION: GRANTMAKER STORIES

## KANSAS HEALTH FOUNDATION

### **THE INITIATIVE: HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE**

[The Kansas Health Foundation's Healthy Communities Initiative](#) partners with 20 Kansas communities to promote healthy eating and active living through changes in policy, systems and environment. KHF convened stakeholders from across Kansas and interviewed experts from across the country about how to have the most impact on community health. After a year of conversation and study, they concluded that the greatest impact would come from changing policy and systems to create healthier community environments — and to do this, they had to first build the capacity of cross-sector community leadership teams that can influence health policy at the local level.

Participating communities form HCI leadership teams: collaborative, cross-sector, interdisciplinary groups. During an initial planning year, the leadership teams identify a policy priority and develop an implementation proposal for a range of education and advocacy tactics to build support for the changes they want in their communities.

According to Jeff Usher, KHF's senior program officer, "This initiative gets people focused on policy change and systems change. When we've tried to make these kinds of changes before, everyone wanted technical solutions focused on individual change rather than adaptive solutions focused on the system or environment that makes healthy behaviors the default behavior. Now we're helping communities to think about health as something that requires systems change."

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## EVALUATION FOCUS: CAPACITY OUTCOMES

KHF wants to measure progress toward policy goals that target the system or environment. But before communities can succeed on the policy change front, they need to build collaborative and leadership capacity to do and sustain the work. Recognizing that not all communities will achieve policy change at the same rate, intermediate indicators of coalition and leadership team capacity help KHF better understand why some communities may make more progress than others. KHF understands coalition and leadership team capacity is not the sole contributing factor to policy success; it is one of the areas that enhances understanding of community-level progress. So not surprisingly, KHF and its initiative evaluator, Innovation Network, focus significant evaluation energy on understanding the extent to which HCI leadership teams are working together effectively, engaging community members, building community involvement, raising knowledge and awareness and ultimately moving others to action about issues related to healthy eating and active living.

## EXAMPLES OF CATEGORIES AND INDICATORS

- **Political, Economic and Cultural Context:** HCI leadership teams map their political, economic and environmental context using a “Context Mapping Guide,” which looks at barriers, opportunities and key contributors to their policy priority. This context mapping helps them to identify critical areas for change.
- **Baseline Conditions:** HCI leadership teams use results from a leadership team assessment tool administered multiple times during the initiative to better understand the capacities of their leadership team and changes in these capacities over time.
- **Capacity-Building Interventions:** KHF gauges the effectiveness of its training and technical assistance by tracking participation in annual convenings, regional workshops, monthly webinars and regular technical assistance calls and onsite visits. Early on, KHF conducted

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an assessment to identify initial needs for technical assistance. This information was used to help develop agendas for the convenings, webinars, workshops and regular contact with HCI leadership teams with the goal of focusing and individualizing technical assistance where it would be most beneficial. KHF routinely obtains participant feedback about convenings and workshops to help guide technical assistance.

- **Capacity Outcomes:** KHF is measuring several leadership team capacities. These include leadership, ability to learn from the community, basic functioning and structure, reputation and visibility, sustainability, ability to cultivate and develop champions and ability to develop allies and partnerships. An online survey that members of the HCI leadership team complete captures multiple perspectives on each team's overall capacity and readiness. Interviews with leadership team members and members of the broader community provide additional insights into each community's progress toward its policy goals.
- **Capacity Outcomes and Changes to Systems Conditions:** Evaluators will also use focus groups and bellwether interviews to understand the growth and visibility of HCI leadership teams' work and messages. Once these leadership teams understand how they can affect policy, KHF assumes that they will be self-sustaining.
- **Systems-Level Changes:** As communities make progress toward policy change, the evaluation will begin to look at indicators of systems change toward population-level impact. In particular, they will track the policies and new practices implemented in grantee communities and the changes in community norms that support healthy behaviors.

KHF emphasizes that HCI is a work in progress. Once the HCI leadership teams have determined their priorities, they can take advantage of relevant funding opportunities to implement best practices in creating healthier environments.

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# FRAMEWORK IN ACTION: GRANTMAKER STORIES

## THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER ATLANTA

### **THE INITIATIVE: PLACES**

For more than 60 years [The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta](#) has served as a bridge between philanthropic resources and efforts to increase community vitality across the region's 23 counties. Today the foundation manages donor assets of nearly \$900 million and has awarded up to \$120 million annually in grants to a wide array of nonprofit organizations and community-based programs, in addition to providing coaching, guidance and knowledge that increases the strategic and management capacity of the nonprofit sector.

During the past year the foundation began to explore ways to increase its impact and generate broader, smarter civic interest and involvement to produce positive community change. The resulting framework is PLACES — Partnerships for Leadership and Civic Engagement Solutions.

PLACES is designed to generate more civic participation and a stronger collective investment in community life, through investments in efforts focused on the following:

- Civic Engagement: Promoting individual and collective efforts to address issues of public concern.
- Capacity Building: Providing tools and resources that strengthen the capacity of organized groups and nonprofits to advance community efforts in concert with community members.

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- **Community Building:** Developing processes that coordinate, link and support cohesive resident-driven efforts.
- **Leadership Development:** Creating experiences that develop or enhance the influence, skills and attitudes of individual residents and citizens.

## EVALUATION FOCUS: COMMUNITY CAPACITY OUTCOMES

In 2012, the foundation joined 20 other states and four other cities in producing an annual Civic Health Index. The index gives insight into metro Atlanta's status in relation to five data points: participation in formal and informal volunteering, participation in groups, social connectedness, electoral participation and political action.

The Civic Health Index will be the primary gauge for progress. Using 2012 as the baseline year, the foundation will collect data for comparison in 2014 and at regular intervals thereafter.

## EXAMPLES OF CATEGORIES AND INDICATORS

- **Baseline Conditions:** The 2012 Civic Health Index will be used as a baseline measure. For example, in 2012, Atlanta's metropolitan statistical area ranked 27th among the 51 largest metropolitan statistical areas, with 65 percent of citizens registered.
- **Funder Levers of Change:** The foundation will measure effectiveness over time through performance measures aligned with its Results Based Accountability organizational goals. Performance measures include: change in the number of grants across the region, change in the amount of dollars influenced by the foundation to address community needs, change in the number of activities provided to share information regarding community data and policy issues, and change in the number of opportunities the foundation undertakes to facilitate civic engagement in the region.

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- **Implementation:** Funding will target efforts in the foundation’s four priority areas. Specific tactics may include public dialogues, training and education, grants and scholarships, community initiatives and community partnerships. To assess implementation, the foundation will capture community-level goals and measures and track change based on the extent to which efforts achieve their stated objectives.
- **Capacity Outcomes and Changes to Systems Conditions:** The foundation will look at three results-based accountability indicators of community capacity: the number of investments (financial, human and intellectual) in the nonprofits, the number of nonprofits with strategic plans that measure progress and the number of nonprofits and organized groups engaged in addressing public policies.

Changes to systems conditions will be measured by the five indicators of the Civic Health Index: participation in formal and informal volunteering, participation in groups, social connectedness, electoral participation and political action.

“Engaging residents for the betterment of their community is the first and best ingredient of healthy communities. PLACES is an effort to support the civic infrastructure of resident-led change in the region.” – Tené Traylor, senior program officer, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GRANTMAKERS

It's challenging to measure and evaluate place-based initiatives because the efforts are complex and multilevel and they operate within an always-changing environment. As a relatively new social strategy, they have had less time and fewer resources to develop practices of measurement and evaluation. Community change initiatives also pose unique measurement problems because measures of community and systems-level changes aren't as well developed as individual-level change measures.

These guidelines can help make measurement of community change processes and outcomes most successful:

1. **Establish a clear and aligned pathway or theory of change.** Community change initiatives often suffer from a misalignment of strategies, activities and outcomes.<sup>6</sup> A theory of change, whether it is a narrative or a drawing, identifies the key components that will contribute to an initiative's intended results. A useful theory of change, like any good plan, must be a concrete description of how the community will get to desired results, grounded in or informed by prior research evidence, experiential knowledge and knowledge of good practice.<sup>7</sup> It must clearly identify how the specific actions, strategies or approaches will contribute to the desired results<sup>8</sup> and be well understood by all stakeholders in the process, not just by the grantmaker. At the same time, it needs to leave space for how activities and strategies evolve in complex community situations.

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<sup>6</sup> Brown, "Evaluating and Learning from Community Change," *Voices from the Field III: Lessons and Challenges from Two Decades of Community Change Efforts* (Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 2010), 95 - 105; Chavis and Amulya (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Corcoran, Howe, Langmeyer and Minich, "Can Community Change Be Measured for an Outcomes-Based Initiative? A Comparative Case Study of the Success by 6@ Initiative," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 38 (3/4), (2006): 183 - 190.

<sup>8</sup> Auspos and Kubisch, "Building Knowledge about Community Change: Moving beyond Evaluations," The Aspen Institute, 2004.

2. **Measure process and progress — not only long-term results.** Everyone wants to see substantial results, improved quality of life and hope for the future. Evaluations should measure the key milestones for progress toward achieving results as well as the ultimate outcomes themselves.<sup>9</sup> Many funders look at immediate outcomes or outputs of supported programs (e.g., children completing early childhood programs, adults completing job training, agency participation in case management). However, these are program-level changes. Grantmakers should also value and document how the community's capacity is strengthened by improvements in social capital and improved collaboration among organizations, and link these changes to the programmatic outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Process outcomes such as organized citizens, changed policies and a greater sense of community are monumental successes by themselves in most communities.
  
3. **Keep an eye on scale and sustainability.** Change is fleeting if an initiative doesn't achieve scale and sustainability. Yet many place-based initiatives don't evaluate progress toward these ends. Evaluation needs to help a funder assess whether a particular program or strategy is scalable — that is, does it have the potential to be replicated or expanded consistently to a large enough percentage of the population that negative trends begin to reverse?

An additional measure of scale and sustainability is the presence of change and improvements between neighborhoods and between a neighborhood and the larger city, county and state systems. Many efforts succeed at just improving relationships within a neighborhood and therefore may have only an isolated impact, missing opportunities to connect to larger initiatives.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly, "Five Simple Rules for Evaluating Complex Community Initiatives," Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco Community Investments, Spring 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Auspos and Kubisch (2004).

<sup>11</sup> Chaskin, Dillman, Greenberg, Riccio and Verma, "Creating a Platform for Sustained Neighborhood Improvement: Interim Findings from Chicago's New Communities Program," MDRC, February 2010.

4. **Build appetite and capacity for data collection, analysis and utilization.** Community organizations and residents are not evaluation experts. Many funders need to build the skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of evaluating an initiative.<sup>12</sup>

Grantmakers can assess communities' ability to collect and use data and then help build needed appetite and capacity. Effective evaluation allows communities and funders to have the right information at the right time to inform key decisions. Grantmakers should walk the walk in the use of data for their own decision-making, both to make good decisions and to model this process. Communities may need help critically analyzing and using data for decision-making and making a habit of using data.<sup>13</sup>

It's also important to prioritize data collection needs, since ongoing data demands can be staggering. Funders and communities should emphasize data and performance measures that local stakeholders see as relevant and important. These can be balanced with indicators that most reflect systemic and community changes and those that enable change, such as collective efficacy, community capacity and a sense of community across geographic areas, race and ethnicity and economic class.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Brown and Fiester "Hard Lessons about Philanthropy and Community Change from the Neighborhood Improvement Initiative," The William and Flora Hewett Foundation, March 2007.

13 "Next Generation Community Revitalization: A Work in Progress," The Bridgespan Group, December 2011.

14 Foster-Fishman, Nowell and Yang, "Putting the System Back into Systems Change: A Framework for Understanding and Changing Organizational and Community Systems," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 39 (2007): 197 - 215.

5. **Develop and communicate realistic expectations for change.** By the third or fourth year of investing in community change, initiative stakeholders may begin to expect evidence of long-term outcomes. This pressure to show results can derail other efforts. It is important that funders help distinguish between immediate outcomes, systems-level changes and population-level shifts, and that stakeholders have a realistic understanding of what’s possible with the time and money allotted.<sup>15</sup> It takes time to see major changes that result from community change initiatives, especially at their early stages of development.<sup>16</sup>

Grantmakers can also share results with the community by publishing newsletters, submitting stories to local newspapers and organizing events to communicate what’s been learned.<sup>17</sup> By communicating about the effort’s progress, grantmakers can help strengthen the public and political will to continue this work — often essential factors in the outcome.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Farrow and Schorr, “Expanding the evidence universe: doing better by knowing more,” Center for the Study of Social Policy, July 2011.

16 Auspos and Kubisch (2004).

17 “Sustaining Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Key Elements for Success,” Financing Strategy Brief for the Finance Project, 2002; Farrow and Schorr (2011).

19 “Evaluating Community-Based Initiatives: A conversation with Prudence Brown,” *The Evaluation Exchange, A Periodical on Emerging Strategies in Evaluation*, 9, No. 3, (2003); Auspos and Kubisch (2004).

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# CONCLUSION

There is an old business maxim: “What gets measured gets done.” Grantmakers invest significant energy in deciding what to measure, but this conversation often happens after an initiative is well under way. By focusing on the measures of community change as initiatives are developed, funders and their partners can think more deliberately about the intended long-term impact and what it will take to get there.

A framework like this one is necessarily only a two-dimensional snapshot of the dynamic and complex work of community change. It focuses on the funders’ contributions, although these may be only one of many factors in play. And it describes a linear progression with a predictable flow, which is unrealistic in the real world. However, even with these caveats, the framework can help funders and communities have critical conversations about priorities, discuss sequencing of interventions and data collection and think intentionally about the changes they hope for and expect.

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GEO is a diverse community of nearly 500 grantmakers working to reshape the way philanthropy operates. We are committed to advancing smarter grantmaking practices that enable nonprofits to grow stronger and more effective at achieving better results.

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