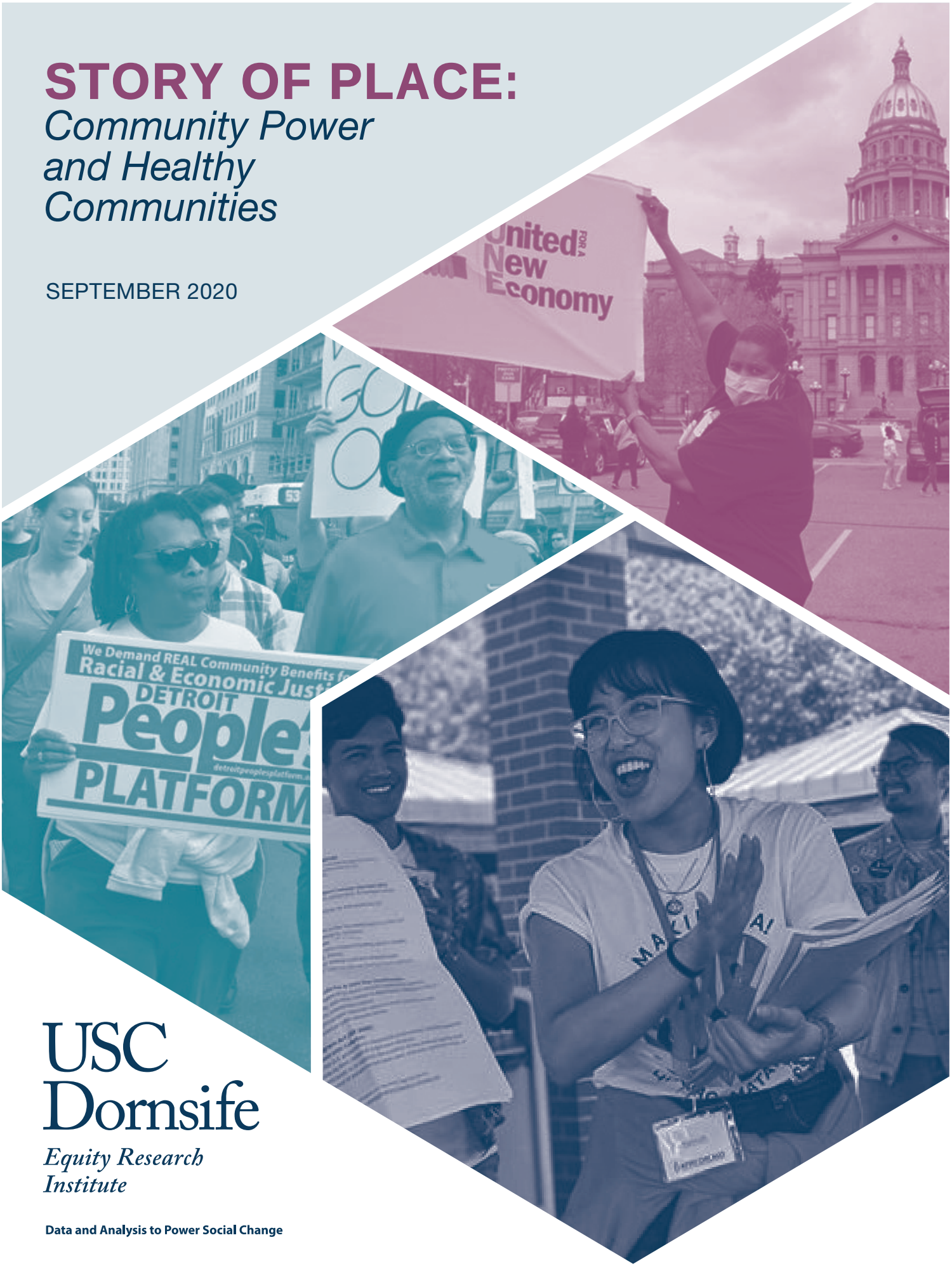
STORY OF PLACE:
Community Power and Healthy Communities

SEPTEMBER 2020



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Data and Analysis to Power Social Change

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CONTEXT

The widespread and devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 have revealed how critical social, environmental, and economic conditions are in the protection of public health. The pandemic has brought to public attention trends that have been in place for a long time. There are still many people and communities who lack health insurance; who do not have financial assets to survive an emergency; who are forced to go to work regardless of the risks or rewards of that work; who are at constant risk in overcrowded or unstable housing; who are on the wrong side of a digital divide that makes remote work and remote learning challenging; and who are finding themselves and their family members getting sick and dying at rates higher than the general population.

This marks an opportunity for a transformative teaching moment. Many are recognizing that our own health is linked to that of others and that when we protect everyone, we protect ourselves. There is growing awareness of the underlying inequities by race, income, and geography that leave some communities systematically marginalized and at higher risk of debilitating health effects and dying after contracting the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, protests sweeping the nation and the world sparked by the tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery at the hands of the police are bringing to public attention racial discrimination.

Across the country, there are long overdue conversations about how the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 virus and police violence on Black Americans, in particular, have deeper roots in racism (Ollove and Vestal 2020; Vestal 2020) and how racism is a public health issue (Vestal 2020). These conversations are happening alongside a growing recognition of powerlessness as another root cause of unhealthy communities (Givens et al. 2018; Kickbusch 2015; Schrantz 2016). So the question we need to explore is not whether these kinds of conditions determine the health of communities. We know they do. The question is how do impacted communities re-shape such conditions to improve their daily lives and those of their children?

This report finds that the answer lies in community power. This report is based on a 24-month project that brought together leaders from across the country who are directly working to address issues of powerlessness in communities disproportionately impacted by racial, economic, and environmental inequities. The research question we set out to explore together was: **How does community power catalyze, create, and sustain conditions for healthy communities?** To answer this question, we applied our Changing States framework to understand the relationship between community power and pathways to healthy communities and the role of place (For more on Changing States, see Pastor, Ito, and Wander 2016).

So what is community power building? Community power is **the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence decision-makers, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with them to change systems and advance health equity.** It is about the development, implementation, and protection of policies, practices, and systems changes to support a culture of health—a culture in which all people have equal opportunities to make healthy choices, whatever their circumstances[1]—and how that happens in ways that increase the capacities and influence of low-income communities and communities of color.

In exploring what that means for contemporary America, this report lifts up the following:

- First, strategy and capacity needs are inextricably tied to place—and its historical, demographic, economic, political, and geographic contexts and structures. The *Changing States* framework considers power contestation in these and related arenas across multiple scales, and so helps us understand the terrain facing 16 very different places, ranging from Miami, FL to Washington State in communities seeking voice and promoting health. We argue that such specificity is needed to explore how community sustains conditions for healthy communities—and what investments can help strengthen the field.

- Second, community power has multiple dimensions, including setting, winning, *and* ultimately governing to realize a public agenda. Governing power is crucial. That means not just the ability to advocate for and win policies, especially those related to structural reform but also the ability to oversee their protection and implementation. Yet so is the ability to shape mindsets and to generate narrative change. And while organizations have experienced successes in navigating administrative, economic, and cultural arenas of change, these aspects of governing power are the leading and growing edges of the field.

- Third, community power building is not just a way to achieve outcomes but is an outcome in and of itself. It is important to address structural barriers to healthy communities, but the process itself can build organization and leadership within impacted communities in ways that have lasting impact. Because of this, more resources and coordination are needed to lift up leadership and organizational development. In addition, the metrics of success need to focus not just on transactions, such as particular policy shifts, but also on transformation at the individual, organizational, inter-organizational, and societal levels.

1 For more on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's efforts to build a culture of health, see https://www.rwjf.org/en/cultureofhealth.html.

- Fourth, organizing and base building are the foundation of community power building, but do not exist in a vacuum. There is an ecosystem of advocacy groups, legal supporters, research centers, and intermediaries that play important roles. Yet, organizing is too often seen as being in service to an agenda determined by professional advocates, funders, or communications experts. This project highlights the impacts—both tangible and intangible—when organizing is at the center. The most important contribution of power builders to building healthy communities is often less visible, less frequently measured, and less resourced. Yet is critical. For historically-excluded residents to engage in strategies and campaigns that drive toward healthy communities, they must make their private problems public and join with others to make change.

- Fifth, the time to invest in power building is now. It is appropriate to think of community power building as a long-term strategy—but that does not mean it is an activity to be postponed over emergency relief or short-term policy advocacy. Whether talking to statewide groups or neighborhood groups, all acknowledge that conditions were precarious even before the global pandemic: housing was neglected, healthcare was scarce, immigrants were threatened, wages were inadequate, incarceration was rampant, education was failing, and community fragmentation and isolation was growing. Post-pandemic, the needs are even starker, but they will only be met if we collectively recognize our connections and if communities are part of the conversation about the road ahead.

This last point is critical. There is a growing recognition in the health field of the power of social determinants, which are the "conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age" (Cash-Gibson et al. 2018; Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2008). And that current levels of economic and social inequality are damaging for community health, particularly for low income and communities of color (Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2008). As a result, it is critical to center both social determinants and racial equity in our work going forward. Power building, system disruption, narrative change, and policy transformation are all a part of the American story—and, in fact, the very way that America has been reminded of the ideals it lifted up to the world. Ideals that were never quite fulfilled.

This report is a summary of the report *Leading Locally: A Community Power-Building Approach to Structural Change* (Pastor, Ito, and Wander 2020b) that explores the story of community power in 16 places primarily through the knowledge and experiences of 40 local community power-building organizations. *Leading Locally* also includes a discussion of the research methodology, a list of key literature, interviewees, and other resources that have informed this report.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Lead Local Partners and Research Questions

The purpose of *Lead Local: Community-Driven Change and the Power of Collective Action*, a project which began in 2018 and was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, aimed at understanding **how community power catalyzes, creates, and sustains conditions for healthy communities.**

A research committee, comprised of USC Equity Research Institute (ERI, formerly USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity), Human Impact Partners, the Right to the City Alliance, Change Elemental, Caring Across Generations, Johns Hopkins University SNL Agora Institute and P3 Lab, and Vanderbilt University, spent 24 months exploring this question. Forty local and state organizations were invited to answer this question based on their expertise in building community power to dismantle systems that perpetuate health inequity and to create alternative policy and institutional vehicles to promote healthy communities.

USC ERI focused specifically on community-led structural reforms in *A Primer on Community Power, Place, and Structural Change* (Pastor, Ito, and Wander 2020a) and led the investigation of community power building in 16 places across the country (Pastor et al. 2020b). We know that individual and community health is shaped by the conditions of a given locality, so we set out to explore such conditions as well as the capacities and power-building strategies that are being employed to catalyze, create, and sustain healthy communities.

Vanderbilt University, with Johns Hopkins University, SNL Agora Institute and P3 Lab, and conducted a literature review of current research and theory related to community power and health equity (P. Speer, Gupta, and Haapanen 2020) and also developed a forward-looking research agenda to support the field to measure community power building in and across places (P. W. Speer, Gupta, and Haapanen 2020).

Human Impact Partners and the Right to the City Alliance brought a focus on the current housing crisis—housing instability (i.e., eviction, foreclosure, houselessness), unaffordable housing, and poor quality housing—and how the crisis is directly linked to poor health outcomes and rooted in an unequal distribution of power. These topics are further detailed in their report: *A Primer on Power, Housing Justice, and Health Equity: How Building Community Power Can Help Address Housing Inequities and Improve Health* (Human Impact Partners and Right to the City Alliance 2020). Human Impact Partners also conducted a survey of health departments to explore their collaborations with community organizing groups (Human Impact Partners 2020).

Caring Across Generations contributed its expertise both in the role of culture change and narrative power as well the role of multi-sector collaborations in achieving healthy communities. Change Elemental applied its framework on capacities for community power building and equitable communities as well as conducted capacity-building sessions for a subset of the local and state community power organizations (Misra, Bamdad, and Winegar 2020).

Methodology

This report focuses on 16 places that were selected through the Lead Local project. There are nine small to mid-size cities (with populations between 50,000 and 500,000): Atlanta, Des Moines, Eau Claire, Miami, Minneapolis, Portland (Maine), Rochester (New York), Santa Ana, and Santa Fe. There are three larger cities with populations over 500,000: Chicago, Detroit, and Denver. There are four states including Kentucky, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. See Figure 1 for a map of places that are the focus of the Lead Local project.

These places were selected to ensure diverse geographic, political, and demographic representation so that findings from this project can be applicable and scale-able in a variety of contexts. They were also selected based on the knowledge and expertise of Lead Local partners related to organizations and efforts that could shed light on our thematic areas of inquiry: structural reforms, capacities for change, cultural and narrative work, multi-sector coalitions, and housing justice. USC ERI conducted interviews with community power-building organizations across the 16 places. Representatives from the Research Committee (HIP, RTTC, Change Elemental, and CAG) joined in the interviews that were relevant to their specific focus area. The list of individuals and organizations interviewed for this project are provided at the end of this report.

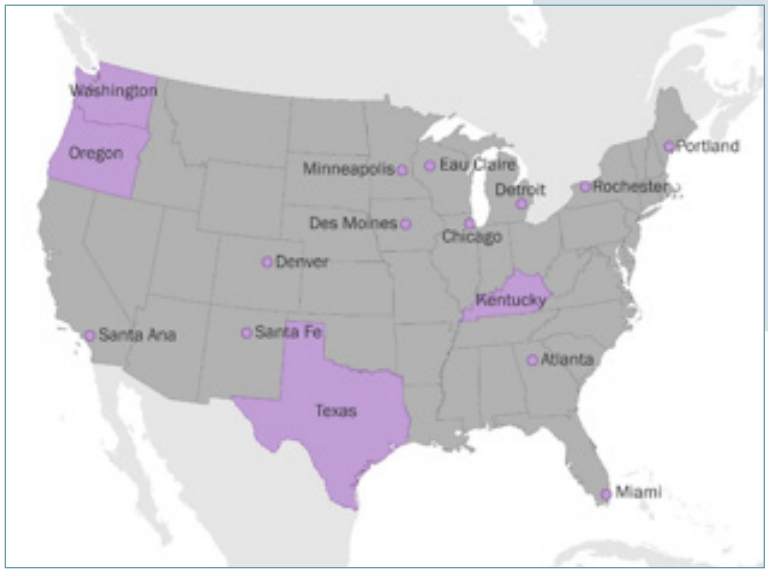

Figure 1. *Map of Lead Local Places*

The analysis of each place was conducted by applying the *Changing States* framework to the interview protocol, background research on each place, and to the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. *Changing States* was developed by USC ERI in 2016 to gauge the conditions, arenas, and capacities for change at the local, metro, or state level. The framework focuses on "governing power" and on an understanding that power is contested in multiple arenas: electoral, legislative, administrative, legal, economic, and cultural spheres. The framework reflects the complicated nature of decision-making: While voters, elected officials, and government agencies make certain decisions, the courts, business leaders, and the general public also have influence in ways that shape our communities.

The inquiry for this project centered on the particular structures in each of these arenas to better understand how they shape and are shaped by the strategies employed by community power-building organizations. For a longer discussion on the research methodology and on each of the 16 places, see the full report *Leading Locally: A Community Power-Building Approach to Structural Change* (Pastor et al. 2020b).

CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The conditions that Lead Local partners are seeking to change range from racially-motivated violence against communities of color; rising rents as development attracts more affluent renters; wages too low to pay for housing, food, transportation, health care, and child care; long commutes and few viable transit options; cockroaches and mold in their apartments; overcrowded schools with inadequate resources; to the fear of being separated from their families and deported to places they have not been for years.

These problems of housing, work, transportation, education, and immigration status may seem like disconnected issues; however, a health equity frame can help connect them to health outcomes. In the last few decades, there has been an upsurge in research linking health outcomes to the "conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age"—commonly referred to as the social determinants of health (Cash-Gibson et al. 2018; Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2008). These include "economic stability, education, social and community context, health and health care, and neighborhood and built environment" (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2014).

More recently, many in the public health field are recognizing the root causes of the social determinants of health—the structural determinants that keep inequities in place (Baum et al. 2018; Beckfield and Krieger 2009; Givens et al. 2018; Wailoo 2017). These are rules and regulations, institutional policies and priorities, cultural norms and values—and disparities in power and influence. They relate to the "arenas of change" of the *Changing States* framework, the terrains where ideas, policies, and power are contested. The structures and systems in each of these decision-making arenas—and the interplay between them—are directly related to the health and well-being of a community.

For this project, the question focuses on community response to these inequities: How do communities re-shape such conditions to improve their daily lives and those of their children? We're finding that the answer lies in community power. So the question is not whether conditions determine the health of communities—we already know they do. Research also shows that both social and structural determinants of health are tied to place (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine et al. 2017). The real question is how those conditions came to be sustained, it is not a mistake but is inherent in a system of power and advantage - only power will shift the balance.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY POWER

Across place, issue, constituency, and geographic scale, interviewees provided concise and consistent definitions of community power. Community power building is not new and for decades organizations that build community power have honed in on what it is and the forms it takes. It is important to note that building community power is an iterative and cyclical process and that the pathways are rarely linear in nature. In fact, the level of community power itself can wax and wane with changing conditions.

Synthesizing our findings from the field, we define community power as **the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence decision-makers, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with them to change systems, foster structural equity, and advance health equity.**

Community power drives toward influencing decision-makers and even shifting who is making decisions by **centering the voices of communities most impacted by unhealthy conditions.** One interviewee put it as those "on the ground feeling the most hurt," such as: care givers and farmworkers working long hours for low pay; families displaced from their neighborhoods due to gentrification; voters purged from the rolls; tenants living in slum housing; immigrants who've been separated from their families; and more.

A guiding principle of community power-building organizations is that community members are themselves experts about their own experiences and conditions, and should drive the design, implementation, and protection of policies and reforms meant to improve their day-to-day lives. Indeed, there are many examples of how community-driven policy campaigns change lives: paid sick leave in Minneapolis; publically-funded long-term care in Washington State; defeating the ability of police to impound undocumented residents' cars in Santa Ana; building a public transit system in Clayton County outside of Atlanta; and creating a housing trust fund in Detroit.

While individual campaigns and policies can catalyze and create conditions for healthy communities, what is needed for sustaining such conditions is community-led systems change. So a second just-as-critical principle of community power building is that the type of structural reform that is necessary to transform systems, and so community conditions, only happens when community members have participated in, take responsibility for, and see themselves as public actors in determining the future of their communities.

As an interviewee put it, community power building is a "long-term project" that requires the development and sustained active presence of **a strong and organized base of people most impacted by the systems targeted for change** to hold decision-makers accountable—or become the decision-makers themselves. An organized base of community members are in relationship and invest in each other's leadership; share a common identity shaped by similar experiences and an understanding of the root causes of their conditions; and use their collective analysis to create solutions and strategize to achieve them.

In this way, base building is more than mobilization—and in fact, repeated mobilizations around specific issues cannot happen without base building. At the same time, mobilizations are ways of exercising the sort of civic engagement muscles that help people work on sustained power building. And what we know from previous research is that this type of base building and leadership development cannot happen without place-rooted ecosystems of community power-building organizations (Han 2014; Ito, Wander, and Pastor 2019).

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

How does community power catalyze, create, and sustain conditions for healthy communities? We take this central question for the Lead Local project and turn it into a simple frame for understanding the ways in which community power building impacts the social and structural determinants of health:

- Community power builders catalyze conditions by **setting an agenda** for change: bringing attention to issues and problems facing marginalized and historically disenfranchised communities; developing analyses of root causes that inform solutions to the problems; and building momentum through collective action and catalytic campaigns.

- Community power builders create conditions by leveraging that momentum toward **achieving an agenda**, winning—or protecting—funding, programs, and services; developing, passing, and enacting policies and establishing alternative models or programs.

- Community power builders sustain conditions for healthy communities by **governing an agenda**, developing leaders for key decision-making positions; building mutual accountability between decision-makers and communities; and shifting the public discourse through narrative and culture-change work.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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What this drives toward is the transformation of systems, structures, and worldviews necessary for healthy communities. We do not intend this to be a prescriptive set of sequential steps; moreover, we think about this as a cyclical process that is on a pathway—however direct or meandering it may be—towards healthy communities. In other words, as groups are able to demonstrate success in setting, achieving, and governing over an agenda, they are able to put forth a bolder agenda towards a healthier future for all.

Catalyze | SET AN AGENDA

Bring attention to issues

Develop shared analyses and solutions

Build momentum

Create | ACHIEVE AN AGENDA

Develop and pass policies and legislation

Win–or protect–funding, programs and services

Establish alternative models

Sustain | GOVERN AN AGENDA

Develop leaders for key decision-making positions

Build mutual accountability

Shift public discourse

Catalyzing Conditions for Healthy Communities: Setting an Agenda

Bringing Attention to Issues

Critical to changing conditions to achieve healthy communities is for those in positions of authority to recognize and acknowledge the problems and issues that communities are facing; community power organizations often need to **bring attention to an issue that would otherwise be ignored or overlooked.** Simply making the case for an issue or that there is a problem can require a full-scale campaign—especially when those in decision-making positions are disconnected and not exposed to the everyday challenges facing residents of unhealthy communities.

For example, caregiving work can be isolating, so Citizen Action of Wisconsin is doing work in Eau Claire to bring caregivers together and elevate their voices to people in power who would otherwise not realize how large of a constituency they are and the widespread issues caregivers must navigate. Similarly, the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans, out of efforts to protect the Comprehensive Care Program (CCP), sparked a dialogue around universal long-term care during the 2018 gubernatorial primary campaigns. During these conversations—surrounding the issues of long-term care—there was a collective realization that community members and state legislatures experience the same issues.

Places that are focused on attracting business, investing in public transportation, and revitalizing central cities need to balance these priorities with the pressures of rising rents, unaffordable housing, and good-paying jobs. By being close to their constituents and communities historically excluded from policy making and agenda setting, community power-building organizations are able to expand the public dialogue and debate to put their communities' on decision-makers' radars.

For example, Puget Sound Sage, in Washington State, produced a report and worked with allies to raise awareness of the imminent risks to Seattle-area residents posed by unregulated Airbnb units. Affordable housing itself is a prominent issue in the state with almost 50 percent of Washingtonians being housing burdened—paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing.[2] The organization framed the success of Airbnb as a harm to Seattle residents by taking 4,000 units off the rental market. Due in part to this effort, in 2017, the City instituted a $5 million annual tax on short-term rental companies, like Airbnb, to fund anti-displacement work.

2 PolicyLink/USC Equity Research Institute, National Equity Atlas, https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Housing_burden.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
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How do community power-building organizations put the issues on decision-makers' radars? It starts with the foundation of **base building and organizing.** They bring the most impacted communities together—through conversations in neighborhoods, apartment buildings, and through institutions like schools and churches—to learn and strategize about how to make, as multiple interviewees described, "material changes in their living conditions." Across place, they employ a diversity of strategies to nurture leadership from impacted communities— from organizing trainings to political education sessions to healing circles—in order to address community issues. The larger aim in bringing people together is that they make connections across their lived experiences and conditions. Indeed, base building is the foundation of community power building, and so the foundation of the work described hereafter that catalyzes, creates, and sustains conditions for healthy communities.

Developing a Shared Analysis and Narrative

In addition to facilitating connections and helping build relationships among community members, community power-building organizations help people develop a shared analysis of the systems that are responsible for the unhealthy conditions in their community. They often challenge people to look below the surface of their problems to the underlying causes and actors: an over-emphasis on corporate profit and power, land speculation in Denver, decline of manufacturing in Detroit, international policy making and migration in Oregon, and overseas, corporate landlords in Austin. In turn, this **shapes the narrative** around how people are defining problems and their root causes.

These organizations also help to build a shared understanding of the structures in place that they can use to influence decisions. An interviewee explained, organizers "help people connect the dots for themselves...between election results, a policy agenda, and the material conditions in their lives that they want to see changed." Having a deep understanding of the causes of their collective problems rooted in power imbalances—understanding their problems are not due to personal mistakes but larger systems and structures—they are able to **develop solutions** and formulate strategies needed to achieve such solutions.

Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC) organized communities and workers across Kentucky to develop and propose formal clean power policy after state leadership refused to do so as part of the Clean Power Plan introduced by then-President Obama. KFTC did this building trust among a base of residents and coal miners so they could collectively envision an alternative to Kentucky's current energy system; through public hearings and a culminating summit, they co-created an alternative energy plan for Kentucky—which accounts for issues from land use to job creation to racial equity.[3]

3 Kentuckians For The Commonwealth. 2016. "Empower Kentucky: Executive Summary of the Empower Kentucky Plan." http://usclimateandhealthalliance.org/post_resource/empower-kentucky-executive-summary-of-the-empower-kentucky-plan/.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
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The shared analyses and solutions also rely on an **understanding of decision-making structures and processes.** In Minneapolis, Right to the City Alliance member Inquilinxs Unidxs organizes tenant assemblies that meet weekly to do just this. Tenants come together to share experiences—such as cockroach infestations or mold on and inside walls that cause asthma and other health problems, particularly for children. They unpack their problems together, which means realizing that these deplorable living conditions are not their fault but rather a result of systemic neglect by landlords and government agencies—therefore, tenants must target these entities to change their conditions.

Building Momentum

Bringing attention to issues and community-led solutions—to catalyze conditions for healthy communities requires **mobilizing the base**—to hearings at city council or school board meetings—and **developing leaders** who come into direct relationship with decision makers. This includes attending and giving testimony at rallies and marches, signing letters and petitions, canvassing and phone banking, and more—and these tactics make waves and often grab the attention of decision makers. But it also includes mobilizing for critical interventions—based on a shared analysis of decision-making structures and processes—that may seem less exciting than a mass march or a vibrant protest.

United for a New Economy (UNE) took on a housing campaign after high rents and poor rental housing conditions surfaced as priorities from residents in Westminster, a northwest suburb of Denver. To push the City to fund free legal clinics for renters to address problems with landlords who were not maintaining their rental properties, UNE brought residents in direct communication through meetings with city councilmembers; UNE won this campaign in 2018. In Aurora, another suburb of Denver, the Colorado chapter of the national women's association 9to5 developed leadership among residents of mobile home parks who attended meetings of and eventually participated in a city council task force to study the issue of displacement of mobile home park residents.

In Des Moines, to address the predatory practices of payday lending, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (Iowa CCI) cultivated and trained members to speak in public to council members and state legislators to raise awareness and present solutions—a strategy that helped build pressure on the Des Moines City Council to pass zoning ordinances.[4] Indeed, members speaking directly to decision-makers—rather than Iowa CCI staff—is a metric of success; a common metric mentioned by many interviewees.

4 Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement. 2016. "Iowa City passes 2nd reading of payday lending ordinance, 7-0." http://iowacci.org/in-the-news/iowa-city-passes-2nd-reading-of-payday-lending-ordinance-7-0/.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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Key to this type of communication with decision-makers—and a key part of leadership development and training—is story telling. In Portland, Maine, for example, the Southern Maine Workers Center trained and mobilized its members to describe living without paid sick time at hearings during the development of what would become LD 369, which includes paid sick time and paid time off.

In the Seattle suburb of Auburn, Washington Community Action Network (Washington CAN) organized residents to fill city council chambers to provide testimony about living in fear of their families being targeted by ICE. After the City refused to allow community members in to share their stories, Washington CAN organized its own town hall to which they invited council members to attend and listen. Not only did this help lead to a Sanctuary City Resolution, but Washington CAN established itself as an influential force—evidenced by Auburn council members attending its annual fundraiser later that year.

Other types of interventions community power-building organizations make to get the attention of those in power can involve the **strategic use of litigation**—especially in places where community power builders may meet more hostility. In Miami, the Miami Workers Center, Struggle for Miami's Affordable and Sustainable Housing (SMASH), and Legal Services of Greater Miami organized tenants to launch a campaign called "Smash the Slumlords." As part of the campaign, SMASH developed a media strategy to expose tenants' horrible living conditions in the Miami Herald led to a successful City-led lawsuit against two of Miami's worst slumlords; they were forced to repair their unsafe units.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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In Atlanta, the state's "Use It or Lose It" law removes registered voters from the rolls if they have not voted in recent elections or been in contact with election officials over a three-year period. In 2017, Georgia's Secretary of State used this rule to oversee the purging of 107,000 voter before going on to (narrowly) win the state's 2018 gubernatorial election.[5] Additionally, precinct closures have adversely affected voter turnout, particularly among Black voters who were 20 percent more likely to miss an election because of long distances than white voters.[6] For this reason, New Georgia Project, among other community power-building organizations, spends its time not only mobilizing voters but also litigating to remove structural barriers to voting.

Another way to think about catalyzing conditions for healthy communities is through the **catalytic campaigns** that fuel efforts forward. Sometimes they come as a result of intentional plans; sometimes they are openings due to external factors; and many times it is the result of a combination of both. In Denver, through a succession of victories—first in support of the teachers strike then in pushing out of the superintendent after six months—a broader, multi-racial, multi-sector coalition came together to run a grassroots campaign for three open seats in the 2019 school board elections; it successfully "flipped the board" from being dominated by pro-charter members.

5 Magee, Ny. 2018. "Voter Suppression: Georgia 'use it or lose it' law purges 107,000 from voter rolls." The Grio, October 21. https://thegrio.com/2018/10/21/voter-suppression-georgia-use-it-or-lose-it-law-purges-107000-from-voter-rolls/.

6 Niesse, Mark and Nick Thieme. 2019. "Precinct closures harm voter turnout in Georgia, AJC analysis finds." Atlanta Journal-Consitution. December 16. https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/precinct-closures-harm-voter-turnout-georgia-ajc-analysis-finds/11sVcLyQCHuQRC8qtZ6lYP/.

Creating Conditions for Healthy Communities: Achieving an Agenda

Developing and Passing Policy and Legislation

The long-term goal of community power-building organizations is to substantially improve the everyday lives of their constituency and the broader community. A critical step towards this are the **policy and legislative solutions** which are waged through **advocacy campaigns** or **community-led ballot initiatives.** This is one of the most well-worn ways to make change, and there are examples across all 16 Lead Local places of how community power-building organizations have been part of efforts that resulted in policies and initiatives that improve their communities' lives. While we have already referenced some of those efforts, here are more examples from the last few years.

In 2017, the Maine Peoples' Alliance helped make Maine the first state to mandate Medicaid expansion through a ballot measure; Organizers and supporters saw this approach as the only path forward under the assumption that the then-governor would veto any measure coming through the legislature. In 2018, BASTA (Building and Strengthening Tenant Action) helped pass a $250 million affordable housing bond in Austin, Texas as well as new regulations on affordable housing and tenant protections. In 2019—after a 10-year campaign—Washingtonians for a Responsible Future helped pass the Long-Term Care Trust Act, which made Washington the first state to approve publicly funded long-term care. That same year, in Oregon, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) helped pass SB 370 that requires employers to notify employees about audits, a law impacting undocumented workers, and the Community Alliance of Tenants, through its Stable Homes for Oregon Families Campaign, helped pass SB 608, the first statewide rent stabilization law in the nation.

Although success related to policies and measures mark significant progress, a key finding also pointed to other areas: implementation and administration of policies is just as important as—if not more important than—passing the policies themselves. And so the work of implementation in the administrative arena is key to moving from creating to sustaining conditions for healthy communities.

Winning—or Protecting—Funding, Programs, and Services

Another set of interventions is through coordinated and targeted efforts to **demand and protect funding, programs, and services—or reinstate cuts.**

For example, in the realm of public transportation, the Detroit People's Party organized bus riders to get the Q-line restored, a critical transit line that gave bus riders access to downtown job centers. In Atlanta, groups won a bus route in Clayton County which exhibited the power of alliance building between Georgia STAND-UP and other groups supporting transit access.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

continued

In Santa Fe, the Chainbreaker Collective led a successful fight against public transportation cuts (although parks and libraries faced cuts as a result). Also in Santa Fe, in 2013, a decade after Somos Un Pueblo Unido had won driver's licenses for undocumented New Mexicans, the organization successfully protected the rule from attempted repeal.

In Detroit, groups including the Detroit People's Platform, Community Development Advocates of Detroit, Coalition on Temporary Homelessness (COTS), and the United Community Housing Coalition came together to advance a housing trust fund that would provide affordable homes for low-income families and families at risk of displacement due to development. As a result, the city is required to allocate 20 percent of all commercial real estate sales taxes—every year—to the housing trust fund. Similarly, in Seattle, the Tenants Union of Washington State not only works to ensure that the City implements the Just Cause Eviction Ordinance but organizes to ensure renters know their rights under the ordinance. And in Oregon, Family Forward Oregon came together with other organizations, students, and educators, to form the Early Childhood Coalition in efforts to pass the Student Success Act, a measure funding K-12 and early childhood programs. The measure passed creating a new tax on businesses to generate an estimated $1billion, annually, to fund the Act.

Winning not only includes getting the government to provide services and programs, but corporations, too. In the economic arena, communities in Minneapolis put forward a demand for economic justice to Target—yes, the global corporation is headquartered there. This emerged when community power-building organizations like TakeAction Minnesota, ISAIAH, labor unions, and others came together in 2010 to generate a shared analysis of decision-making structures and entities directly impacting the conditions facing their communities; Target ended up being, well, their target. The groups developed a collaborative campaign with several demands that would improve conditions across their constituencies and communities and a shared commitment to not make any deals until everyone's issues were addressed; one organizer described it as the following, "None of us are done until all of us win." By working collectively, the coalition was able to secure a 'Ban the Box' policy; neutrality in union recognition for janitors; and increases in wages—This was a remarkable development both for the gains themselves but also because it constituted a direct intervention in the economic or corporate sphere rather than simply an appeal to state regulators or authorities.

In some cases, this work includes expanding funding, programs, and services to address issues and concerns that are voiced by constituencies, sectors, and communities. For example, through the organizing and advocacy work of the Florida Farmworkers Association, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) updated worker protection standards to include farmworkers exposed to pesticides; previously, EPA provisions excluded farmworkers from certain protections.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
continued

Establishing Alternative Models

Another dimension of creating conditions for healthy communities is **establishing alternative programs/models** to expand the realm of what is possible beyond the status quo. Caring Across Generations calls this "modeling power: which invites us to dream, ideate, and innovate to push past what we think is currently possible—and to seize actual opportunities to live in the world we want to create, even if they are experimental and small-scale." Indeed, Caring Across Generations' report illustrates how grassroots and power building coalitions can innovate initiatives and projects and be a leader in forecasting what we need to build.

In Denver, Our Voice Our Schools created the Loving Community Schools system in response to the depletion of public schools and in the wake of the rise of the reform school (i.e., charter) movement. In Atlanta, in response to concerns around the sale of Turner Field and surrounding properties, the Housing Justice League helped establish a first-of-its-kind Stadium Neighborhoods Trust Fund to support economic and community development initiatives like affordable housing and job training.

Sometimes establishing alternative models means community power-building organizations stepping in where existing institutions—including government agencies and non-profits—fall short. In Oregon, community power-building groups like Family Forward Oregon are having to work with county governments to implement paid family leave because the counties are not equipped to implement or enforce this state-level policy. In Illinois, community power-building groups like AFIRE and the Jane Addams Senior Caucus are collectively envisioning the systems required to meet the needs of wokers in the implementation of the state's Domestic Worker Bill of Rights—the direct result of their joint organizing and advocacy work in 2016—as there is little precident for the policy.

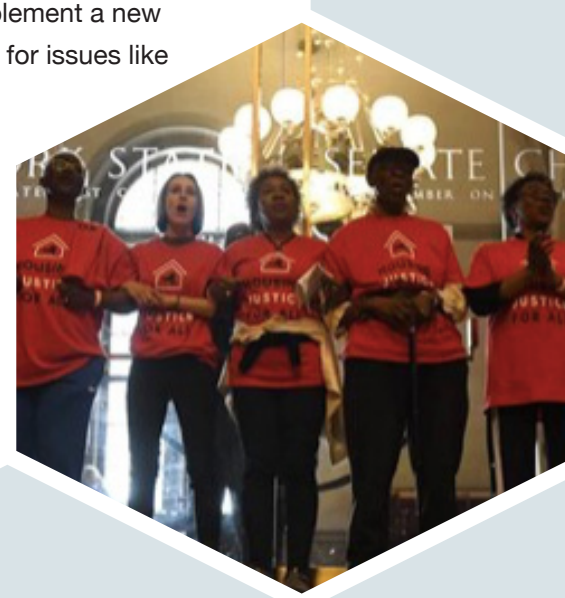
Sustaining Conditions for Healthy Communities: Governing an Agenda

Developing Leaders for Decision-Making Positions

Many interviewees explained that power building is not just about winning policies and elections, but running institutions—or, governing—and having the skills, capacity, and clarity to do so. Indeed, achieving this type of **governing power** is key to implementing change and sustaining conditions for healthy communities. A key part of this is **changing the composition of who is in power and the values upon which they are making decisions.**

Of course, this sort of change is not quick and takes a commitment to **developing a pipeline of leaders who can successfully run and hold positions of authority.** What this might look like is encouraging 'everyday people' based in impacted communities to run for elected office or serve on appointed boards. This was the case in Denver when three school board candidates aligned with Our Voice Our Schools' agenda were elected to the board; similarly, in Washington, volunteers who had been trained by community power-building organizations helped to elect Pramila Jayapal, a local immigrant rights group leader, to the state senate. Jayapal is now a prominent member of the U.S. Congress.

It could also look like the **establishment of and community participation on key taskforces and committees.** For example, after Miami Workers Center and SMASH organized tenants and succeeded in getting the City and County to assemble a taskforce to hold slum property owners accountable for despicable housing conditions. Similarly, the Citywide Tenant Union of Rochester organized with allies to force the City to establish and implement a new housing court where renters would be able to submit claims against landlords for issues like outstanding building repairs.



But it could also look like **community members getting appointed to boards and commissions** that oversee the agencies in charge of policy and program implementation— or getting hired into government staff positions directly. In Minnesota, for instance, ISAIAH helped position one of its members to become second-in-command at the state health department, and so had much influence over the multi-million dollar health equity budget.

In Kalamazoo, Michigan United also helped appoint one of its own members, a long-time housing advocate, as Vice Mayor in the Kalamazoo City Commission. They promptly proposed amendments to the city's housing ordinances to prohibit landlords from discriminating against prospective tenants and to ban blanket housing rejections based on race. In Chicago, the Grassroots Collaborative trained and got its members appointed to the Community-Driven Zoning and Development committee, which works with the city's 35th Ward Alderman to make zoning and development decisions. Because of their presence, the needs of workers and residents experiencing poverty in these neighborhoods are at the center of the conversation.

And remember the $5 million annual tax on Airbnb that Puget Sound Sage and its partners won to help curb displacement in Seattle? As part of that, they also ensured that the fund is administered by a commission of community stakeholders: city officials, nonprofit developers, and representatives from community-based organizations. These are examples of governing power: of getting into the details and working to monitor concrete solutions.

Building Mutual Accountability

It is not enough for elected officials and government agency staff to come from communities most impacted. Once on the "inside" of government, they should make **decisions in partnership with communities** from which they come. In fact, when grassroots leaders successfully assume these types of "insider" roles, many express feeling isolated or disconnected from the community power-building ecosystem that helped put them there in the first place.

As one interviewee eloquently put it, this means developing "[mechanisms] to **be in constant communication** with the communities that they represent so that they know what the priorities are of the communities...and that they are always accountable to the communities." When policy makers are accountable to and engaged with organized bases of people, policies are much more likely to be designed and implemented in a way that actually improves community conditions.

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

continued

Different structures require different **relationships of mutual accountability.** Minneapolis, for example, is governed by a strong council system, meaning that organizations have had to build strong relationships with the council president who can be more important to moving an agenda than the mayor. Community power-building organizations in Detroit are dealing with an emergency manager who was appointed by the state in 2013. The manager has the power to change the ordinances in the city charter and with said authority has dismantled many things like workers' rights and the ability of residents to participate in the city's planning and development decisions.

In Santa Ana, El Centro Cultural joined the Santa Ana Collaborative for Responsible Development (SACRED) to overcome structural hurdles to government accountability and transparency. Together they helped pass the Sunshine Ordinance in 2013. The Ordinance requires, among of things, that elected and department heads keep their calendars open and accessible to the public; that developers meet with the community at the early stages of projects; that the public have access to bids on city service contracts; access to requests for proposals and campaign finance disclosure forms; that statements of economic interest on the city's website; and that city budget outreach be more inclusive of the community.

For officials in elected positions, **voter engagement and mobilization** is one way to keep their attention and to keep them accountable to the community. There is a growing field of community power-building organizations seeking to build sufficient power in the electoral arena, particularly at the state level. Community power-building organizations in Oregon and Washington focus on voter education and mobilization. In Georgia, organizations cannot just focus on education and turnout; they also have to be prepared to fight the state around voter suppression with litigation.

As one interviewee noted, those that they stand in opposition to approach change differently: they first gain decision-making power then they set the agenda. Of course, that approach makes sense when your side has the financial resources and relationships with the political elite to do so. On the other hand, community power-building organizations "have to do with people what they do with money."

HOW COMMUNITY POWER SHAPES CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
continued

Shifting Public Discourse

Critical to sustaining conditions for healthy communities is **shifting the public discourse to reset cultural norms.** "We won a campaign, but we're still fighting the same fight because we didn't actually change the story and expand what people thought about our democracy and how they understood these attacks...We actually need to be intentionally moving narrative and cultural strategies that begin to tell a new story about who we are and it's actually an old story," one interviewee stated.

Shifting narrative is often an overlooked part of change, but it is critical—**the story sets the default interpretation.** Framed as "Dreamers," immigrant youth advanced their interests; framed as "marriage equality," LGBTQ advocates won the right to have their families recognized; and framed as a "living wage," labor organizers were able to push forward increases in the minimum wage.

For years, Caring Across Generations (CAG) has been exploring what it takes to build "narrative power"; or, as CAG describes it in its report, "the ability to tell the story of where we are now and to shape the public narrative of where we can be." What CAG has found is that changing narratives starts on the ground—not from top-down nationwide messaging campaigns. Rather, local contexts of place—historical, demographic, economic, political, and geographic contexts—are critical to consider in shaping narratives that resonate and stick.

Furthermore, dominant narratives and mindsets tend to place the blame on people's own behaviors and choices for poor health, unsafe living conditions, and other problems they face. This can have the effect of furthering people's sense of powerlessness. Yet the challenge is that government is often called upon as the solution—at least as part of the solution—and there is a strong anti-government sentiment. Therefore, groups talked about **helping to restore faith in government** and **exploring effective ways to work with government** (e.g., health departments to support enforcement of safe working conditions, DMVs around driver's licenses for the undocumented, and building and safety departments around enforcement of maintaining humane housing conditions).

All this is especially critical in the current moment. The story we tell ourselves about the COVID-19 pandemic will define how we structure our economy and society for decades to come; whether we are all in this together or we would be better off just protecting our own; whether life is precious and to be protected or whether workers can be sacrificed to jump-start GDP and; whether inequality is unacceptable going forward or whether recovery means reversion.

WHY BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER MATTERS FOR BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

There are many ways to approach change and many roles required in the work to build healthier communities for all. One could look at what we have just laid out about catalyzing, creating, and sustaining conditions for healthy communities and ask: Isn't it more effective to hire a communications firm to bring public attention to an issue? Isn't it faster to achieve policy gains when it is led by policy experts who also have relationships with decision-makers? Can't we just fund the government directly to reform its public participation processes?

We would argue that victories have deeper roots and greater results for change when led and anchored by community power-building organizations. And this is due, in part, to their deeply-seated belief that nothing short of transformational change is needed. When working with "people closest to the pain," in the words of a Faith in Action organizer, one cannot help but see what dramatic changes are needed; furthermore, communities hold organizers accountable to what's needed rather than to what's feasible. They seek transformational change at multiple levels: starting with the individual, to the organization, across organizations, and ultimately at the societal scale.

What has become clear through our research is that the most valuable role that community power-building groups play is often the least visible, hardest to measure, as well as the most challenging to resource. Under an assumption that these factors are interrelated, we have done some work in this area to make the behind-the-scenes work front and center stage; place equal (if not more) weight on transformational metrics as transactional ones; and translate the work to philanthropy.

In prior sections, we have already discussed much of this work: It is building an organized and engaged base around a common issue and action plan. It takes the community education process to develop a shared analysis that then leads to collectively-developed solutions. In the following section, we dive a little deeper into what organizers share as perhaps the most important aspects of their work and discuss how it brings about deeper and bolder change. For the purposes of this project, we focus on leadership development, strategic alliances, and cultural change yet we recognize that this is only a starting list and it not comprehensive.

Focus on people's internal transformation

Across our interviews, we repeatedly heard that community power stems from "realizing you're not alone." One interviewee put it so succinctly: "Building power to us means bringing people together." In coming together to share stories, a type of transformation occurs: People understand that their problems are not unique and not due to any personal shortcoming or mistake but that their problems are ones facing their entire community. It's a **shift from private shame to the desire to make their problems public and collectively build and wield power to change their conditions.**

An organizer from the Maine People's Alliance illustrated this type of transformation in a story about organizing farmers to protect Medicaid. One farmer, in particular, felt embarrassment and guilt for going on Medicaid. Even though Medicaid had provided life-saving care for his wife, as then-Governor Paul LePage repeatedly labeled it "welfare," which he equated to "entitlement" and "free health care paid for by the taxpayers."[7] This underscores the power of narrative.

But when the organizer showed him a video of another farmer describing the same struggles with health care, a "light bulb went off." He realized his lack of access to adequate and affordable health care was not due to some mistake he had made personally, but a structural problem facing all farmers—farmers with whom he would go on to stand side by side at rallies and in a meeting with the governor directly.

7 Kilgore, Ed. 2017. "LePage Insists Medicaid is 'Welfare." New York Magazine, August 30, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/08/lepage-insists-medicaid-is-welfare.html.

And while someone's first public stand may be around a specific demand—like protection of Medicaid, it is likely **that they will continue to fight as the needs and issues shift.** In Denver Meadows, 9to5 sees the legacy of the fight to protect residents of the mobile home park: "When a resident speaks to media and tells their story, they're taking a risk. Because they've done the work, been themselves, and with our support, they've gotten to a point where they want to advocate for themselves: 'I am empowered.'"

Building this lasting capacity among a community is particularly important in hyper-local efforts: The tragic irony is that successful efforts to demand neighborhood improvements can result in increased rents that end up pushing out long-time residents and business owners who fought for the changes in the first place. A well-organized and powerful community is more likely to push for new policies and practices that help protect affordability and their ability to stay in place.

Practice new ways of decision making

Earlier, we highlighted how groups develop grassroots leaders for key decision-making positions as part of efforts to sustain conditions for healthy communities; equally important is the work that they do to **instill new values and practices towards more inclusive decision-making.**

Resilience OC in Santa Ana takes a transformative justice approach by **"changing what the systems around us are doing while also realizing and changing ourselves in that process."** In the heat of a campaign, organizers place just as much importance in changing systems and practices as they do on their own organizational systems and practices. That means also checking oneself and not taking up a "super hero" complex. Instead, it means taking the steps to build trust with people in the community; setting intentional time to listen and learn from them; engaging people at every step in the work; and empowering people and providing a space for people to develop new skills. In short, people's participation is authentic and not tokenized.

Several interviewees talked about the importance of **not replicating oppressive decision-making processes within their organizations**—tactics that they fight against. It is similar to the ways in which organizations are establishing alternative programs to demonstrate the possible—like Loving Schools or neighborhood land trusts. It is just as important to model new ways of inclusive decision making, and leaders learn the skills of inclusive democracy that they continue to hone and employ as they move up in positions of responsibility and authority. This is yet another way to shift systems from the ground-up—by preparing leaders skilled to usher in new ways of working with others, especially with communities most impacted.

Seek to build lasting alliances

Key to community power-building organizations transforming such systems toward healthy communities is building alliances for the long haul. Alliances between community power-building organizations help them connect different constituencies across neighborhoods and issues to discover interconnections between their problems and ultimately develop a collective analysis of the root causes. From there, alliance members can create and strengthen their shared solutions and strategies and increase their capacities to achieve such solutions. In this way, alliances are more than the sum of their parts; they help members **expand their individual identities and interests toward a larger, longer-term vision for healthy communities** (For more on alliance-building, see Pastor, Ito, and Ortiz 2010).

A critical distinction is between long-term alliances and short-term coalitions. The latter—short-term or "tactical" coalitions—come together around an individual policy or campaign, then disband after the win (or the loss). On the other hand, long-term alliances **come together around interconnected issues and work together again and again toward a shared vision for healthy communities**. As a veteran organizer explained, "It is being rooted in staying clear on... what's the bigger thing that we're trying to move, and that each policy fight is supposed to set us up for the next one."

Alliances provide a vehicle for communities to do just this: continue their work together after individual policy campaigns and elections toward a shared vision. This is why alliances are a critical element in our healthy communities equation—particularly the "sustaining" piece. For example, the Fight for 15 in Seattle and SeaTac brought together organizations that, after their landmark victory, leveraged their momentum and relationships to launch their Clean and Safe Ports campaign—a campaign mandating both environmentally sustainable and worker-friendly practices at the port.

And in Austin, Texas, the Workers Defense Project, the Texas Organizing Project, and United We Dream came together under an informal coalition called "Fuerza Texas" ("Strength in Texas") to pass the "Freedom City" resolution in response to SB 4, an anti-immigrant legislative piece allowing local law enforcement to cooperate with immigration enforcement agencies. Leveraging their momentum and relationships, organizers have been able to wage additional campaigns to protect immigrant families in other cities like Dallas and Houston.

7 See USC ERI's 2010 report—published under the former organization name of USC PERE—Connecting at the Crossroads: Alliance Building and Social Change in Tough Times for more: https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/connecting_at_the_crossroads_final_web.pdf.

Much of what it boils down to is trust. Similar to base building, knowing that others will have your back and are driving toward a shared vision for healthy communities is the lifeblood of long-term alliances. In Atlanta, Georgia STAND-UP is working to do just this: Community power-building organizations are helping to bring together Black and Latinx communities—particularly women leaders—to **build relationships and trust as the foundation for future and sustained work together.**

Change the culture of civic engagement

While we have already discussed the importance of cultural shifts and narrative change, what we highlight about the transformational work of the community power-building field is the impact that they are having on changing the culture of civic engagement. Key to this work is **expanding the notion of what civic engagement is:** This includes setting a vision of governance that transforms and expands who votes and on what issues.

One way community power-building organizations do this is by going beyond the often short-term and narrow get-out-the-vote ("GOTV") programs. While elections are important moments to engage with voters on issues and on the importance of voting, the most impactful work of **expanding and diversifying the electorate**—those who actually vote—is the on-going and year-round work of engaging voters in between election cycles. For example, in between elections, New Georgia Project organizes those groups who are disproportionately under-represented among the electorate: namely people of color, those between the ages of 18 and 29, and unmarried women. And indeed, some of this "in between" work includes efforts to reform structures like "Use it or Lose it" that bar certain populations from the polls.

WHY BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER MATTERS FOR BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES *continued*

So to underscore a key point: building a base that is engaged and activated to move the needle on a particular issue happens at all times—before, during, and after elections—and in more arenas of contestation beyond the ballot box—such as in city hall, in the public square, and in corporate board rooms. And to raise another point, having the issues defined by the community—by centering the concerns and voices of the most impacted—can **activate and mobilize the under-mobilized.**

For example, in a 2016 city council election in Portland, Oregon, Chloe Eudaly beat the incumbent by more than 24,000 votes. Eudaly did this by running on a tenant protection platform. Because of the on-going, year-round organizing work of groups like the Oregon Community Alliance of Tenants, there was already an organized base of tenants focused on improving which paid off when the election came around. In her first term, Commissioner Eudaly championed several tenant protection bills, including a bill requiring landlords to pay tenants a relocation fee when tenants are evicted without cause or when rents are raised by more than 10 percent.

Finally, community power-building organizations not only mobilize the under-mobilized to vote but also to motivate others to vote. The Texas Organizing Project (TOP) is developing the leadership of community members while mobilizing voters through its year-round electoral organizing. Through its electoral training programs, community members learn more about electoral processes and canvass to encourage their fellow community members to vote by telling stories and connecting over shared problems—and shared solutions.

INCREASING COMMUNITY POWER FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

So what does this all mean and what actions does it suggest? As we started this report with the top five lessons from this project, we circle back to them now before turning to our top ten list of recommendations:

LESSON #1: Community power-building strategies and capacities are inextricably tied to place. The historical, demographic, economic, political, and geographic conditions and contexts of a place shape and are shaped by community power. Systematic application of the Changing States framework allows us to explore both the specificities of community power in 16 very different places—as well as the commonalities across people and places.

LESSON #2: Community power has multiple dimensions, including setting the public agenda, winning that agenda, and ultimately governing to realize that agenda. Governing power—not just the ability to advocate for and win policies and structural reform but also the ability to oversee their implementation—is crucial. While organizers and communities understand the critical need to shape mindsets and the mainstream narrative, there is often limited capacity to generate narrative change. While some power builders demonstrate skills at navigating administrative and economic arenas of change, there is room to grow in this aspect of governing power.

LESSON #3: Community power is an end goal in and of itself—in addition to being a way to achieve outcomes. It is important to address structural barriers to healthy communities, but the process itself builds organization and leadership within impacted communities in ways that have lasting impact. Because of this, more resources and coordination is needed to lift up leadership and organizational development. The metrics of success need to focus not just on transactions, such as particular policy shifts, but also on transformation at the individual, organizational, inter-organizational, and societal levels.

LESSON #4: Base building and community power building exists within an ecosystem of organizations. This work does not happen in a vacuum. There is an important ecosystem of advocacy groups, legal supporters, research centers, and intermediaries that play an important role. Still, power building should be at the center of the work. While professional advocates, government reformers, or media/communications experts have much to contribute, the most important contribution of power-builders to building healthy communities is often less visible, less frequently measured, and less resourced. In particular, the role of a skilled organizer is critical. For historically-excluded residents to engage in strategies and campaigns that drive towards healthy communities, they must be mobilized.

LESSON #5: The time to invest in power building is now. It is appropriate to think of community power building as a long-term strategy—it is not an activity to be postponed in favor of emergency relief or quicker policy advocacy. Whether talking to statewide groups or hyperlocal groups, all acknowledge that conditions were precarious even before COVID: housing was scarce, health was neglected, immigrants were threatened, wages were inadequate, incarceration was rampant, education was failing, and social distance was growing. Post-COVID, the needs are even starker, but they will only be met if we collectively recognize our connections and if communities are able to force their way into the conversation about the road ahead.

So what investments in power building should be made? We would be remiss if we did not state the obvious: **Fund community power-building organizations with multi-year and general operating grants.**

While we certainly hope that foundations see ways in which they can increase grantmaking to community power-building organizations, we also want to acknowledge that every one of us can set into motion a series of steps that will help strengthen the field. As we discuss in this report, there are different roles in building healthy communities, that everyone can play in increasing community power—from government agencies, legal and policy advocates, national civic organizations, and even academic research centers.

The following are our top ten recommendations:

1. Take steps to center community power. While there is an ecosystem of change actors, the dynamics within that system are often such that community organizing and base building is treated—and funded—as being in service to an agenda determined by professional lobbyists, by funders, or by others outside of the community. To reset such power dynamics and lines of accountability, funds can be given to the base-building organizations to re-grant to policy allies, evaluators, or researchers.

2. Center racial equity in health equity. As we have seen the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 on communities of color, in particular, and the upswell of popular protest against violence on Black people, they are yet more reminders that unless we tackle racial disparities in all systems, our whole society's health and well-being are at risk. Addressing race and racism in all its forms and in all structures must be part and parcel of any health equity initiative.

3. Strengthen organizations and networks that are rooted in communities most impacted by unhealthy conditions, particularly Black and Indigenous communities, which were under-represented in this project. In equity work, paying attention to who is not in the room is often just as important as paying attention to who is. A lack of capacity to organize a community leaves their issues off the table thus allowing problems to persist and worsen over time.

4. Understand the specificities of a place in order to determine what strategies and capacities are needed and how to support or partner with local community power-building organizations. Changing States is one tool that can be adapted to any particular line of inquiry and should be used to engage in dialogue directly with people living and working in the place of interest.

5. Support groups in organizing a constituency base. We often hear from organizers that their funding is tied to campaign outcomes which is important yet does not fully resource the work that it takes to build, maintain, and grow a membership and leadership base. From Seattle to Atlanta to Denver, in places experiencing high levels of urban displacement due to gentrification, organizational bases are being pushed into the suburbs. Such groups could use resources and space for experimentation to organize their constituencies and build urban-suburban-rural connections.

6. Increase the field's capacity to organize toward governing power. Organizations working with those communities most impacted have specialized understandings of capacities, outcomes, and timeframes for building community power—knowledge that should be valued and resourced. Groups need the resources, time, and space to envision and plan for how their demands will get implemented; who will be held accountable for its implementation; reimagining how they could hold that power themselves; and how they would govern differently.

7. Support experiments and efforts in cultural and narrative change—particularly around restoring people's faith in government. Groups see this work as essential but have little capacity to engage or experiment yet see it necessary for this strategy to bubble up from the local context. National messaging and communications strategies often do not resonate at the local level. It should also be driven by the groups themselves—or at least in authentic partnerships with those over communications and other consultants.

8. Explore ways for community power-building organizations to partner with government agencies—to leverage agency resources and offset corporate power and influence. For example, exploring how groups can work with building and safety departments around the enforcement of safe housing conditions; with departments of labor around wage theft; worker health and safety enforcement; or with health departments to advance healthy living and working conditions.

9. Build a network of scholars with the skills and capacity to partner with—and to bolster the work of—community power-building organizations. There are mutually beneficial ways in which universities can partner with groups to build this network. Some examples of how this looks on the ground are the joint training institutes in community organizing like Our Voice, Our Schools and the University of Denver or the New Georgia Project which develops scripts for their campaigns that emerge from the community and are also vetted with attorneys and social science researchers to ensure they make the intended impact.

10. Develop clear measures of community power—including the less visible and less frequently tracked measurements of transformation that are of paramount importance to the field. There are clear outcomes that groups are achieving as discussed in the report—yet to distinguish the added contribution of the community power-building field it is critical to achieve our first recommendation of centering community power.

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES AHEAD

At the start of this project, we could not have predicted such a turning point and transformative moment in our world's history: that a virus could bring the world to a stop and wake up more people to see the precarious pre-COVID conditions that were reality to many. Still tomorrow, it could be a hurricane, a wildfire, or an earthquake that brings devastation and wreaks havoc on a community. While we cannot predict the future, we can take steps to protect the most vulnerable and to remake our communities into places where all can live, play, learn, and thrive. And that begins with building the kind of community power, systems disruption, and story about ourselves and this nation that, in fact, more closely reflects the American ideals we lifted up to the world.

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LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

The following are interviewees we conducted with organizations that are part of the Lead Local Project:

Atlanta, Georgia

- Jordan Brown, Development & Strategic Partnership Manager, Strategic Alliance for New Directions and Unified Policies (Georgia STAND-UP)
- Alison Johnson, Executive Director, Housing Justice League
- Deborah Scott, Executive Director, Strategic Alliance for New Directions and Unified Policies (Georgia STAND-UP)
- Nsé Ufot, Exective Director, The New Georgia Project

Chicago, Illinois

- Jeanne Cameron, Executive Director, Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans
- Lori Clark, Executive Director, Jane Addams Senior Caucus
- Hannah Doruelo, Community Organizer, Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights & Empowerment and Empowerment (AFIRE Chicago)
- Amisha Patel, Executive Director, Grassroots Collaborative
- Ryan Viloria, Interim Executive Director, Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights & Empowerment and Empowerment (AFIRE Chicago)

Denver, Colorado

- Andrea Chiriboga-Flor, Co-Director, 9to5 Colorado
- Cesiah Guadarrama Trejo, Housing Organizer, 9to5 Colorado
- Cassandra Johnson, Co-Director, Our Voice Our Schools
- Carmen Medrano, Executive Director, United for a New Economy
- Soul Watson, Co-Director, Our Voice Our Schools

Des Moines, Iowa

- Matthew Covington, Organizer, Iowa Citizen for Community Improvement (Iowa CCI)
- Andrew Mason, State Policy Director, Iowa Citizen for Community Improvement (Iowa CCI)

Detroit, Michigan

- Ryan Bates, Executive Director, Michigan United
- Linda Campbell, Co-Director, Detroit People's Platform

Eau Claire, Wisconsin

- Robert Kraig, Executive Director, Citizen Action of Wisconsin
- Claire Zautke, Healthcare Campaigns Director, Citizen Action of Wisconsin

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

continued

Kentucky

- Jessica Hays Lucas, Organizing Co-Director, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
- Burt Lauderdale, Executive Director, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth

Miami, Florida

- Trenise Bryant, Executive Director, The Miami Workers Center
- Jeannie Economos, Coordinator of the Pesticide Safety and Environmental Health Project, Farmworker Association of Florida
- Kamalah Fletcher, Board Member, The Miami Workers Center
- Benita Lozano, Community Health Worker, Farmworker Association of Florida
- Adrian Madriz, Executive Director, Struggle for Miami's Affordable and Sustainable Housing (SMASH)
- Antonio Tovar, Executive Director, Farmworker Association of Florida

Minneapolis, Minnesota

- Jennifer Arnold, Co-Director, Inquilinxs Unidxs Por Justicia (United Renters for Justice)
- Elianne Farhat, Executive Director, Take Action Minnesota
- Doran Schrantz, Executive Director, ISAIAH

Oregon

- Lili Hoag, Political Director, Family Forward Oregon
- Katrina Holland, Executive Director, Community Alliance of Tenants
- Reyna Lopez, Executive Director, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)

Portland, Maine

- Rachel Ackoff, Campaigns Director, Maine People's Alliance
- Drew Christopher Joy, Executive Director, Southern Maine Workers' Center
- Jennifer Pirkl, Organizing Director, Maine People's Alliance

Rochester, New York

- Liz McGiff, Executive Director, City-wide Tenants Union of Rochester

Santa Ana, California

- Oswaldo Farias, Director of Operations and Communications, Resilience Orange County
- Claudia Perez, Executive Director, Resilience Orange County
- Gema Suárez, Co-Director, El Centro Cultural de México

Santa Fe, New Mexico

- Marcela Diaz, Executive Director, Somos Un Pueblo Unido
- Tomás Rivera, Executive Director, Chainbreaker Collective

Texas

- Jose Garza, Co-Director, Workers Defense Project
- Ana Gonzalez, Director of Better Builder and Policy, Workers Defense Project

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

continued

- Shoshana Krieger, Organizing Director, BASTA (Building and Strengthening Tenant Action)
- Michelle Tremillo, Executive Director, Texas Organizing Project

Washington

- Maddie Foutch, Campaigns Manager, Washingtonians for a Responsible Future
- Violet Lavatai, Executive Director, Tenant Union of Washington State
- Mary Le Nguyen, Executive Director, Washington Community Action Network
- Nicole Vallestero Keenan-Lai, Executive Director, Puget Sound Sage

Supplementary interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

Chicago, Illinois

- Regina McGraw, Executive Director, Wieboldt Foundation

Denver, Colorado

- Mike Kromrey, Director, Metropolitan Organizations for People

Detroit, Michigan

- Kevin Ryan, Program Officer, Ford Foundation

Eau Claire, Wisconsin

- David Liners, State Director, WISDOM

Kentucky

- Alicia Hurle, Deputy Organizing Director for Democracy and the Saturday Black Citizenship in Action Group, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth

Miami, Florida

- Andrea Mercado, Executive Director, New Florida Majority
- Santra Denis, Interim Executive Director, Miami Workers Center
- Quanita Toffie, Senior Director, Groundswell Action Fund

Rochester, New York

- Mary Lupien, City Councilmember, City of Rochester

Santa Fe, New Mexico

- Robby Rodriguez, Program Officer, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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IMAGE CREDITS

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