



SPARCC: Igniting Systems Change

The Strong Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge ([SPARCC](#)) is designed to ignite systems change in how communities plan, design, and invest in community development projects. SPARCC has a holistic vision for addressing the fundamental relationship between racial inequity, health disparities, and climate vulnerabilities, and for proposing inclusive solutions for change.

Racial equity is at the heart of all SPARCC projects. SPARCC partners have made a commitment to support the empowerment of people to create communities in which everyone, regardless of race or origin, has the opportunity to thrive. SPARCC projects encompass housing, transportation, health and the environment, and they are accomplished through regional “collaborative tables” whose members include citizens, leaders and stakeholders, including local policymakers.

Research shows that place¹ as well as race² matter and that both impact life expectancy and social economic mobility. While recent attention has been paid to cities experiencing rapid economic growth and development, less is reported about the vast majority seeing higher and more concentrated rates of poverty.³ Many of these struggling areas are living the legacy of the entrenched “norms” of an America built on class and race, including practices ranging from government redlining dating to the 1950s that [excluded thriving neighborhoods of color](#) from investment, to constructing highways through low-income neighborhoods and building polluting power plants next door. These actions resulted from infrastructure built on structural racism and an investment in [systemic inequalities](#), particularly between blacks and whites, whose corrosion of the moral, social and economic fabric of the country is now at a crisis point.

This paper explores several key SPARCC concepts and approaches to advancing systems change. It spotlights regional efforts and serve as a guide to actualize systems change from theory to reality. It includes an appendix of tools and resources to assess and prioritize systems change activities.

What is Systems Change? A strategy that shifts the function or structure of a system to address the root cause of a problem.

A Systems Change approach in community revitalization can lead to greater understanding of the policies, practices, and institutions that create inequities – whether accidental or intentional. Through the development process such an approach creates an environment that can mobilize action and institutionalize change. It includes a “systems thinking” analysis to understand the root cause of an issue and identifies transformational integrated solutions.

¹ Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Jones, M., Porter, S. (March 2018). Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective. The National Bureau of Economic Research. NBER Working Paper No. 24441. Retrieved from http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/race_paper.pdf

² Thompson, J. P. (2016). Place Matters, and So Does Race. *Urban Affairs Review*, 53(1), 210-218. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1078087416633876>

³ Cortright, Joe; Mahmoudi, Dillon. Lost in Place: Why the persistence and spread of concentrated poverty—not gentrification—is our biggest urban challenge. *City Report*. December 2014.

Over the next decade, the public sector alone – as part of general maintenance and budgeted improvements – will invest trillions of dollars in communities across the country. SPARCC seeks to leverage these investments to change the systems that shape the built environment based on three key components that are required for transformational systems change adapted from John Kotter's approach to accelerate change⁴—1) create the conditions for change; 2) mobilize action; and 3) implement and institutionalize systems change. To create the proper conditions for change, SPARCC identifies a “catalytic moment,” an opportunity or event that can be leveraged to fundamentally reshape the built environment, such as a major public-sector investment, change in political will, or new policy. A guiding coalition of collaborative table members is selected to advance the theory of change and strategic visions. In order to mobilize action, key Influencers and barriers are identified to help make the case for why change is needed, incorporating various techniques ranging from a data-driven approach to storytelling. The final phase of implementation and institutionalizing SPARCC systems change includes the executions of quick wins through an impact-effort analysis, fostering a learning culture, and institutionalizing change through policies, process, projects, and programs to establish the “new status quo.”

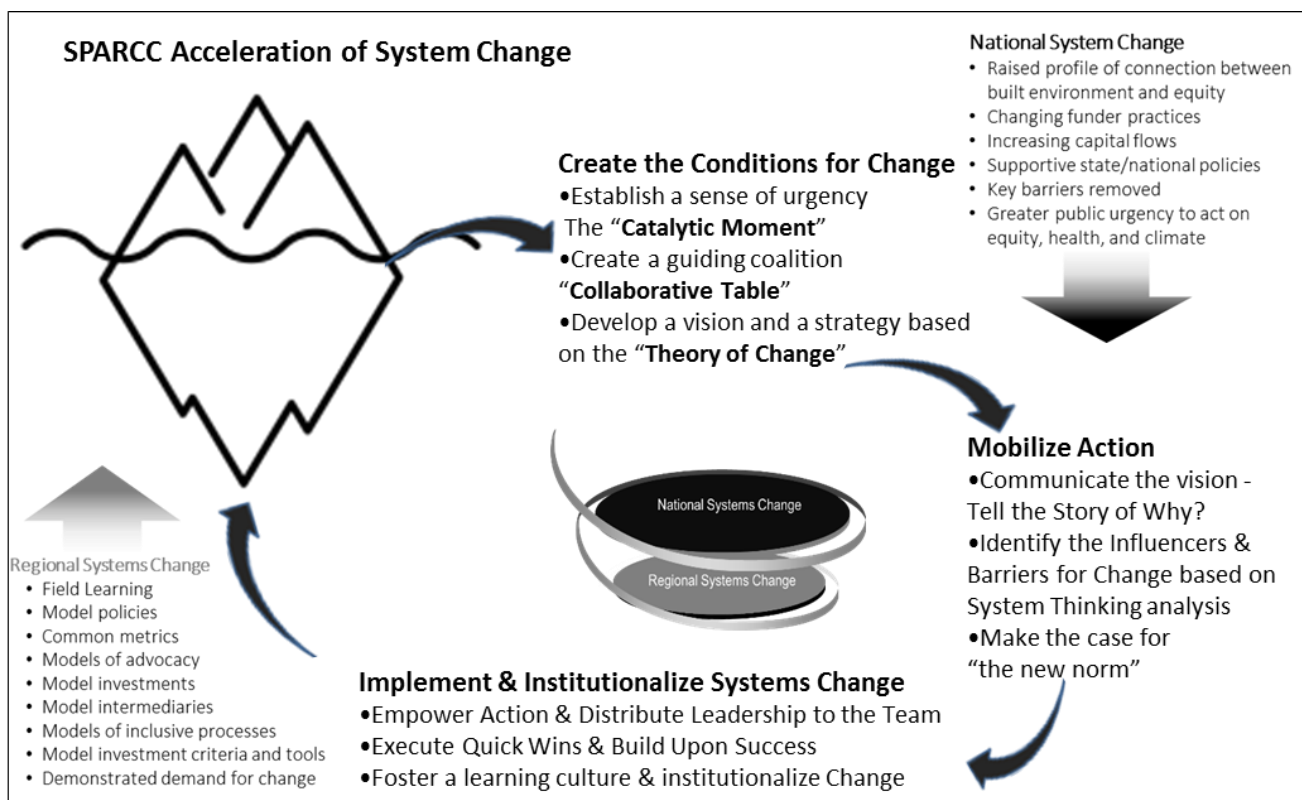


Figure 1. SPARCC Acceleration of Systems change provides an overview of the Systems Change Process.

Transformational impact requires a plan that communicates to the hearts and minds of people who invariably influence the systems that affect our lived experience as a society. Leaders, advocates, practitioners often look to policies, practices, and resource tools to change the status quo. However these strategies are the tip of the iceberg (See Figure 1.) toward transformational systems change. Exploring the norms, values, and assumptions that occur below the surface of observed behavior offers a deeper understanding and opportunity to shift the “business-as-usual” mindset.

⁴ Kotter, J. P. *8 Steps to Accelerate Change in 2015*. Kotter International. Retrieved <https://www.kotterinc.com/wp-content/uploads/background-photos/8-Steps-for-Accelerating-Change-eBook.pdf>

SPARCC aims to demonstrate the benefits of integrated solutions that advance racial equity, improve health outcomes, and increase climate resilience. This approach, along with the acceleration of systems change strategies, distinguishes SPARCC from other community development initiatives.

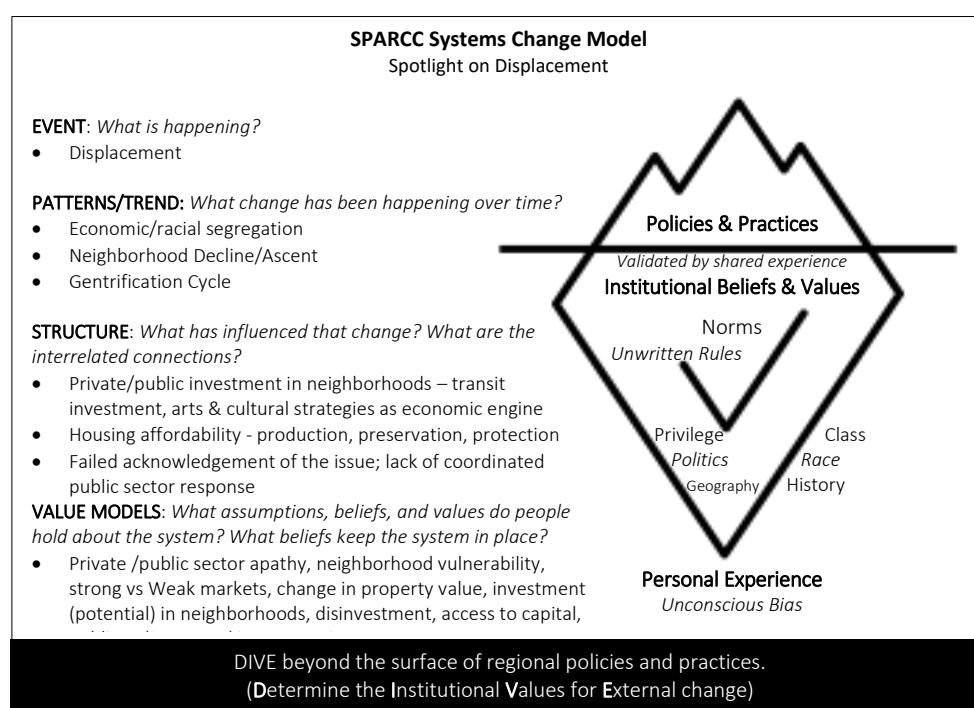
Another challenge facing communities is the impact of major investment. New transit stations or parks and open space, for example, are often thought to be positive developments that bring opportunity to communities. But, with a growing affordable housing shortage and traffic congestion, such investments are leading to displacement of existing residents in what were once affordable neighborhoods in cities nationwide.

For SPARCC, systems thinking analysis helps determine the institutional values for external change to “dive” below the surface of policies and practices, including those previously believed to be solutions for disinvestment. Diving deeper and analyzing the structures of the neighborhood system, such as housing affordability, the production of new housing, preservation of existing housing, and protection of renters/tenants offers greater insight on what may influence systems change. Finally, evaluating the value models of the systems, such as classism and racism, can offer holistic integrated solutions toward change.

Systems thinking can help address the root cause of an issue and identify holistic solutions by answering the following questions:

- ***What is happening?*** Identify the event or action that’s occurring. Who benefits? Who is burdened?
- ***What are the changes that have been occurring over time?*** Analyze what is happening in the community in historical context and analyze patterns and trends.
- ***What has influenced that change? What are the interrelated connections?*** Assess the systemic structures to find out who or what is influencing change?
- ***What assumptions, beliefs, and values do people hold about the system? What beliefs keep the system in place?*** Evaluation of value models (e.g. racism, classism, sexism, privilege, etc) and the willingness to embrace positive change can foster the development of new approaches.

Figure 2. The SPARCC Systems Change Model provides a system thinking analysis on the challenge of displacement (see below).



OPERATIONALIZING SYSTEMS CHANGE

SPARCC has focused its collective efforts initially with six regional collaborative tables in Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Memphis, and the San Francisco Bay Area. It includes national partners -- Enterprise Community Partners, the Low-Income Investment Fund, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, and the Natural Resources Defense Council -- as well as philanthropic and other capital partners to transform three major systems impacting community development:

- 1) **CAPITAL MARKETS.** SPARCC will use capital investments that influence the market to better achieve climate resilience, better health and racial equity goals;
- 2) **PUBLIC SECTOR.** SPARCC will reform the way that public investments, planning processes, and policies to advance equitable development achieve multiple community benefits; and,
- 3) **COMMUNITY POWER.** SPARCC will elevate the power and voice of community-led development processes by prioritizing the needs of community members, assets and needs.

National Systems Change Goals:

- **Influence the field of practice** to institutionalize more equitable and just outcomes for low-income people and communities of color.
- **Advance the implementation of model projects, policy approaches, and financing strategies** that support the integration of racial equity, health, and climate-resilience.
- **Develop tools and resources** that improve social outcomes that can result from the built environment.

Approach

- **Document practices** that create more equitable outcomes for communities.
- **Invest in model/pilot projects** that support integrated solutions and measurable outcomes.
- **Foster greater collaboration**, including peer exchanges and forums on systemic community development issues.

Integrated Solutions

- **Racial Equity:** Implement policies and practices that dismantle structural and institutional barriers.
- **Health:** Leverage and align health system investments to address social determinants of health.
- **Climate:** Incorporate the considerations of climate resilience into public and private plans and investments.

SPARCC is operationalizing systems change outcomes by strategically influencing the decisions and dollars invested in 6 regions across the country— focusing on the ways policies, programs, and the allocation of resources are made to create more equitable outcomes for communities.

SPARCC sites are conducting systems change workshops in each region, analyzing the social equity implications of local policies, plans, and projects. The systems change workshops are intended to assess integrated strategies and holistic approaches versus the siloed impact of individual activities to achieve systems change goals. They also provide an opportunity for participants to identify barriers, possible solutions, resources and key relationships that will be needed to move policy and systems change goals forward over the course of the initiative.

SPOTLIGHT OF REGIONAL SYSTEMS CHANGE IN ACTION

SPARCC regional sites have demonstrated their ability to set bold goals to advance racial equity, health, and climate resilience in their respective regions. Examples of how they are achieving systems change outcomes can be found through their various innovation projects below:

Denver

West Denver Single Family Plus Pilot Program (WDSF+)

Opportunities to lift families out of poverty are critical to improving child and overall family health outcomes. WDSF+ will support low-income homeowners in nine gentrifying West Denver neighborhoods to create new rental housing units as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU). WDSF+ is piloting the financial viability of ADUs and working with the city to make it cheaper and easier for low-income homeowners to build ADUs to generate wealth and reduce the impacts of displacement. The WDSF+ is specifically informed by the Denver Neighborhood Equity Index created by the Denver Department of Public Health Environment and by DHA's Healthy Living Initiative (HLI).

Los Angeles

Equitable Park-Oriented Development

A collaborative of nonprofit and public agencies committed to supporting multi-benefit investments that support healthy, climate-resilient, and equitable development for all is studying the impacts of green spaces on displacement. This research will help urban communities advocate for the types of green spaces that work best for their communities without added fears of displacement, and provides public agencies and stakeholders with "right-sized" displacement protections to include in policies.

Atlanta + Bay Area Project

Advancing Upstream Investments in Health Equity

To address health inequities caused by social determinants of health, the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) and the Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement (ARCHI) are collaborating to develop replicable models for increasing capital investments by healthcare institutions to meet communities' health needs at the lowest possible cost. The cross-geographic team will design and implement small-scale, low-risk demonstration projects to determine the most effective approach for health system engagement.

Bay Area + Los Angeles Project

No Net Loss of Affordable Housing

The LA and Bay Area collaboratives will develop sharable strategies for implementing no net loss of affordable homes near transit through policy and data tools. Both the SPARCC Bay Area and LA tables have been instrumental in their regional transit agencies' passing "no net loss" affordable housing policies near transit. The grant will ensure that these policies are implemented in a way that benefits vulnerable communities. The project will address transportation agency gaps by 1) creating standardized data and performance metrics to track change and the impact of agency actions over time, 2) developing practical agency policy tools to ensure no-net-loss goals are explicitly stated and met, and 3) improve understanding how different transportation funding sources can advance affordable housing and anti-displacement strategies.

Appendix Guide: Systems Change Worksheets

The SPARCC Team developed several worksheets to help advocates and practitioners consider various approaches to advance systems change solutions. The worksheets were used as part of the systems change workshops conducted by regional SPARCC sites. Key activities include—power mapping, conducting an impact/effort analysis of activities, and an assessment of policy approaches. The *power mapping worksheets* help identify key influencers, the group’s ability to influence change, and assess the relationship commitment and alignment of work for change. The *activity reflection worksheet* provides guiding questions to assess current activities. The *impact-effort worksheets* offer analysis of strategies, partners, resources, and technical support to help prioritize systems change activities. These worksheets are intended to assess integrated strategies that achieve systems change outcome goals.

POWER MAPPING

Power mapping is a tool used to identify the best individuals to target and promote social change. The role of the relationships and networks is critical for social change.

- WORKSHEET 1: [Systems of Influence Assessment](#). *This activity will help identify target influencers.*
 NOTE: Consider using the identified categories as a system of influence.
 - Category 1: Sector Focus (Housing, Transportation, Health, Environment)
 - Category 2: Type of Institution (Government, Private/Business, Civic)
 - Government – Federal, State, Regional, Municipal
 - Civic Organization – Community Group, advocacy organization, non-profit
 - Private/Business – Banks, Corporations, developers
 - Category 3: Specific Organization/Office/Department/Agency
 - Category 4: People (Mayor, Council, Public Official, CEO, President, Staff)
 - Category 5: Tools used to Influenced (policy, programs, procedures)
- WORKSHEET 2: [Systems of Influence List](#) (Used for Shared Group Assessments)
- WORKSHEET 3: [Assessing Your Current Power of Influence](#)
This worksheet maps the level of influence on a grid based on worksheet 1 or 2
- WORKSHEET 4: [Relationships Assessment](#)
Assess the current commitment and alignment of work.

[ACTIVITY ASSESSMENTS](#)

Key questions that can help assess current activities.

IMPACT EFFORT ANALYSIS

Impact effort analysis of strategies, partners, resources, and technical support help to prioritize systems change activities.

- WORKSHEET 1: [Impact Effort Activity Assessment](#)
- WORKSHEET 2: [Activity Assessment](#)
- WORKSHEET 3: [Resource Assessment](#)
- WORKSHEET 4: [Integration of Solutions & Approaches](#)

[POLICY ASSESSMENT WORKSHEETS](#)

Key questions that can help assess policy strategies.



Systems of Influence Assessment

This activity will help identify target influencers. Please answer each question and then discuss as a group.

<i>What systems are you trying to influence?</i>	<i>Who are key influencers of the system?</i>	<i>Key Points of Influence? (How do you influence this system? What do they value?)</i>	<i>What are the current barriers to change?</i>	<i>How are YOU influencing /impacting the system?</i>

Systems of Influence List (Group Worksheet)

Based on the group discussion, please list your systems of influence and key influencers

What systems are you trying to influence?	Key Influencers? (Elected Officials, Government, Civic & Community Leaders, Philanthropic, Nonprofit, Business/Corp)
	<div>A.</div> <div>B.</div> <div>C.</div> <div>D.</div> <div>E.</div>
	<div>A.</div> <div>B.</div> <div>C.</div> <div>D.</div> <div>E.</div>
	<div>A.</div> <div>B.</div> <div>C.</div> <div>D.</div> <div>E.</div>

Assessing Your Current Power of Influence

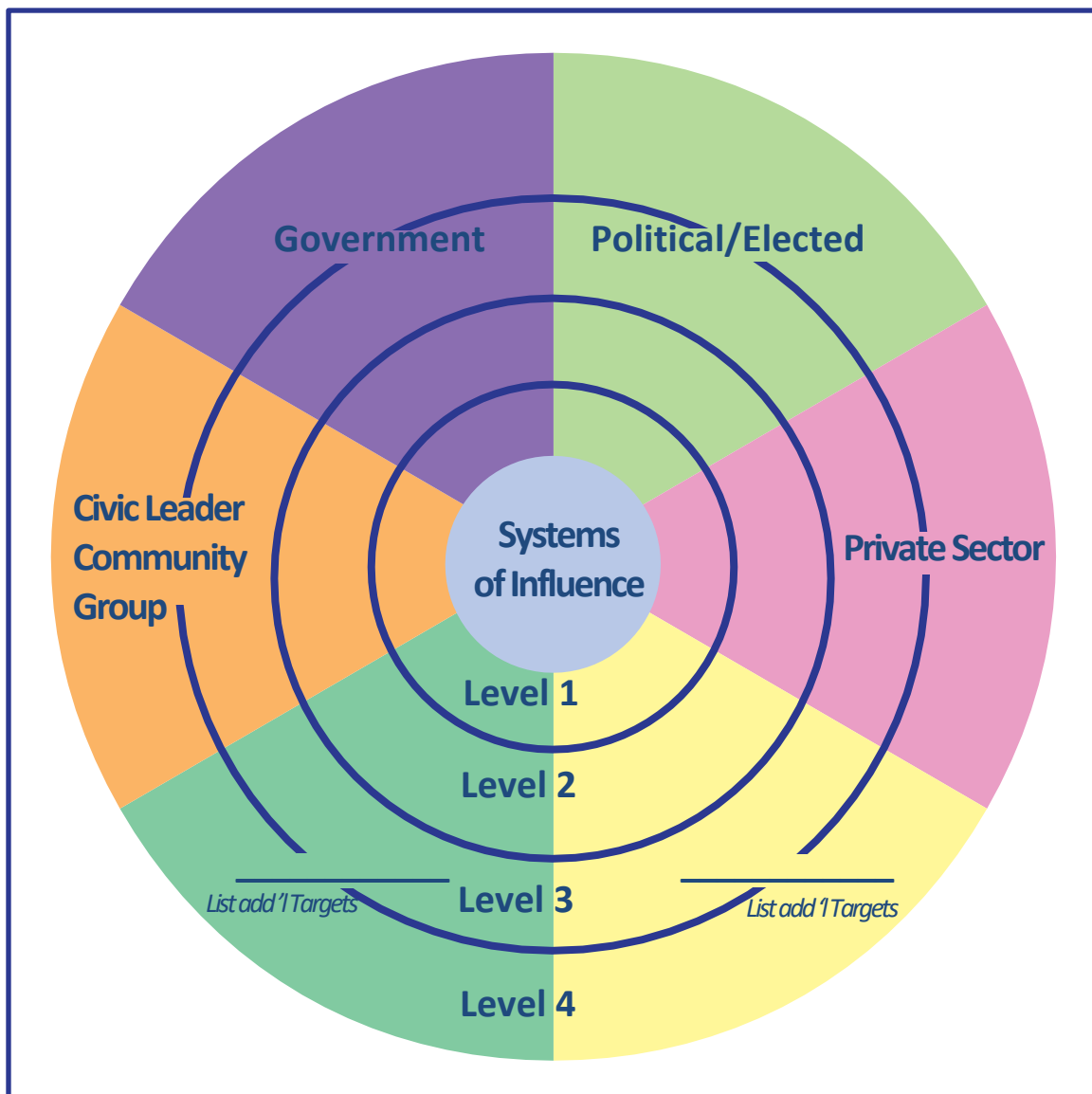
(Using the systems of influence list created in the previous activity. Identify each influencer's corresponding letter and map your level of influence in the grid below).

LEVEL 1 I, or a board or staff member, have a personal connection

LEVEL 2 We can call and the call will be returned because the contact knows us

LEVEL 3 We know them, but they may not know us

LEVEL 4 We have heard of the person/organization



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<http://www.communitypartners.org/civic-power-grid>



Relationships Assessment

List key stakeholders below. Assess their current commitment and alignment to your work.

Low – COMMITMENT TO ACTION - High	High Commitment, Low Alignment (High Burden, High Support)	High Commitment, High Alignment (High Benefit, High Support)
	Low Commitment, Low Alignment (Low Burden, Low Support)	Low Commitment, High Alignment (High Benefit, Low Support)
Low – ALIGNMENT OF VALUES - High		

- High Commitment, High Alignment (Engage in Partnership)
- High Commitment, Low Alignment (Identify Potential Areas of Opportunity to Align)
- Low Commitment, High Alignment (Meet to Engage & a Foster Relationship)
- Low Commitment, Low Alignment (Avoid Over Commitment)

Activity Reflection

- How are your current activities aligned with influencing key institutions or systems?
- Are these activities sufficient to influencing the system?
- Are some activities a higher priority than others?
- Which have the most impact based on the effort required?

Assessing Your Current Power of Influence

Mapping Group Assets

- Who do we know/what do we bring that has influence inside and from outside of the field?
- What will it take to mobilize these assets?
- What power/influence does the group share? How can it be strengthened?
- What knowledge have we learned from our past experiences?



SPARCC

Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge

An initiative of Enterprise Community Partners, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, the Low Income Investment Fund, and the Natural Resources Defense Council

Impact/Effort Activity Assessment

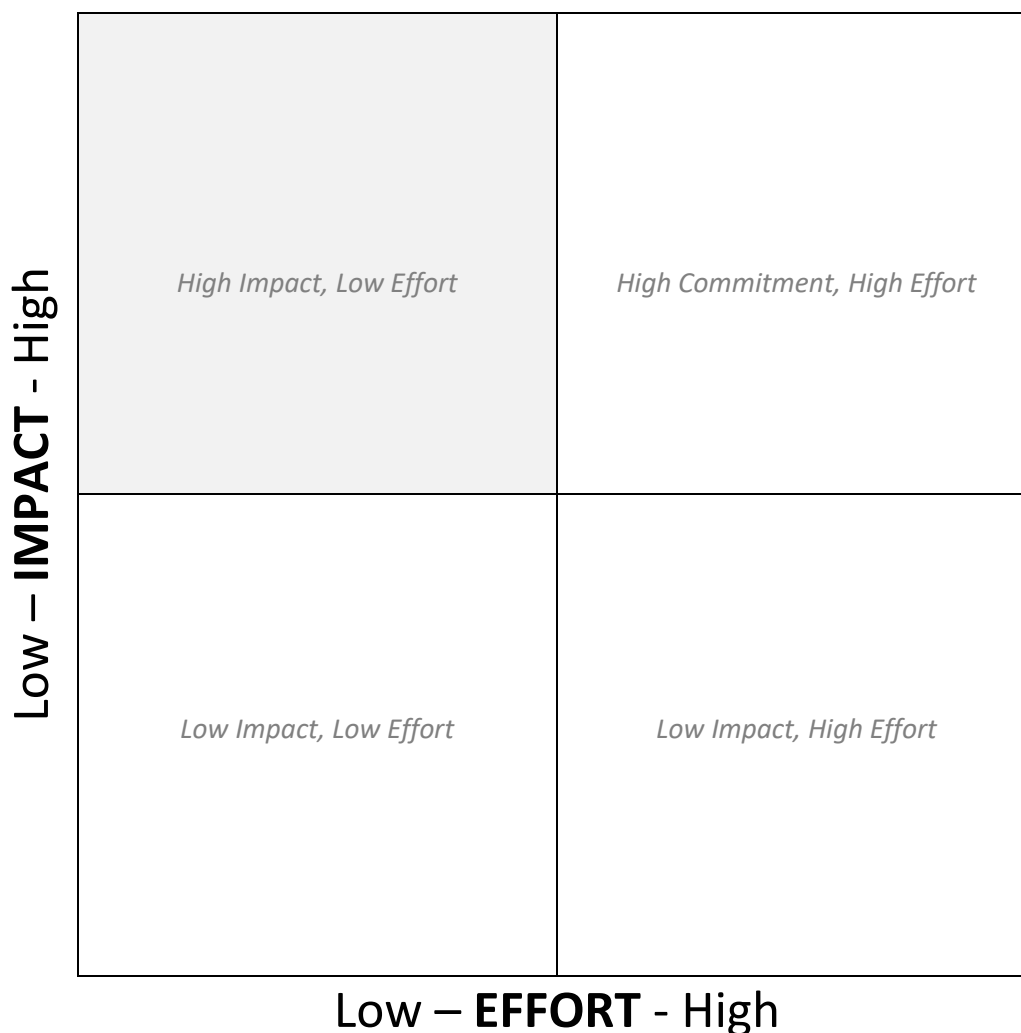
Please answer each question and then conduct the impact/effort analysis.

Key Strategy	Critical Partners	Resource & TA Support (See Resource Assessment)	Integration Opportunity (See Integration Approach)	Impact/Effort Analysis (see Activity Assessment)



Activity Assessment

List key strategy activity below. Assess the impact based on the effort required.



- QUICK WINS (High Impact, Low Effort) *Good Return for relatively low effort*
- MAJOR PROJECTS (High Impact, High Effort) *Strategic but complex w/ longer execution time.*
- CONSIDER (LOW IMPACT, LOW EFFORT) *only if you have time & resources.*
- AVOID (LOW IMPACT, HIGH EFFORT)

Resource Assessment

For each of the key strategies, please answer the following questions listed below.

What are current resources available & key limitations?

-
-
-

How may you be able to supplement what is needed (consider the relationship assessment).

-
-
-

Are there activities that need to be refined, prioritized, or eliminated based on resources and impact?

-
-
-

Integration of Solutions & Approaches

Key Activity #1 _____

How are you integrating the various health, climate, and equity solutions with this activity?

- HEALTH _____
- CLIMATE _____
- EQUITY _____

Are there other key actors/partners that could be engaged (based on the integration)?

What would be a perceived barrier by allies (based on the integration)?

Who would be negatively impacted by this approach?

Key Activity #2 _____

How are you integrating the various lens with this activity?

- HEALTH _____
- CLIMATE _____
- EQUITY _____

Are there other key actors/partners that could be engaged (based on the integration)?

What would be a perceived barrier by allies (based on the integration)?

Who would be negatively impacted by this approach?

Integration of Lenses & Approaches

Key Activity #3 _____

How are you integrating the various lenses with this activity?

- HEALTH _____
- CLIMATE _____
- EQUITY _____

Are there other key actors/partners that could be engaged (based on the integration)?

What would be a perceived barrier by allies (based on the integration)?

Who would be negatively impacted by this approach?

Key Activity #4 _____

How are you integrating the various lens with this activity?

- HEALTH _____
- CLIMATE _____
- EQUITY _____

Are there other key actors/partners that could be engaged (based on the integration)?

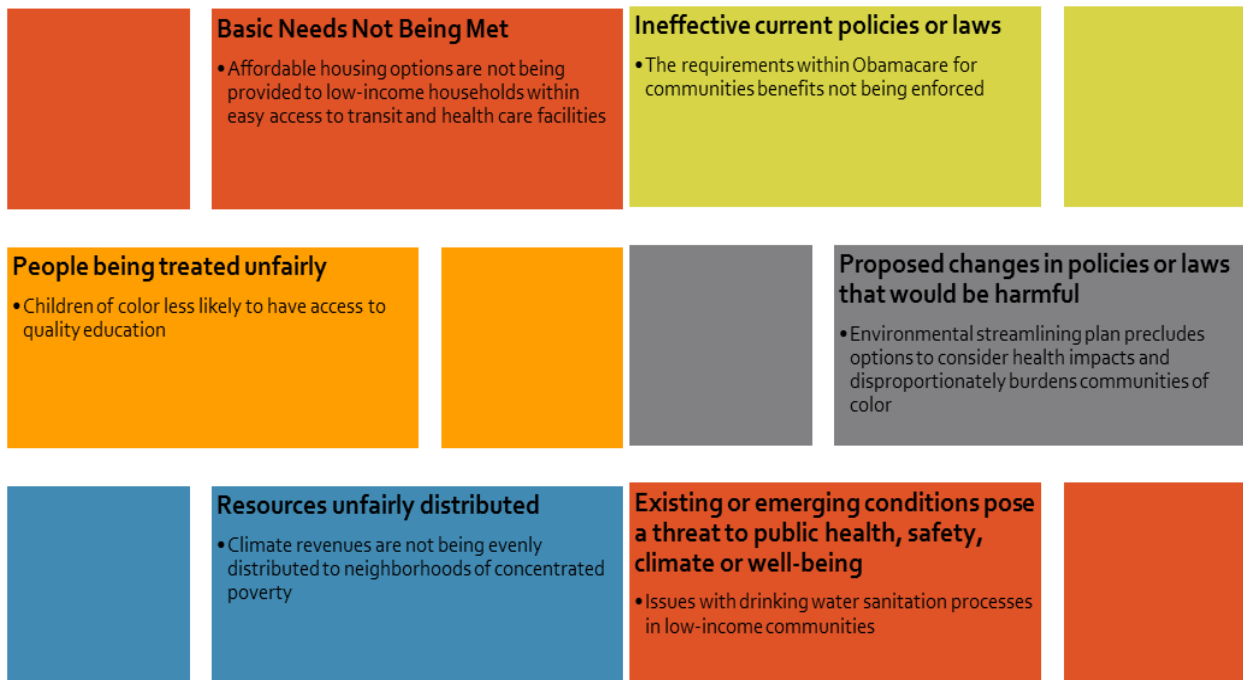
What would be a perceived barrier by allies (based on the integration)?

Who would be negatively impacted by this approach?

Policy Assessment Worksheet

SPARCC assumes that policy + data strategies will work to integrate across racial equity, health and climate outcomes. Further, that racial equity is a fundamental part of the SPARCC policy process.

1. **What is the problem to be addressed? Thinking about the catalytic moment your collaborative table is working to leverage, state why a policy needs to be developed or modified over the next 3 years. The following chart shows some of the factors to consider as you brainstorm, thinking about deeper structural, institutional or political barriers that underlie policy needs.**



What are possible solutions? Define the issues or current policy in neutral terms and generate possible policy related solutions, specifically considering whether there are related impacts to health, climate and equity –

- Public laws or ordinance change (at city/county, state/province/tribal, or national levels)-
 - Regulatory policies (at city/county, state/province/tribal, or national levels)-
 - Other Administrative Action or Organizational Practice -
2. **What is the role of quantitative and qualitative data? How can data help to refine the issues and assess possible solutions?**
 - **Quantitative data:** Data can help identify areas that are at risk of displacement and can help identify parcels and properties that are key targets for acquisition/investment.

- **Qualitative data:** Resident voice data can help to identify problem buildings or problem landlords (e.g. code enforcement issues, tenant harassment and evictions), highlighting prime opportunities for ac/rehab
3. **Select a strategy.** Based on the potential policy solutions and assessment of data identified above, select one and determine what type of policy intervention might be needed. In selecting, consider who do you need to influence and do you have existing relationships to do that?
 4. **Policy Setting Stages.** During the next three years, which policy development stage do you need to influence? What broad goals do you need to achieve to be effective under each stage?
 - a. Communications and Framing. Bring the issue to the attention of the public and decision maker and frame the issues and available policy options. Determine which data is needed to enhance communication message (both technical and cultural/relational)
 - b. Policy Adoption. Influence the adoption of a preferred policy option through educating and lobbying decision makers -
 - c. Policy Implementation. Assure effective implementation of adopted policies -
 - d. Policy Evaluation. Assess the effects of adopted policies to advance climate, health, and equity outcomes and adjust as needed –
 5. **Identify resources and assets.** Within your collaborative table, what resources and assets can be used for policy development; including:
 - a. The number and kind of people who are available and committed to working on the problem or issue-
 - b. The financial resources anticipated and currently available (are there any constraints placed on financial resources?) -
 - c. The communication technologies, facilities, and other material resources available-
 - d. What relationships does your coalition currently have to influential policy makers or community thought leaders? –
 - e. Other assets that can be used to support the effort-
 6. **Allies or Opponents.** Indicate potential allies and opponents of policy development efforts:
 - a. Identify likely allies outside of your existing collaborative table and how they could support the effort-
 - b. Identify likely opponents and how they might resist or oppose the effort because of the consequences of your proposed policy-
 7. **Evaluation.** When assessing the evaluation of the policy development effort:
 - a. What indicators will signify “success” (e.g., in adoption of desired policy options; in more faithful policy implementation; in achieving longer-term outcomes.)-
 - b. How measures of success will be obtained (e.g., review records; interviews with implementers and those affected.)-
 - c. Describe how the information will be used to improve the policy (e.g., feedback will be provided to elected and appointed officials on outcomes)

This document is a modified version of a larger Policy Development assessment created for The Community Tool Box, a service of the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/influencing-policy-development>