



# 2020 SPARCC Site Summaries

June 2021

The Strong, Prosperous, And Resilient Communities Challenge – or SPARCC – is investing in and amplifying local efforts in six regions to make sure that major new investments in the places we live, work, and play lead to equitable and healthy opportunities for everyone. The SPARCC evaluation team<sup>1</sup> conducts annual site visits and interviews with partners at each of the six SPARCC collaborative tables to understand and document SPARCC’s contribution to systems change related to community development. Given the unique challenges and adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, the site visits looked a bit different in 2020. Instead of in-person meetings and interviews, the evaluation team collaborated with SPARCC partners in the design of virtual site visits. The resulting format of the “visits” varied between the sites, ranging from individual interviews with site leads, group interviews with key partners, to a half-day celebratory event with table members in attendance. These site summaries were designed in collaboration with site leads to highlight sites’ individual work in 2020.

In addition to the site visits, other data sources informed the summaries including site work plans, grant/progress reports, interviews with SPARCC national team members, observations of select SPARCC events (both national and local), and table surveys from each of the six sites. The different sources allow triangulation of information to understand progress and learning in SPARCC.

This package features site summaries for the six SPARCC collaborative tables: TransFormation Alliance (Atlanta), Bay Area 4 All, Elevated Chicago, Mile High Connects (Denver), North Memphis VOICE Coalition, and SPARCC LA (Los Angeles). Each summary begins with a (1) brief overview of the history and mission of the table, (2) followed by key progress and impact made in various areas such as table development, community leadership and power, capital, and policy, and (3) concludes with a section about next steps.

<sup>1</sup> The SPARCC evaluation team is led by the [Center for Community Health and Evaluation](#) in collaboration with consultant Beth Altshuler Muñoz

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SPARCC's collective work in increasing awareness, building relationships, trust, and administrative infrastructure in the first three years of the initiative laid the foundation and allowed organized, collaborative entities to both advance existing priorities, as well as effectively respond to the challenges of 2020. For example, SPARCC contributed to the sites' ability to do the following:

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**Covid-19  
Response**

- » SPARCC site tables were poised to act when COVID-19 hit. All sites engaged in responsive, direct-service actions in housing (e.g., advocacy for eviction moratoriums), basic needs (e.g., safety, food, utilities, Wi-Fi), transportation and transit (e.g., personal protective equipment for operators), health care delivery support (e.g., COVID-19 testing), and small business support (e.g., funding).
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**Table  
Development**

- » All sites worked on adding and/or amplifying community resident or community-based organization/organizing voices, including more BIPOC-led partners. Over half of the sites worked on strengthening table infrastructure, including hiring staff and increasing capacity.
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**Community  
Leadership  
and Power**

- » All sites offered clear examples of new voices in decision-making spaces, influencing planning/policy processes and priorities, and pushing decision-makers to shift the direction of policy and practice. Tables had established and tested direct feedback loops to communities in the first three years of the initiative that were leveraged in 2020 by both the tables themselves and government entities.
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**Capital**

- » Capital development projects continued to move forward in most sites, including some key pre-development investments in a couple sites that contributed to projects moving forward and/or influenced who controlled the project (e.g., BIPOC, community-responsive developers).
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**Policy and  
Practices**

- » All sites worked on cultivating their local policy environments to increase the likelihood formal policies in alignment with SPARCC values could occur in the future. They did this through building relationships, increasing awareness, and influencing practice change within government agencies or entities that reach across a county or region (e.g., transit agencies, planning commissions) or establishing regional collaborative infrastructure.
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In 2021, all sites are moving beyond emergency response work related to the COVID -19 pandemic and shifting towards long-term recovery strategies. Notably, partners from four SPARCC sites, Atlanta, Bay Area, Denver, and Memphis have formed a broader health equity coalition to advocate for the Federal Health Equity for All ACT, which aspires to reinvent the health infrastructure to promote inclusive well-being and community-driven and localized interventions. The group is meeting regularly to hone its vision and strategies.

# The TransFormation Alliance (TFA)



Founded in 2015, the TransFormation Alliance ([TFA](#)) started with a focus on equitable transit-oriented development in legacy Black communities and has grown considerably to include 35 member organizations. Its work has expanded to include housing choice, transit funding, community engagement, creative placemaking, a healthy built environment, and job access. TFA is led by an executive committee consisting of seven organizations who lead the collective effort in different content areas: the [Partnership for Southern Equity](#) (racial equity), [Georgia STAND UP](#) (community leadership), [ARCHI](#) (health equity), [West Atlanta Watershed Alliance](#) (climate), [Atlanta Bicycle Coalition](#) (transit), [Generator Inc.](#) (arts and culture), [Enterprise Community Partners](#) (capital).

TFA member organizations work together to influence public policy, investment patterns, political will, and community engagement to bring its vision to life. Since 2017, with the support of the [SPARCC initiative\\*](#), TFA has focused on an area of Southwest Atlanta that stretches from the West End MARTA station to the Oakland City MARTA station referred to as the Lee Street Corridor. The work is organized around four strategic priority areas:

Priority Area	Result	Geographic Area of Focus
<i>Strengthen a healthy and influential TFA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» TFA members work collaboratively to deliver TFA-related programs and explore other work</li> <li>» TFA members are sought out as thought leaders and influencers on transit, mobility, and racial equity issues</li> </ul>	
<i>Deepen our solidarity with community partners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Residents in the Lee Street Corridor experience key improvements in their work and daily lives</li> </ul>	
<i>Leverage our collective power around capital projects</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» TFA is raising awareness and investing in the capacity of organizations that strengthen Atlanta's civic infrastructure</li> <li>» TFA has supporters who can provide visibility and financial resources</li> </ul>	
<i>Activate our influence</i>		

This document highlights the work of TFA in 2020, as it built on a strong foundation to support the communities most impacted by COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement.



## A HEALTHY AND INFLUENTIAL TFA: SUPPORTING THE COLLABORATIVE MAINTAINS A STRONG FOUNDATION

TFA continued to devote energy to building a healthy and influential collaborative, including convening the right partners and supporting them to work together to carry forward a multi-sector approach to community development. Key highlights in 2020 included:

- » TFA's leadership team expanded to include more administrative and leadership support for a growing collaborative, a stronger focus on transit systems with the addition of the [Atlanta Bike Coalition](#), and a deeper connection to the community's climate justice priorities through the new climate lead, the [West Atlanta Watershed Alliance](#).
- » TFA members reported an increase in collaborative effectiveness across a variety of measures included in an annual member survey, and for the second year in a row rated the effectiveness of its leadership above all other measures.

“The level of meaningful and impactful collaboration on the part of a diverse set of organizations that we have experienced is not seen in other efforts, particularly in our community.”



## DEEP SOLIDARITY WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS: DELIVERING SUPPORT AROUND COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

In 2020, TFA built on existing relationships with organizational partners to continue to advance existing priorities while also responding to the pressures of COVID-19 with flexible and fast community support.

- » The urgent needs elevated by COVID-19 prompted TFA leadership to innovate, clearing away procedural barriers, obtaining funding, and focusing on rapid response. TFA leadership gave its member organizations flexibility in their workplans to focus on COVID-19 response work, and TFA provided \$60K in rapid response grants to local nonprofits. TFA members organized the distribution of food baskets, voter registration activities, and self-care trainings for community members emotionally impacted by participating in Black Lives Matter protests.
- » TFA's existing partnership with the City Department of Transportation was crucial in setting up a walk-up COVID-19 testing site. Additionally, the network and community trust that had been built around the [station soccer](#) sites funded by TFA in 2019 made it possible for coaches to pivot and offer healing and trauma training to the players, parents, and local community in response to COVID-19.
- » The transportation needs of essential workers accelerated some existing work of TFA's new mobility champion, the Atlanta Bike Coalition (ABC). TFA members joined ABC members to advocate for city wide speed limits, safe streets, and protections for essential workers. ABC was also instrumental in organizing a coalition for



the City of Atlanta to adopt and pass its [Vision Zero](#) legislation.

“2020 has helped to shine a brighter light on the issues our group formed to work and have increased the audience paying attention. There is a unique opportunity for our messaging and advocacy platforms to connect the dots between the systemic discrimination inherent in all of our societal systems, and the resulting inequitable conditions that so many people have been reluctant to acknowledge or have been simply ignorant of. 2020 has presented the opportunity to double down on established goals.”

### LEVERAGING COLLECTIVE POWER: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND USING SPARCC CAPITAL TO INCREASE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

A core part of TFA’s work is supporting new community leaders to carry forward a multi-sector approach to community development. TFA continued to implement its leadership development programs throughout the competing demands of 2020. Highlights include:

- » Now in its third year, the [TransFormation Academy](#) led by Partnership for Southern Equity, conducted a virtual youth leadership summer academy which aimed to build new leaders’ capacity around equitable transit-oriented development and the intersections between racial equity, housing, transportation, climate, and health. In 2020 the academy included a youth-led participatory budgeting process where participants collectively decided which nonprofit organizations should be awarded grant funding. One participant, Sam Quartarone, shares their experience [here](#).
- » The Culture Resilience Environmental Workforce (CREW) program, a green-infrastructure workforce development project, implemented residential and commercial

projects in the Utoy Creek Watershed, using planting and hardscaping to prevent flooding and create community gathering spaces. The program [provided](#) hands-on training in installation and maintenance of green-infrastructure projects and assisted alumni with job placement. In 2020, CREW supported the creation of a paid 2-year resident scholar fellowship to support one fellow.



In 2020, TFA continued working to influence the community development system to become more responsive to specific community identified needs. Highlights include:

- » SPARCC funding was secured to renovate and update the Master Plan for the Reverend James Orange Park Recreation Center building. The City of Atlanta plans to match initial seed funding. TFA partners have been conducting conversations with local community organizations and residents as well as contracting with an architect to begin initial designs.
- » TFA members previously created the [Equity Evaluator tool](#), which brings equity considerations to every stage of a development project. The tool is a worksheet for developers or community members that contextualizes



development plans with community assets and needs and guides them toward more equitable outcomes. In 2020, TFA presented it to various local institutional partners and for the first time worked directly with a community group, [Murphy's Crossing Coalition](#), to use the tool. In addition, [the Atlanta BeltLine](#), a major commercial, residential, and green-infrastructure development project along an old rail line, is a recent user of the tool. The BeltLine is building on the Equity Evaluator to both update it and integrate it more formally into its work, impacting the affordability of its housing developments and strengthening its equity goals.

- » [The Guild](#) (a TFA member), with funding from JP Morgan Chase, designed and implemented a program aimed at making the local development ecosystem more equitable by providing predevelopment dollars to a targeted cohort of developers. This cohort consisted of smaller scale developers led by people of color serving neighborhoods that previously experienced disinvestment and are now under the imminent threat of gentrification.



“TFA is seen as representing interests of the community, surfacing equity issues into local and regional dialogue.”

## ACTIVATING INFLUENCE: RAISING AWARENESS AND CAPACITY IN ORGANIZATIONS THAT STRENGTHEN CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

TFA's efforts also support lawmakers, municipal partners, and funders in carrying forward TFA's approach to community development. In 2020, highlights include:

- » TFA's arts and culture champion, Generator, spotlighted Atlanta's Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta's historic redlining of Black-led arts organizations. The foundation acted in response to an inquiry into their funding practices and a virtual town hall that brought forward the voices of the Black arts community. They changed their grant application requirements to qualify a larger pool of Black applicants, and in subsequent rounds of funding prioritized Black-led organizations, increasing the percentage of grants awarded to Black-led organizations from 13 percent to 85 percent. See more [here](#) and [here](#).
- » TFA members are involved in many different groups across the city and region. In 2020, they successfully shifted the conversations among decision makers, working to ensure local government planning processes included TFA's central values of community engagement and equity. For example, ensuring community engagement was a component of the new Atlanta Department of Transportation's strategic plan and influencing the MARTA bus system redesign to incorporate equity.
- » TFA secured SPARCC funds to support training city staff on racial equity principals and tools and to develop policy recommendations that address racial inequities in citywide planning efforts. The cohort includes City of Atlanta staff from the Parks and Recreation Department, Watershed Management, Housing and Community Development, and the Office of Resilience.

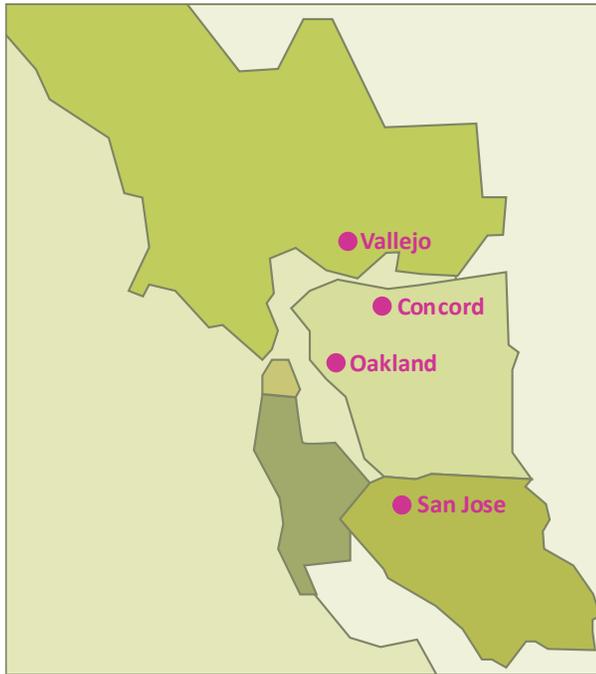
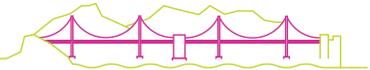


## WHAT'S NEXT FOR TFA?

- » 2021 will present a new challenge for TFA, as the Managing Director will be transitioning, and the Executive Committee will search for a replacement. TFA is in an excellent position to absorb this change with resilience as TFA's program manager has proven capable and responsive and has created relationships within their fiscal sponsor and the Executive Committee that will keep TFA's work moving forward.
- » TFA members will coordinate and host a multi-issue-area City of Atlanta Mayoral and Council Candidate Forum Series to hold candidates accountable to their promises in TFA's target geography and other influential voting districts.
- » With the support of a SPARCC innovation grant, TFA will establish a City of Atlanta Equity Council that will offer professional development and clean energy trainings.

*\* The Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge ([SPARCC](#)) aims to shift decades of racially discriminatory policies and investments that have resulted in racial disparities in health and climate resilience in communities throughout the United States. SPARCC aims to address the barriers facing communities of color and low-income communities by advancing a community-driven development model, which evolved to focus especially on displacement. The operations and work of TFA has been supported in large part by SPARCC since SPARCC's inception in 2017.*

# Bay Area 4 All (BA4A)



In 2017 BA4A was formed to be part of the [SPARCC initiative](#).<sup>\*</sup> Since its inception, BA4A has increased alignment and integration of housing-related work by coalitions and organizations across the Bay Area in California, allowing it to have a broader regional footprint. With a total of 13 organization members, it has advanced a regional approach to community-driven development in targeted neighborhoods across the Bay Area. Three key partners lead the collaborative: [6 Wins for Social Equity Network](#), [Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative \(BARHII\)](#), and [Great Communities Collaborative/The San Francisco Foundation](#). The leadership of BA4A includes representatives who work in each of its four geographic focus areas (San Jose, Oakland, Concord and Vallejo): [Working Partnerships USA](#), [Monument Impact](#), [Vallejo Housing Justice Coalition \(VHJC\)](#), [Urban Habitat](#) and the [Northern California Land Trust \(NCLT\)](#).

BA4A identified two key pathways to move the region towards community-driven development:

- Preservation of existing affordable housing, including through community ownership
- Utilization of public land for community benefits as part of the development process

BA4A's funding structure supports the leadership of community-based organizations, which has enabled BA4A to increase the capacity of critical local partners that are often overlooked by philanthropy. BA4A has had the unique opportunity to bring together a variety of organizations and geographies with different levels of experience in organizing and advocacy. Although Oakland and San Jose have more developed advocacy infrastructure and more public and philanthropic resources than Concord and Vallejo, BA4A partner organizations in each of the areas have benefited by learning from and supporting each other.

## BA4A'S STRONG RELATIONSHIPS POSITIONED IT WELL TO RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES OF 2020

Both the relationships that these organizations brought to BA4A and those created or strengthened through BA4A were essential to their response to the pandemic and the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. Building on these foundational relationships and a clarity of mission, BA4A was poised to act on the most urgent needs in 2020, which included increasing their influence with policy makers, directing funding to where it was most needed, and advancing both community ownership and the use of public land for public good. The following sections highlight a sample of BA4A's work in 2020.



## SHIFTING THE NARRATIVES AROUND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK AND HOW IT IS FUNDED

BA4A aims to shift large systems, acknowledging that large scale change is not caused by a single flashy policy shift, but instead by an accumulation of incremental changes that influence how people think about the issues at play and how work gets done. SPARCC funding has influenced this kind of work in all four of the geographic focus areas by supporting work to elevate the importance of housing preservation and influence how money flows.

“We’re fending off rent increases and eviction notices. We have to stem the bleeding, but people ARE interested in the future of their community.”

### Influencing policy makers and lifting the importance of housing preservation

Each geographic area has pursued BA4A’s common goals around housing preservation and using public land for public good differently. Each saw successes in 2020:

- » Organizers won local and county-wide eviction moratoria in all four BA4A geographic focus areas, despite mobilized opposition by landlord and real estate groups.
- » In Concord, BA4A partners amplified diverse community voices that helped Concord’s City Council see the connection between land use, affordable housing, and tenant protections, which resulted in a surprisingly fast and uncontested local eviction moratorium. The County Board of Supervisors were also influenced by BA4A partners to begin providing language interpretation at their meetings.
- » In Oakland, SPARCC capital supported the acquisition of a home occupied [by Moms 4 Housing](#) by the Oakland Community Land Trust (CLT), which became an [international news story](#) highlighting harm done to Black

communities by real estate speculation. This increased awareness and served as a catalyzing vehicle for other housing-related campaigns. The company that owned the property agreed to offer CLTs, other affordable housing organizations, and the city the right of first refusal on its properties, helping to make housing more affordable. While other local organizations directed the organizing, Oakland CLT played a critical role in enabling the final acquisition with the help of SPARCC capital.

- » The Vallejo Housing Justice Coalition (VHJC) were crucial in the passage of an eviction moratorium in Solano County, one of the first in the Bay Area. The awareness effort was historic. This was reportedly the first time some county officials had heard community stories about why tenant protections were important. VHJC also acquired seats at the city’s housing advisory committee where it continues to push forward social justice work despite having few allies.
- » In San Jose, Working Partnerships successfully advocated for the San Jose City Council to adopt a 10-part anti-displacement plan, which included COVID-19 recovery measures for affected renters and homeowners, a neighborhood preference program for affordable housing, exploration of an enhanced code enforcement program, and a Community Opportunity to Purchase Act.

### Influencing the flow of money towards tenant protections, preserving affordability, and community ownership

BA4A influenced the flow of public dollars to respond to the needs of tenants during COVID-19:

- » The distribution of Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 response money was influenced by BA4A partners’ research and advocacy both in Oakland and Concord (which also influenced distribution in the nearby cities of Antioch and Walnut Creek). In Oakland, an additional \$4.7 million were allocated to acquisition-rehabilitation preservation work; in Concord the funds went towards legal protections for tenants.



- » Concord’s City Council reached out to BA4A as thought partners and to manage the distribution of rental assistance funds despite a history of limited outreach and engagement.
- » In Vallejo, SPARCC resources were brought in to support community organizing work that resulted in the formation of the VHJC, which focuses on housing justice issues in Vallejo and advocated for one of the first eviction moratoriums passed in the Bay Area. VHJC supported the Solano County government in thinking about funds to use for paid quarantine and housing options. It also advocated for more tenant protections in federal CARES funding and for various funding sources to support undocumented residents during the pandemic. In response to uneven regional resources and philanthropy support, VHJC also brought funders together to learn about and support strategies for tenant protections and preservation models, including land trusts.
- » In San Jose, the culmination of six years of campaign work was the passage of a commercial linkage fee ensuring large commercial development projects will contribute financially toward addressing the need for affordable housing. This in combination with a new inclusionary housing policy means a new Google housing project in San Jose will include 1,000 affordable housing units.

“Some advocacy feels like it is trying to staunch the bleeding and slow the crisis to return things to the status quo. We don’t want that; we want transformative change, which is a big thing to make happen.”



### USING PUBLIC LAND FOR COMMUNITY BENEFIT

In Concord, BA4A partners continued to push a community-driven planning process for the development of the Concord Naval Weapons Station. The associated developers came to see BA4A as “players to be reckoned with” because of the community connectedness and credibility in affordable housing policy analysis that they brought to the table. Due to their extensive organizing, the project may ultimately have significant affordable housing and community ownership elements.

In San Jose, [BA4A partners continued to respond to the displacement threat](#) brought about by Google’s local campus expansion. Prior to 2020, their organizing efforts brought many from San Jose into the partnership. They found it was relatively simple to organize the community around the Google project given how residents feel about Google, the publicity that raised the profile of the problem and possible solutions, the ability to organize around multiple policy ideas under one project, and the existence of immediate visible impacts in the form of business displacement. The pandemic slowed community benefit negotiations between the city and Google, so the big win came in early 2021 with Google releasing a community benefits plan of more than \$150 million for:

- » An opportunity fund dedicated to preserving existing affordable housing in the area.
- » Increasing services for homeless residents.
- » Increasing protections for low-income renters.
- » Grants for educational scholarships.
- » Programs and services related to adult and youth occupational skills training.
- » Small business support.



### SUCCESSES IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP: AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRESERVATION AND PRODUCTION

The BA4A partners in Oakland and Vallejo have been working on the goal of housing preservation for several years. Although the pressures brought about by the pandemic shifted this work to include keeping people in their homes through eviction moratoria and stopping rent increases, these partners continued to make gains towards community-driven housing goals in their communities:

- » The Northern California Land Trust (NCLT) has been able to acquire various multi-family units from the largest corporate landlord in the world with capital funding from SPARCC. For example, in late 2020, NCLT acquired a 16-unit housing development with the help of SPARCC capital. This was a targeted anti-displacement acquisition and rehab project that will guarantee permanent affordability for the building’s residents.

“SPARCC capital dollars really represented an opportunity to start making acquisitions in Oakland. The structuring of the SPARCC funding opened up some new opportunities and supported organizing work. Our organizations had the analysis and the ideas but needed some additional funding support behind them.”

- » The team in Oakland is creating a new data tool that will centralize tenant protections and ownership data for organizers to use when working with tenants or preserving properties. BA4A’s vision to advance a regional approach to community-driven development in targeted neighborhoods across the Bay Area has been implemented in a tailored way across the four geographic focus areas. The areas outside of the big cities in the Bay Area have unequal access to resources, historic underinvestment, and a shorter history of community organizing. With this backdrop, BA4A’s focus on Vallejo has been especially notable.

“There’s much less history of organizing in the suburbs. You have to build that capacity. The fact that after 5 years we’ve finally gotten people to listen to us - is sort of miraculous. It is a process and it doesn’t happen overnight.”

- » In 2020, the SPARCC initiative supported Vallejo Housing Justice Coalition (VHJC) both with funds for hiring a new CLT project manager and making the connection to expertise guidance from the Northern California Land Trust. SPARCC funding has been leveraged to secure funding from other national partners and expand the visibility of VHJC.
- » In response to the housing pressures brought about by the pandemic, VHJC led various virtual tenant clinics where it provided information and referral services to residents and led virtual workshops to engage residents around the city’s housing strategy.

### WHAT IS NEXT FOR BA4A?

BA4A is continuing their work to advance a regional approach to community-driven development across the Bay Area. These highlights from 2020 have been quickly joined by early wins in 2021. For example, BA4A partners continue to move forward their housing preservation goals.



- » Oakland partners are positioning the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) as a greater priority given COVID-19 because they anticipate a downturn in the real estate market that might force institutional investors to sell and put stress on more vulnerable single property owners and multi-family buildings. Having a TOPA in place is an essential part of being ready to acquire these properties. They plan to continue working with Oakland's Department of Housing and Community Development and the City Council to advance a TOPA and identify public subsidy sources to acquire and rehab affordable housing, since existing Measure KK bond money has been exhausted.
- » BA4A plans to take the tenant-centered affordable housing preservation model it developed in Oakland and bring it to other jurisdictions, in part through building institutional support for this work at the Bay Area Housing Finance Authority through technical assistance, financing, and capacity building.
- » As a regional preservation pipeline is developed, BA4A is calling for new funding from CDFIs, philanthropy, and the public sector to continue building on past housing acquisition successes in Oakland and Vallejo. Partners would like to see more attention to and funding for preserving smaller properties (where displacement risk is highest), and collectively owned housing models such as CLTs and co-ops, with the goal of transferring ownership to residents themselves.

## HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE TWO-PRONGED APPROACH

Building on the collaboration and planning with another SPARCC site in Denver, BA4A's partners at BARHII have come together with partners from SPARCC sites in Atlanta, Memphis, and Denver to advocate for the Federal Health Equity For All Act. This act is designed to institute infrastructure and mechanisms at the community level to create the conditions for durable well-being. The act outlines a two-pronged approach to reinventing the health infrastructure so that it promotes inclusive well-being, community-driven and localized interventions, and has equity as a core metric. The two prongs are:

- A network of health equity innovation hubs sustained by coalitions of community-based organizations.
- Flexible and nonprogrammatic funding streams that support social entrepreneurs to thrive and change the health system from the ground up.

To continue this work, BARHII and their SPARCC partners are advocating for long-term federal funding, pioneering financial tools, facilitating peer learning for innovators and real-time wellness indicators, and helping to build a critical mass of people power.

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# Elevated Chicago



Since launching in 2017, Elevated Chicago (EC) has mobilized local and national partnerships that bring community-led solutions to address structural inequities that perpetuate racial segregation and correlative urban disinvestment. While the table has evolved through the years, it continues to prioritize its core principles of racial equity and centered community engagement and ownership to advance equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD). These principles guided EC as it responded to urgent needs from the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, and adeptly managed other priorities such as moving forward its strategic work on the City of Chicago ETOD Policy Plan, incorporating community voice and leadership in capital projects, continuing community-based programs, and expanding partnerships.

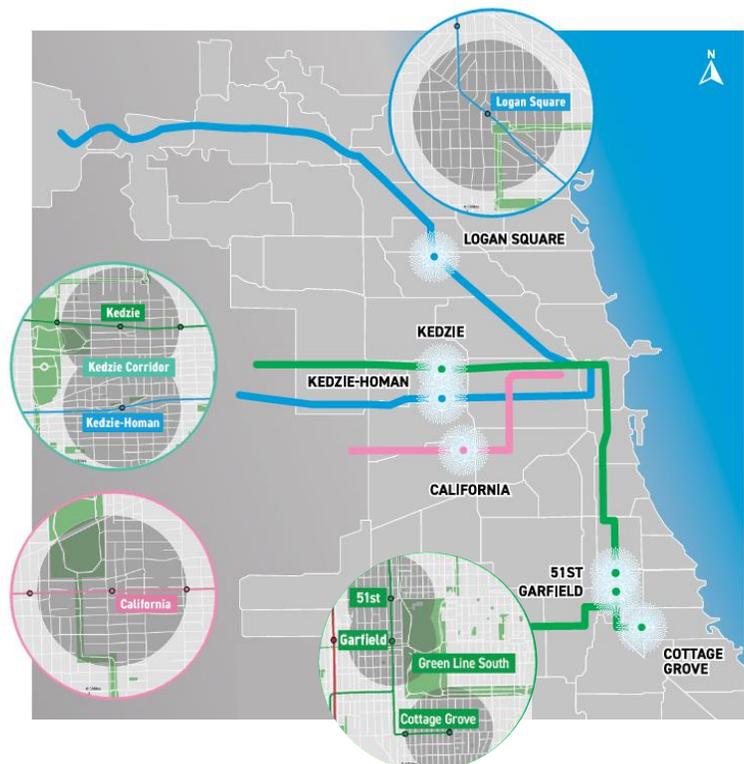
## RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE 2020 BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

### Elevated Chicago and its partners galvanized collective power and resilience

The challenges presented by the pandemic demonstrated an unsurprising reality for those who work towards the goal of racial equity: the communities most affected by COVID-19 are also the most affected by systemic racism in neighborhood development. EC’s long-term work in addressing racial inequities, early investment in table development, and collaborative structures enabled the group to effectively respond to emerging community needs during the pandemic. Moreover, it provided EC and its partners the opportunity to demonstrate how their collective power and resilience could meet the challenges at hand.

EC immediately shifted budgets and priorities to provide tables greater flexibility in their spending and response. The pivot enabled tables to serve as a safety net to communities when the government failed to act; this was shown in multiple ways:

- » The Blue Line Logan Square eHub, in partnership with LUCHA, mobilized solidarity funds to provide rent and food assistance to families, particularly undocumented households in the community.



- » The Pink Line California eHub used a SPARCC capital grant and loan to expand the capacity of Esperanza Health Centers, a first COVID-19 responder.
- » On the Green Line South, the former Overton School worked as a food and supply distribution center during the pandemic.



“The pandemic has presented us with unbelievable challenges but has put something that was already happening on steroids: community stakeholders and community organizations banding together to solve problems quickly.”

### New leadership within the community rose to the occasion

Rather than waiting for the government to act, community leaders stepped up to support their community. At the same time, EC and its partners were strategically engaging new communities and fostering new leadership to determine how long-term equitable recovery would look. For example:

- » EC increased efforts to invite additional residential voices, particularly from communities that have suffered from disinvestment and gentrification, beyond the initial footprint of EC (e.g., from Washington Heights and Englewood).
- » EC, along with several other partners, launched the Equitable Development Ambassador Program, a cross-community, multi-racial, and intergenerational initiative to equip residents across all the eHubs with tools to advocate for equitable development in Chicago.
- » EC, in partnership with Transformation Alliance in Atlanta, won a \$200K Innovation grant from SPARCC to fund a Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (JEDI) learning cohort, with the goal of training municipal leaders in authentic DEI strategies and processes.

“We’ve found it’s like Dorothy in Wizard of Oz... We go through trials and tribulations. But at the end of the day, we click our heels. We already have what we need. What SPARCC has let us do is think about the assets we have.”

## THE CHICAGO EQUITABLE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT POLICY PLAN: DRIVERS OF SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In addition to responding to a pandemic and social unrest in Chicago, EC continued to move forward with its policy work. One of the most significant achievements was EC’s partnership with the City of Chicago in drafting the [Chicago ETOD Policy Plan](#)—the first ever equitable development plan for the city. EC and its community-based partners bravely raised their voices and exercised their power to keep government, developers, and investors accountable to equity. The plan elevates and prioritizes investments and policies that focus on eliminating racial inequities and attaining community-focused benefits, such as affordable housing, improved public health, strong local businesses, and environmental sustainability.



Mural by the CTA 51<sup>st</sup> station entrance funded through SPARCC.

### Drivers of Success: Investing in Community and Stakeholder Engagement

To ensure transparency, inclusiveness, and equitable development was promoted in all neighborhoods, EC and the City of Chicago co-led an extensive engagement process. There was steady and persistent growth of stakeholder engagement. For example, participation in the workshops quadrupled from 20 to 80 people throughout the summer of 2020. Through SPARCC, EC provided resources to compensate community leaders involved in the engagement process.



The City of Chicago ETOD website was visited 4,500 times; the plan was downloaded 1,500 times and received over 650 digital engagements. Extensive social media campaigns helped expand reach as well (#ETOD). Moreover, key partners hosted multiple community meetings and received written comment submissions during the 45-day public comment period. The leadership of EC kept community stakeholders and partners involved and engaged throughout the process, which resulted in a robust plan to advance equitable development.

“Elevated has had an impact on city decision makers. It is a nose under the tent - getting the City to be more open to hear the voices of those most impacted by their decisions.”

### Drivers of Success: Strong Partnership with the City of Chicago

Much led up to the successful partnership between EC and the City of Chicago. For example:

- » In 2019, several EC table founders and members joined the city administration. This helped influence the Mayor’s Office and other City departments to adopt engagement principles from EC and build political will to move the work forward. Additionally, a TOD ordinance amendment, adopted earlier that year through EC’s advocacy, included an explicit equity focus. The alignment in principles and shared vision enabled an effective planning process.
- » The community engagement process was inclusive, robust, and diverse. At the table were a balance of technical experts and those with lived experience, including communication experts, national partners, activist artists, key allies, writers, community members, government officials, and organizational

representatives affected by TOD. There was also an effort to recruit new community groups to participate in the process.

- » EC’s previous involvement with the ETOD policy planning process meant they had historic knowledge, expertise, resources, and relationships that created efficiencies for the new City administration and shortened the process.

### CHICAGO ETOD PLAN KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Included 36 recommendations to advance racial equity, community wealth building, climate resilience, and public health goals in equitable transit-oriented development over the next three years.
- Expanded provisions beyond train lines to include ETOD policies for high-frequency bus corridors and improved walkability.
- Translated into six languages, used plain language, featured community-based artists, and avoided jargon to increase accessibility and reach.



Mural by the CTA Logan Square station entrance funded through SPARCC.



“They have built some phenomenal internal relationships and perhaps even more importantly, created a public awareness and energy that I find is really the secret ingredient to making things happen, across administrations and departments.”

### Challenges and Lessons

There were challenges in the drafting of the ETOD Policy Plan, for example:

- » The writing process was made more difficult when a City project manager was unable to influence high-level change. Finding the right champion with decision-making power within the Department of Planning and Development was critical to the success of the work and will continue to be in the implementation phase.
- » The City is not designed for interdepartmental, interagency, or cross-community collaboration. Instead, it tends to incentivize silos and competition. Changing this structure will not happen overnight; thus, understanding how to navigate the bureaucracy and creating space for collaboration are important for future work.
- » A lack of trust exists towards government, developers, and financial institutions within the community stemming from a long and complex history of systematic racism, disinvestment, and gentrification. Building that trust with the community will require significant systems change work and investments in community-driven projects and initiatives.

### EARLY BENEFITS AND IMPACTS FROM ETOD POLICY PLAN

- City of Chicago is committed to a cohort of demonstration projects for the plan.
- City of Chicago plans to compensate community participants in its upcoming Comprehensive Plan update process.
- Philanthropic leaders are now explicitly funding equitable TOD (ETOD), which is also attracting attention of private sector and city government.
- City of Chicago gained community knowledge, trust, and support for ETOD.
- EC community table members acquired deep knowledge and expertise on ETOD.
- Chicago is now seen as a leader amongst other urban markets in ETOD.



## WHAT'S NEXT FOR ELEVATED CHICAGO?

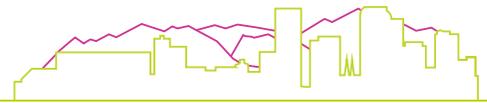
### Incorporating community voice and leadership in capital projects

In addition to its ETOD policy work, EC and its partners continue to move forward with community-driven capital projects. There are over 20 projects in its pipeline, including several that have made significant headway in 2020:

- » The Esperanza Health Center received a \$100K SPARCC capital grant and \$500K loan request to relocate their administrative offices out of the clinic space in the California Pink Line eHub. In a neighborhood with limited primary care, this will help expand clinical space to ensure social distancing and will also increase capacity to support more patients.
- » EC disbursed \$500K in capital grants for community projects, including the acquisition of a former public library. The library will be converted into the Latinos Progresando Community Center, which will provide immigration and legal services, and flexible space to introduce new programming for community priorities.
- » EC and Enterprise Community Partners seeded the funding of the “Here to Stay Land Trust,” a model of community ownership. Additionally, Emmett Street Apartments broke ground in 2020, the first true ETOD in the heart of the Logan Square eHub. Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) led the community engagement process and advocated for the development of 100 affordable homes.
- » In the Green Line South Garfield eHub, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) launched their first ETOD initiative by developing a visual history of Washington Park highlighting key moments, assets, and racial inequities. This work will be supported by a \$133K SPARCC capital grant for branding, walkability, and wayfinding.

*The Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge ([SPARCC](#)) aims to shift decades of racially discriminatory policies and investments that have resulted in racial disparities in health and climate resilience in communities throughout the United States. SPARCC aims to address the barriers facing communities of color and low-income communities by advancing a community-driven development model, which evolved to focus especially on displacement. The operations and work of Elevated Chicago has been supported in large part by SPARCC since SPARCC's inception in 2017.*

# Mile High Connects



Opportunity for all through transit

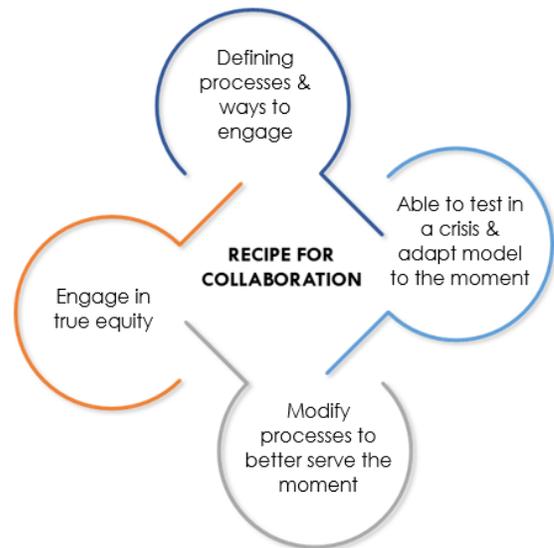
Mile High Connects ([MHC](#)) is a broad partnership of organizations from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors committed to combatting injustices related to accessing affordable housing, transportation, and economic opportunity in the Denver metropolitan region. MHC was formed in 2011 with the goal of taking collective action on community-led solutions in neighborhoods impacted by the light rail expansion in the region. Recently, it has evolved its structure and processes to better work in service of its inspiration to action: a racially equitable, resilient Denver metro region where community-driven solutions are at the center of transformative systems change. This document highlights the work of MHC in 2020, as it struck a balance between playing a key role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthening partnerships to advance long-term equitable investment.

## WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

### Mile High Connects takes its partnerships to the next level

MHC invested significant time and energy in 2019-2020 strengthening its collaborative infrastructure and processes, which benefited the collaborative, its partners, and the communities it serves. Key changes included:

- » Organizing the work, clarifying roles and how partners fit in, communicating the story of MHC, and celebrating the work of community-based partners.
- » Establishing and testing new processes for providing needed support to communities more equitably and efficiently.
- » Bringing more resident voices into MHC.
- » Centering racial justice through root cause analysis work, conversations, and personal journeys.
- » Providing space and structure for target geographies and partners to learn from each other and build trust.
- » Acquiring a new mission-aligned fiscal sponsor.



MHC's Recipe for Collaboration

### Mile High Connects leveraged relationships and a nimble structure to respond to emerging needs related to COVID-19

These structural changes facilitated collaboration, allowing MHC to quickly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, mobilize dollars to community organizations (while testing out a hybrid grant model), and bolster trust and relationships in the collaborative. Through this work, MHC was in a better position to engage in equity work:



Graphic notes from virtual 2020 Evaluation Site Visit.

- » MHC played a leadership role in supporting small businesses owned by people of color or immigrants impacted by the pandemic. It activated partnerships to quickly identify the support needed and distributed \$27k of responsive grant funding to front-line organizations serving immigrant-owned small businesses, who were ineligible for relief funding from other sources. MHC partnered with trusted local connectors, service providers, and community navigators to conduct outreach and ensure language access. Going into 2021, MHC continued to provide strategic support related to re-opening and closing real estate, negotiating with landlords, and other legal work. In addition, MHC created a neighborhood directory of small businesses to galvanize traffic and support these businesses.

- » MHC was recognized for its role in getting personal protective equipment to Regional Transportation District (RTD) operators in the early days of the pandemic. During a time when many agencies were struggling with providing protective gear to their front-line workers, MHC quickly distributed over 2k masks and 240 face shields. It created a rapid response grant program distributing \$10k in free ride vouchers to help community connectors reach community residents, provide food and services, and subsidize volunteer time. MHC also provided \$3k to Redline Contemporary Arts Center to kickstart a mask-making business that employed resident artists and produced hundreds of masks for the transit agency.
- » Table members established an effective feedback loop grounded in an understanding of current community needs wherein individuals or organizations engaged with residents had the chance to bring insights and opportunities for action to the collaborative. The feedback loop ensured the provided support continued to be beneficial. This was particularly valuable given the dynamic environment of the pandemic and will continue to be valuable in future work towards equity.

“The nimbleness and lack of rigidity of how MHC interprets its role was helpful in staying within the broad definition of this equity-focused collaborative, but zeroing in on discussions that needed to be had and support that needed to happen to small businesses that were not getting support from other groups.”



*Rendering of Montbello FreshLo cultural hub, grocery store, and affordable housing project.*

## **MILE HIGH CONNECTS CONTINUED TO ADVANCE MORE EQUITABLE INVESTMENT IN THE DENVER REGION AND BEYOND**

Over the last several years, MHC has played a key role in advancing Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) conversations related to both state and local policy, such as affordable transit fares and elevating the need for a housing trust. In 2020, MHC worked to bring new voices, perspectives, and leadership into planning and decision-making spaces, which successfully made processes more inclusive and elevated priorities of equity and climate justice. Specifically, MHC:

- » Pushed local, regional, and state government agencies' strategic planning processes to be more inclusive. For example, MHC partners participated on the RTD Reimagine Committee and promoted the inclusion of non-traditional voices and perspectives on transportation, affordable housing development, climate, and equity.
- » Influenced policy recommendations through participation in COVID-19 recovery-specific task forces, including the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure's COVID-19 Mobility Task Force and Economic Recovery Task Force, as well as co-leading the SPARCC Restorative Economy Policy Platform process.

- » Contributed an equity perspective into the West Area Neighborhood Planning Initiative (WANPI) process through the West Denver Renaissance Collaborative (WDRC). This was exemplified by WDRC engaging in close collaboration with the WANPI planning team on strategies to engage residents and leaders in early efforts.

### **MHC connected partners and brought resources to advance more equitable capital projects:**

- » The Montbello FreshLo Initiative is community ownership in action. The organizing committee lobbied to purchase land from the RTD to bring a grocery store back to the neighborhood and develop community offices, a performance arts center, and affordable housing units. MHC helped to bring 15 local funders to the table and funded a technical assistance grant to advance the project efforts.
- » Along with BuCu West Development Association, MHC advanced two community-driven projects by providing SPARCC capital resources and support in West Denver. The projects included El Merendero, the conversion of an old bottling plant into a business incubator and purchasing an existing auto facility on Morrison Blvd to be transformed into a small business space, including four art studios.
- » MHC elevated affordable housing as a priority for local, private funders.

**MHC also partnered with community organizers to develop a Community Alert Database** to identify properties that have outstanding health violations and are at risk for being sold. This helped support legal defense to keep people in place (both residential and small businesses). The database also encourages collective action by creating transparency in understanding who owns what properties and can take collective action.



## MILE HIGH CONNECTS ACTS AS “CONNECTIVE TISSUE IN THE COMMUNITY” THAT MANIFESTED ITS IMPACT BY:

- » Facilitating cross-sector relationships that allows partners to bring their expertise to advance their projects, building understanding, and shifting how partners do their work and interact.
- » Making connections, convening partners, and arranging conversations that prioritize racial justice.
- » Bringing financial and human resources to community-identified needs and priorities.

## WHAT’S NEXT FOR MILE HIGH CONNECTS?

MHC is moving beyond emergency response work related to the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting towards a long-term strategy supporting healthy outcomes for local people of color in the current environment, equitable recovery, and systems change. This includes redefining approaches to be effective “coaches” in partnering with communities on capital and community-ownership related work, continuing to position residents and community-based organization voices in decision-making spaces, and determining MHC’s role in criminal justice reform and addressing policing in transit.

*The Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge ([SPARCC](#)) aims to shift decades of racially discriminatory policies and investments that have resulted in racial disparities in health and climate resilience in communities throughout the United States. SPARCC aims to address the barriers facing communities of color and low-income communities by advancing a community-driven development model, which evolved to focus especially on displacement. The operations and work of Mile High Connects has been supported in large part by SPARCC since SPARCC’s inception in 2017.*

# SPARCC LA



SPARCC LA consists of 22 member organizations working across Los Angeles (LA) County with a focus in the cities of LA, Inglewood, and Long Beach. Five organizations lead the collaborative: [ACT LA](#), [Esperanza Community Housing Corporation](#), [Inclusive Action for the City](#), [Long Beach Forward](#), and [Social Justice Learning Institute](#). Since its inception in 2017 to be part of the [SPARCC initiative](#),\* SPARCC LA has brought increased alignment and integration of housing and transit-related work through existing coalitions and policy platforms across LA County, allowing it to deepen organizing and have a broader regional footprint.

The SPARCC initiative supports the work of these partners and allows for deeper investment in the community organizing component of their work, which often receives the least investment. This support strengthens their work by increasing coordination, capacity, and increasing the pace at which SPARCC LA has been able to advance their priorities in alignment with broader regional coalitions. SPARCC LA provides resources to support the leadership of people-of-color-led community-based organizations, which has enabled it to increase the capacity of critical local grassroots partners that are often overlooked by philanthropy. In 2020, the group welcomed two new leaders who have led it in a governance and workplan refresh process resulting in clearly defined priorities for their work related to transit justice, community leadership, housing affordability, and anti-displacement, including exploring community land trust (CLT) models, tenant protections, and small business preservation.

“SPARCC serves as a space to anchor the direction that the county and CBOs are moving in and can be a guide for others. This is a hub to bring together the ideas and the relationships needed to make things happen, so when the money from SPARCC is gone the infrastructure is in place to continue.”

## SPARCC LA WAS WELL-POSITIONED TO RESPOND TO THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF 2020

Building on strong relationships and clarity of mission, SPARCC LA was poised to act on the most urgent needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and centering issues of equity and racial justice in solidarity with the movement to support Black lives. The group was well-

positioned to leverage policy opportunities to strengthen the response at both the county and at the municipal levels. This work required nimble leadership and building on existing networks to help support the emergent work across various issue area coalitions, underscoring the value of funders supporting the operation, and organizing of these kinds of networks that can be quickly activated in times of need.

SPARCC LA found that COVID-19 heightened existing inequities and brought a new urgency to some of the priority areas of SPARCC LA, like tenant and homeowner protections, transit justice organizing, and power building.

The myriad systemic and racial inequities also meant that LA's Black and Brown communities have faced increased injustices in several ways, experiencing:

- » Inequitable healthcare delivery and vaccine distribution.
- » High vulnerability to COVID-19 due to the environmental hazards in their communities.
- » Continued Immigration and Customs Enforcement detentions and deportations that bring an increased risk of COVID-19.
- » Disproportionate economic impacts of the pandemic as individuals, workers, and business owners.
- » A lack of public transit for essential workers.
- » Continued police violence.

“The pandemic is like swimming upstream. A lot of systems and institutions that were compensating for inequality aren't working. We're in hyper-response mode.”

The urgency brought about by the pandemic, as well as the powerful advocacy work of Black Lives Matter Los Angeles and other aligned racial justice groups (such as Justice LA and Reimagine LA) created additional pressure on local governments to take action to address the systemic racism and inequities facing LA's most vulnerable communities, especially Black and Brown communities. SPARCC LA, in collaboration with broader regional coalitions, was poised to act in issue areas it had been focused on for years and were strongly committed to engaging in transformative and regenerative work to bring about justice and equity. SPARCC LA's advocacy work contributed to moving important policies forward quickly in 2020. For example, there was unprecedented investment in community land trusts, widespread eviction protections, investment in anti-harassment ordinances, and the development of a Transit Safety Advisory Committee with LA Metro.

## SUPPORTING NEW COALITIONS AND INITIATIVES

SPARCC LA provided funding or in-kind services to various other local coalitions and initiatives.

- » The Healthy LA coalition was founded in March 2020 with the help of SPARCC LA partners ACT-LA, Inclusive Action for the City, and Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, and now includes over 300 organizations. Healthy LA came together anticipating the need to advocate for equity in any policies or practices responding to the pandemic, as well as those aimed at ensuring a just and equitable recovery. This was the first time that such broad geographic representation was included in one coalition in LA County. That collective power helped move important policies forward in 2020 regarding right to council and tenant protections that are paired with rent relief utilizing federal funding allocated by the State. The Healthy LA coalition also held a policy teach-in for Canceling Rent and Mortgages with a follow up webinar on policies that are part of Cancel Rent.



- » With the support of SPARCC funding, SPARCC LA partner Long Beach Forward is supporting [Cambodiatown Thrives](#), a new coalition that is engaging in a community-led planning and visioning process in response to pressures brought about by a City of Long Beach zoning update process.
- » The Social Justice Learning Institute partnered with a broad coalition of local allies that have different roles supporting tenants’ rights in the Antelope Valley and Hawthorne. This effort added capacity to smaller cities that do not have as much organizing infrastructure.

### COMMUNITY VOICES INFLUENCED THE FLOW OF PUBLIC MONEY IN A NEW WAY

Because of its wide network of member organizations and community partners, SPARCC LA mobilized and united many community voices to advocate for shifting LA City Council funding from policing to community needs like housing and public transit, in a way that had never happened before.

- » At the height of its efforts, the LA City Council received over 15,000 emails regarding the city budget. This was possible because of the actions of many coalitions, including several member organizations of SPARCC LA. The mobilization had a significant immediate impact, which SPARCC LA hopes will translate into an ongoing shift in the way community voices are centered in city advocacy and decision making.
- » In an effort to build community involvement in local governmental affairs, two SPARCC LA partners, Inclusive Action for the City and [LA Forward](#), released their [LA 101 Guide](#), which provides an understanding of how LA’s local government works and how to best plug-in to work with leaders to support communities.
- » The Inclusive Action coalition led a major win in 2020 to legalize street vending. LA County approved a set of recommendations that were directly informed by street vendors. It established new regulations, allocated \$1

million to begin the process of designing an affordable cart that would be approved in partnership with the Department of Public Health, and committed to an education-first approach to gaining compliance.



“The events of 2020 have changed who’s interested and available to work with us. Some people who have lost a lot of capacity to do the work. Others who have seen the need are really stepping up. There was a realization more broadly that people need to be active, so we are seeing interest from a broader array of folks than before.”

### ADVANCING FOR TRANSIT JUSTICE WITHIN LA METRO

ACT-LA has been leading SPARCC LA’s work with LA Metro, and in 2020 moved some very important work forward. Highlights include:

- » Advocating for LA Metro to pilot a Fair Free Transit program with no means testing (i.e., demonstrating a need for government assistance) by connecting transit justice to racial and economic justice and focusing on low-income Black, Latinx, immigrant, and youth populations who depend on LA Metro for transportation and make up a majority of its ridership.



- » Organizing transit riders and coordinating meetings with LA Metro leadership where community residents drove the agenda and discussion.
- » Assessing and addressing COVID-19-related sanitation concerns on transit.
- » Restoring the level of service routes for the over 300,000 people who use the system every day after LA Metro cut bus service by 20% in the spring of 2020.

ACT-LA also worked to change the relationship between LA Metro and law enforcement. LA Metro established a Transit Safety Advisory Committee in 2020, which includes ACT-LA and residents to serve as Metro’s community oversight body. The Board gave the committee powers to investigate and make binding recommendations regarding community safety alternatives to policing and reallocating resources from Metro’s current law enforcement contracts to non-law enforcement alternatives. ACT-LA has already proposed a series of major new policies and programs to



“One measure of success would be who is included at the table and centered in decision making. If we can transform the process, if we bring a view of justice and equity to make those decisions, then that’s a measure of success.”

#ReimagineSafety on transit through their Metro as a Sanctuary report, released in March 2021.

ACT-LA advocated for the LA Metro Board to prioritize community safety over policing on transit including:

- » Approval of the Community Safety Approach to System Security and Law Enforcement motion as a first step in eliminating law enforcement on LA Metro systems and investing in community-based approaches to keep the system safe and welcoming for transit riders of color.
- » Divestment from the billions of dollars spent on a multi-agency police contract and investment toward armed-law enforcement alternatives, fare-free transit, and improved bus service.

### ADVANCING SECURE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Members of SPARCC LA have been playing an important advocacy role pushing a narrative shift around community land trusts (CLTs) for several years. After partnering with the national SPARCC team to advance policy at city and county levels that would secure public investment in CLTs, 2020 brought a significant acknowledgement by LA County that CLTs need to be funded as part of a sustainable housing system. A CLT network formed in LA, and several new CLTs were established. SPARCC LA is now exploring a pilot to show how the model works by acquiring affordable housing units and holding them.

SPARCC LA also supported a Community Opportunity to Purchase Act policy through SPARCC capital with a \$500K recoverable grant to conduct due diligence on identified properties throughout LA County. That was later supplemented by an additional \$50M from the LA County Board of Supervisors to acquire and purchase the properties. Additional accomplishments related to housing included:



- » SPARCC LA and Healthy LA worked on the research and coordination that supported city and LA county eviction moratorium policies.
- » SPARCC LA continued to build on prior successful advocacy for LA Metro to not only approve a Transit-Oriented Community policy goal to achieve equity, but to also now implement it to ensure that development on and alongside Metro land is equitable and centers the communities most impacted, such as production of affordable housing at the deepest affordability levels.



## WHAT IS NEXT FOR SPARCC LA?

SPARCC LA continues to work in 2021 towards transit justice, community leadership, housing issues including community land trusts and tenant protections, and small business preservation. Momentum is strengthened by a few early wins in 2021:

SPARCC LA will continue promoting equitable growth strategies with the help of \$1.25M in [competitive grant funds](#) from the Southern California Association of Governments and the California Community Foundation that were awarded in early 2021, most all of which were to groups that are part of SPARCC LA, either directly or as members of the ACT-LA coalition.

The community land trust work continues to build momentum with the closing of SPARCC LA's first housing purchase of a 11-unit building in East LA. Additional closings are anticipated to follow this year for a total of seven buildings including 75 units. SPARCC money was used for down payments and due diligence as part of a repayable grant.

*\* The Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge ([SPARCC](#)) aims to shift decades of racially discriminatory policies and investments that have resulted in racial disparities in health and climate resilience in communities throughout the United States. SPARCC aims to address the barriers facing communities of color and low-income communities by advancing a community-driven development model, which evolved to focus especially on displacement. The operations and work of SPARCC LA has been supported in large part by SPARCC since SPARCC's inception in 2017.*

# North Memphis V.O.I.C.E Coalition



At the beginning of 2020, the Center for Transforming Communities (CTC) transitioned as the new backbone organization to administer the SPARCC grant on behalf of Neighborhood Collaborative for Resilience (NCR). The collaborative was later rebranded and restructured as the North Memphis V.O.I.C.E (Volunteers, Organizing, Inspiring, Cultivating, and Education) Coalition (NMVC), a multi-neighborhood collaborative, spanning across 30 neighborhoods of North Memphis, with a mission to cultivate thriving “neighborhood democracies,” in which residents have decision-making power in their community. This document highlights the work of NMVC in

2020, as it sought to build a coalition centered on community voice and residents, while balancing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and working towards racial, health, economic, and environmental equity.

## LAYING THE FOUNDATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE TABLE

In pursuit of neighborhood democracies, CTC built key structures and processes within NMVC to support this work.

### CTC established infrastructure that centered voice and built community power:

- » Five workgroups made up of institutional partners, residential leaders, and youth ambassadors were created to support various workstreams: climate and environment, health, arts and culture, growth and economics, and education (C.H.A.N.G.E). Issue-focused champions were recruited to support the workgroups and provide technical assistance.
- » Each quarter, NMVC delegates or community-elected residents convened to review and approve those work plans. This voting structure is currently being revised by NMVC in favor of a consensus-building model which will further help elevate community voices.
- » To fairly compensate and incentivize residential leadership, two chairs per workgroup were allocated an annual \$10k stipend and \$25k+ for groups to develop a workplan.



“There’s a Swahili phrase about the ability to name yourself: Kujichagalia. Many of our names were given to us, but they don’t represent our ancestors’ culture... That’s what ownership is, is ability to name yourself, name something.”



### CTC expanded its capacity and recruited staff with personal /lived experience in North Memphis:

- » CTC hired a coordinator to oversee community engagement, provide administrative support to the coalition, and ensure processes were in place to do the work.
- » Leveraging its robust community engagement tools and strategies, CTC also expanded NMVC’s outreach work, scaling its work across nine hubs, representing 30 neighborhoods along the Interstate 240 belt loop.
- » A total of 10 “connectors” or organizers were recruited to support the nine hubs, one per hub



and an additional connector to work specifically on tenant protections across the neighborhoods. There was also a focused effort on hiring people with organizing backgrounds and personal/lived experiences that could authentically engage with the 30 neighborhoods in North Memphis. For example, a bilingual Latinx connector was hired to support predominantly Latinx neighborhoods.

### CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE AND RELATIONSHIPS

NMVC set out to build the coalition differently than in previous years. Instead of focusing recruitment on new institutional partners, it aspired to increase participation and leadership of North Memphis community residents (including youth) at the table. NMVC wanted community residents to determine their own priorities for their neighborhoods, collectively own the assets, challenges, and solutions in the area, and ensure equity considerations were layered throughout coalition processes and approaches.

- » In the 2020 SPARCC Table Survey, the number of community residents who responded to the survey doubled over the previous year. While a third of respondents indicated engagement with the table for more than three years, a quarter of them reported being on the table for less than six months, suggesting an increased effort in recruitment of new members.
- » It was also reported that engagement remained strong throughout the year with 50-80 community residents consistently attending coalition meetings.
- » NMVC did an assessment of neighborhoods to see where they fell on its organizing model: community building, community organizing, and community development. This included looking at the assets, interests, affinities, and experiences of the community. The type of engagement and support NMVC provided was based off this assessment.



**Diagram: NMVC Organizing Model.**

*This organizing model is not linear or chronological (year one, year two, year three), but rather demonstrates the work should be imagined and executed in a cyclical fashion. Each step works in tandem with and builds upon the others. Often, the arcs can be equated to a year's worth of work, however, this greatly depends on the assets, interests, affinities, and experiences of the community.*



- » To attract hard-to-reach populations and ensure residential engagement, NMVC met people “where they were,” including culturally relevant and contextualized engagement. For example, NMVC would host meetings outside the traditional business hours to accommodate varying work schedules. Additionally, during a retreat with neighborhood chairs, people did not initially lean into conversations about lead or air quality until an issue surfaced around park equity and Gooch Park (a valuable community asset in the heart of North Memphis). Discussions around air quality and lead became more relevant and concrete when it was set in the context of a familiar and treasured place.

### UNLOCKING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ART

Community engagement not only meant getting the right people (community residents) to the table, but also working on building trust and strengthening relationships. North Memphis is a historically disinvested area, with segregated neighborhoods, high poverty rate, and low educational attainment. Racial/ethnic groups have historically been pitted against each other for political power and resources. To overcome these dynamics, NMVC leveraged art, poetry, music, and storytelling to build the community, lift their collective voice, and reclaim their narrative. For example:

- » NMVC invited seven community members to tell their own stories in their own words and compiled it in a video, entitled “[One Minute Memphis Stories](#)”, which was previewed at the 2021 SPARCC National Convening.
- » With COVID-19 shelter-in-place restrictions in place in early 2020, NMVC members created an impassioned song and video entitled [M.E.M.P.H.I.S](#) to exemplify support and solidarity for its community.
- » NMVC’s approach to convenings and meetings intentionally incorporates music, poetry, and dance to promote healing and encourage celebration.

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### M.E.M.P.H.I.S Song Lyrics

*M-E-M-P-H-I-S. Let it sink into your chest. (x8)*

*Mobilizing equity through music  
and our policy. Understanding history so we  
could make a change. (x2)*

*Story is our art.  
Story is our music.*

*Breaking culture down  
so they know how we do this.*

*Story is the light we share.  
Story is for all to bare.*

*Story is the human way we listen  
just to show we care.*

*M-E-M-P-H-I-S. Let it sink into your chest. (x4)*

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### INTEGRATING RACIAL EQUITY AND RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY

While this crucial infrastructure was being built, CTC leadership was also engaging closely with Equity and Results, a consulting company with expertise in racial equity-centered results-based accountability. This was set up as a train-the-trainer model to build capacity within CTC/NMVC leadership to facilitate discussions with neighborhood representatives and delegates on the root causes of racial inequities and the social determinants of health. Through this process, the group identified a “result” they wanted to achieve, the root causes for the inequities, and the indicators to measure progress towards it.

Culminating this process, NMVC hosted HOMEcoming in October 2020 to celebrate and showcase their work thus far and to discuss strategies to address the root causes.

### IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

While the COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to shelter-in-place, Tennessee did not shut down like other parts of the country. Economic impacts came at a later wave and affected social economic and racial groups differently. The level of urgency did



not impact North Memphis in the same way as it did for other parts of the country because resources and access have always been scarce for its community.

NMVC continued to pursue its mission in 2020, even if engaging and organizing the community looked a bit differently. Instead of boots on the ground and going door-to-door, meetings and engagement went virtual. Connectors adapted and began calling people in the community. Neighbors worked together and created phone trees to do outreach, assess needs, and determined how to support each other. Operating in this way made relationship-building and engagement a bit more challenging, but it was also an opportunity to think creatively. Through this work, the coalition was able to respond effectively and connect the community to resources to address issues like food insecurity and WIFI connectivity.

“...a lot of the people we were speaking to have said that this isn’t necessarily an emergency for us. We were already tapped because we didn’t have resources or access.”

In addition to the operational shifts, NMVC surfaced a gap in Memphis’s public health work. It lacked a collaborative structure where residents could provide feedback to key public health actors (e.g., city/county, and health care institutions). At the end of 2020, NMVC began expanding its scope of work to include a public health initiative. It reached out to

traditional healthcare institutions and partners such as BARHII in the Bay Area, ARCHI in Atlanta, and MHC in Denver to form a broader health equity coalition. The vision is to address health equity more broadly through a social determinants of health lens. The group is meeting regularly to hone its vision and strategies.



NMVC Members

### WHAT’S NEXT FOR NMVC?

NMVC is planning to operationalize its vision and starting to advance projects and strategies they have identified in 2020. Some ideas elevated by the CHANGE workgroups include the following:

- » **Climate:** Agri-hood Centers
- » **Health:** Cultural Wellness Centers
- » **Arts & Culture- Next Generation:** Emergency Response Centers
- » **Growth and Economics:** Community Land Trusts/Community Investment Trusts
- » **Education:** Social & Emotional Learning Centers.

*The Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) aims to shift decades of racially discriminatory policies and investments that have resulted in racial disparities in health and climate resilience in communities throughout the United States. SPARCC aims to address the barriers facing communities of color and low-income communities by advancing a community-driven development model, which evolved to focus especially on displacement. The operations and work of NMVC has been supported in large part by SPARCC.*