SPARCC

CASE STUDY:

TransFormation Alliance

Center for Community Health and Evaluation

The Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge – or SPARCC invested in and amplified local efforts in regions of the United States to ensure that major new investments in the places we live, work, and play lead to equitable and healthy opportunities for all. Over six years starting in 2017, SPARCC addressed barriers experienced by communities of color, especially low-income, by advancing a community-driven development model that prioritizes racial equity, health, and climate resilience. At the heart of SPARCC were local, multi-sector collaboratives or "tables" that worked in partnership with SPARCC's national implementation team and funders. As illustrated in the theory of change (see image on Page 2), SPARCC expanded cross-sector collaboration to advance racial equity and contribute to systems changes in community development.

SPARCC came to life in Atlanta, contributing to changes in local community development systems including collaborative infrastructure and relationships, policy and practices, and capital investment strategies. While this case study highlights key examples of systems-change work, it is not a comprehensive or exhaustive account of all the work that occurred in Atlanta during SPARCC.

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SPARCC COLLABORATIVE TABLE: TRANSFORMATION ALLIANCE

Tables provided the infrastructure for a multi-sector partnership to advance SPARCC's goals. Tables received operating funding from SPARCC to support collaboration and partnership development. In Atlanta, this table was the TransFormation Alliance (TFA).

Founded in 2015, TFA started with a focus on equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) in legacy Black communities. Its work expanded to include housing choice, transit funding, community engagement, arts and culture, a healthy built environment, and job access. The TFA structure has a managing director and an executive committee of seven organizations. The seven organizations guide the collective effort in different content areas:
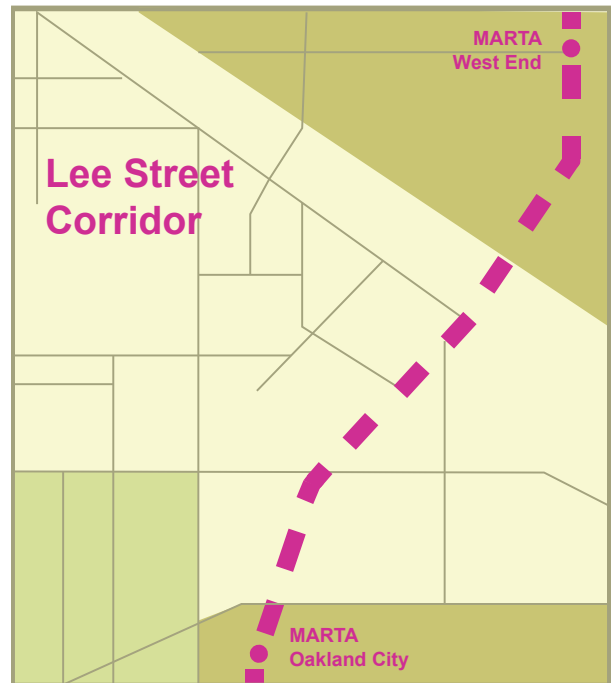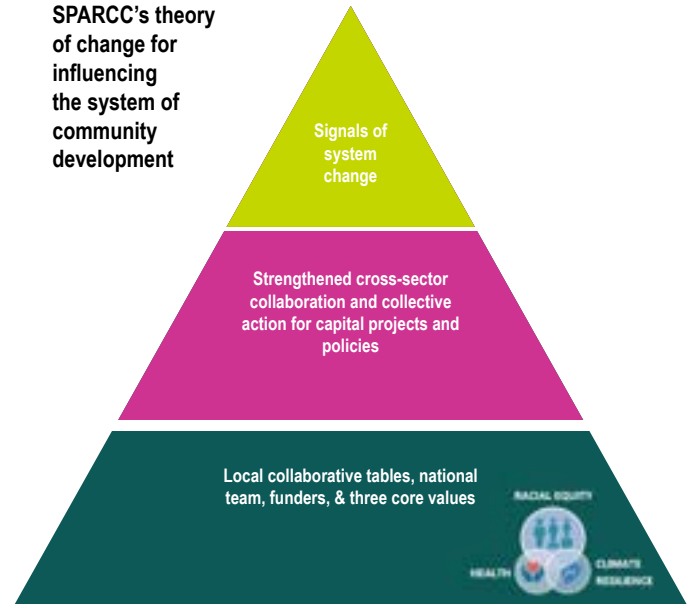
- Racial equity- Partnership for Southern Equity
- Community leadership-Georgia STAND UP
- Health equity-ARCHI
- Climate-West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
- Transit-Propel
- Arts and culture-Generator Inc.
- Capital-Enterprise Community Partners

To bring its vision to life, TFA member organizations work together to influence public policy, investment patterns, political will, and community engagement.

Since 2017, with the support of the SPARCC initiative, TFA has focused on the Lee Street Corridor in Southwest Atlanta, organizing its work around four strategic priority areas:

- Strengthen a healthy and influential TFA
- Deepen solidarity with community partners
- Leverage collective power around capital projects
- Activate our influence

SPARCC's theory of change for influencing the system of community development

Signals of system change

Strengthened cross-sector collaboration and collective action for capital projects and policies

Local collaborative tables, national team, funders, & three core values

RACIAL EQUITY
HEALTH   CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Lee Street Corridor

MARTA West End

MARTA Oakland City

The Lee Street corridor stretches from the West End MARTA station to the Oakland City MARTA station. The corridor includes some of the city's poorest and most segregated neighborhoods. It faces development pressures from the BeltLine expansion, the Metro Atlanta Regional Transit Authority (MARTA) expansion, and the Fort McPherson redevelopment. Experts expect these expansions to spur gentrification and displacement.

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A SHARED VISION DROVE TFA'S COLLABORATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE AND FRAMEWORK FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE EFFORTS

The SPARCC theory of change suggests that local tables contribute to systems change by developing and strengthening relationships and collaborative infrastructure. The SPARCC evaluation team administered an annual survey to all table members. The evaluation used the survey to create an annual snapshot of collaboration within the tables and understand change over time. It consisted of scaled questions addressing the six essential elements of collaboration. Perceptions of concrete accomplishments and collaborative effectiveness were determined by taking the average of several individual item ratings within each of the six elements in the collaboration model.

TFA used SPARCC resources to strengthen its collaborative infrastructure by hiring a managing director and program manager, engaging in a strategic planning process, refining its governance structures, and clarifying member expectations. As a result of early and ongoing investments, TFA increased its survey ratings in all domains since the beginning of SPARCC, with almost all moving from "adequate" to "good" or above. This **trajectory signals the evolution of a table with the foundations in place to move forward their systems change priorities collaboratively**. We included a sample of collaborative functioning highlights below.

Essential elements of collaboration

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SHARED PURPOSE

Intentional vision setting determined the path for TFA. SPARCC helped create a space for TFA to intentionally assess what work they wanted to do as a collaborative. Then, they conducted iterative strategic planning to tie their streams of work and complex work plans together, resulting in clear priority areas and outcomes. TFA's issue champions brought their varied subject matter expertise to shared decision-making. TFA members reflected that while engaging so many partners in such an iterative process took time, it was worthwhile because it ensured the strategies they chose aligned with their values and built on their varied expertise.

Advancing racial equity is the driving force of TFA's work. SPARCC's charge to lead with racial equity positively affected TFA and its member organizations, including energizing and recruiting members, defining guiding principles, distinguishing TFA from other organizations in Atlanta, and raising awareness among members and organizational partners. They learned that a key part of this work is attending to the individuals around the tables' emotional well-being and personal transformation. Because imbalances of power, money, and privilege can trigger people, they found it was essential early on to set aside time for trust building to address those issues. The commitment to center racial equity influenced various aspects of their work, including developing tools and resources, policy and advocacy efforts, and leadership development.

Development of tools & resources	Policy/advocacy	Leadership development & support
• Weaved equity into work with the Equity Atlas online planning tool, which examines eight key community well-being areas, particularly access and opportunity. • Created the Equity Evaluator tool, which brings equity considerations into capital development decisions. • Developed racial equity training and supported the creation of an equity task force for the city of Atlanta.	• Advocated for and secured arts funding for BIPOC organizations. • Organized candidate forums and encouraged elected officials to focus on equity. • Developed policy recommendations that addressed racial inequities in city planning efforts.	• Supported residents and BIPOC developers to participate in capital development projects actively. • Led the resident leadership program, the TransFormation Academy, that built new leaders' capacity in ETOD and the intersections between racial equity, housing, transportation, climate, and health.

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TFA embraced the intersectionality of the SPARCC initiative and advanced various projects related to racial equity, health equity, and climate justice. The SPARCC initiative was structured to support sites in thinking about the connections between health equity, racial equity, and climate justice and shaping their work to impact all three. This structure was new for TFA and resulted in an expansion and strengthening of their collaborative table. TFA reported learning that belonging to a collaborative does not necessarily mean people will think about the intersections of members' work. Instead, it must be an intentional effort to discuss the connections. TFA's projects have linked race, transit, housing, climate, health, arts and culture, and jobs. Examples include:

- Member organization <u>ARCHI</u> put together a community engagement process resulting in health priorities that could be integrated into TFA's workplan. ARCHI also supported <u>seven local health systems in exploring their roles in supporting housing</u> and was part of developing and supporting the creation of the Federal Health Equity for All Coalition and a Federal Health Equity Framework. They supported pilot language for health equity funding to advance community <u>health equity</u> and health centers.
- Member organizations <u>SouthFace</u> and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance ran The Culture Resilience Environmental Workforce <u>(CREW)</u> program. This program was a green-infrastructure workforce development project. It implemented residential and commercial projects using planting and human-made landscape features to prevent flooding and create community gathering spaces. In addition, the program provided hands-on training in the installation and maintenance of green-infrastructure projects and assisted alums with job placement.
- TFA used SPARCC <u>capital funding</u> to help construct two new soccer fields on unused land next to MARTA transit stations. <u>Station Soccer's</u> goal is to create soccer leagues across the city, promoting active lifestyle habits and public transit use. The league created jobs and a hub for social interaction. Station Soccer prompted trust between program staff and community members, which made a program expansion possible during COVID-19, offering players and parents healing and trauma training. MARTA stepped in to continue funding the program resulting in replication at five stations across the city, with the goal of reaching ten.

ESSENTIAL PEOPLE AT THE TABLE

As TFA grew rapidly, it remained intentionally focused on reflecting community needs. TFA grew from around 15 member organizations in 2017 to more than 35 in 2022. Through this growth, TFA successfully brought together various subject matter experts under one shared vision. In 2020, they added a champion focused on mobility to respond to the rapidly expanding transit infrastructure while also attending to the needs of pedestrians and bike riders. TFA also made a strategic shift with a new climate champion to deepen the connection to the Black community's climate justice priorities. TFA found that SPARCC created a space for gathering partners who had not worked together before and facilitated cross-sector problem solving, where work is seen as complementary instead of competitive.

TFA strengthened relationships and deepened solidarity with community partners. TFA's commitment to advancing racial equity shaped its approach to building community power. TFA learned the importance of devoting time to identify and invest in front-line community partners and was intentional about understanding and syncing their work to communities' needs and desires. Informed by past hurts in their community, TFA was very clear from the beginning of SPARCC that they did not want to do work on top of neighbors but with neighbors. They stood up various advisory committees over the years and were careful about what they were asking of community participants, always mindful of not being extractive. A community grants program that redirected SPARCC funding of more than $150,000 to community-led projects was one way that TFA directly supported the priorities of the Lee Street Corridor residents. They also developed community training and fellowship opportunities, including CREW and the TransFormation Academy, and training programs focused on youth and residents organized by the Atlanta Regional Commission and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance.
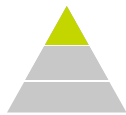
TFA CONTRIBUTED TO POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES THAT ADVANCED INCLUSIONARY HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION PLANS IN ATLANTA

SPARCC's aim was systems change. This change included developing practices, policies, and investments in the built environment to be more equitable so communities are healthier, more climate-resilient, and opportunity-rich places for all. The SPARCC theory of change posited that strengthened local and national collaboration would result in capacity outcomes and ultimately lead to systems changes in community development policies and practices. Through SPARCC, TFA's policy and practice change work mainly focused on influencing local decision-makers to promote inclusionary housing[1] and transportation plans that fit community needs.

A collective policy agenda, informed by community priorities, laid the foundation for TFA members to coalesce and increase their political influence in Atlanta. When SPARCC began in 2017, TFA was not well known enough to have political power in Atlanta. Their issue champions gathered information from the community about their priorities and used that to guide their work. Then their first director organized them to define policy priorities to speak with a collective voice. They developed a set of policy position papers in racial equity, health, mobility, climate, housing, place keeping, and jobs, which guided their work and aligned their collective power. TFA's influence in Atlanta considerably grew as members joined committees across the city and became part of the Atlanta Regional Commission, which helped them gain access to more potential partners. By the end of SPARCC, TFA had successfully shifted conversations among local decision-makers (e.g., lawmakers, municipal partners) to ensure community development planning processes included TFA's central values of community engagement and equity. Specific policy achievements mostly centered around transportation and housing and included:

- **Established a new ETOD fund for housing:** Invest Atlanta, Enterprise Community Loan Fund, and the Low-Income Investment Fund teamed up to create a $15 million ETOD fund, which provides below-market capital products with no expectation of making a quick profit to support the acquisition and pre-development of workforce housing near MARTA stations, the Atlanta Streetcar, the Atlanta BeltLine, and other modes of transit.

- **Passed a new policy to decrease traffic-related deaths:** TFA member organizations, including Propel and Georgia Stand Up, partnered to pass a Vision Zero policy in Atlanta. This policy is an ambitious, data-driven, and equity-focused plan to eliminate traffic deaths and reduce crashes on city streets.

- **Led a community-driven street audit to inform a new transportation plan:** Propel trained community members to conduct an audit and determine areas that need to be addressed (e.g., decriminalizing walking and biking and fixing the most dangerous transit areas). In 2023 they will then connect with planning students at Georgia Tech to develop a transportation plan informed by the audit.

[1] Inclusionary zoning and housing policies require developers reserve a portion of housing units for residents with low incomes

- **Influenced the passage of inclusionary housing policies:** TFA, Georgia ACT, and the City for All housing coalition were instrumental in catalyzing the City of Atlanta's re-commitment to Inclusionary Housing policies along the 22-mile loop around the new Beltline.

- **Promoted tenant protections during the pandemic:** In response to the economic pressures brought by COVID-19, TFA successfully promoted tenant protections by ensuring 25% of the federal funding allocated to Atlanta from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act was set aside for emergency rental assistance.

- **Influenced organizational policy to support BIPOC arts organizations:** TFA Arts & Culture Champion, Generator Inc., advocated with the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta on behalf of the local BIPOC arts community for more inclusionary funding practices. The foundation changed its grant application requirements to qualify a larger pool of Black applicants. In subsequent funding rounds, a total of $1.15 million was awarded to 28 arts organizations impacted by COVID-19, of which 22 were Black-led.

TFA CONTRIBUTED TO SYSTEMS CHANGES RELATED TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL STRATEGIES AND INVESTMENTS

SPARCC was designed to shift community development systems along with policy and practice changes. This shift includes both:

- New capital investment approaches, partnerships, and products; improved capital flow to development that supports racial equity, health, and climate resilience and creates options for residents and businesses to remain and thrive
- Observable changes in the built environment that reflect equitable access to opportunity

New capital investment approaches

TFA promoted a new way of centering community engagement within the development process, pushing back against the local norm of back-room meetings and moving fast at the expense of community priorities and engagement. This new model allocates more money and attention to community engagement. For example, the Tucker Avenue ETOD demonstration project tested a community engagement co-design model, using resident-generated narratives, feedback, and vision to guide the design and programming of the community land trust housing project. Additionally, TFA reached out to the surrounding neighborhood residents to explore how additional community priorities may be incorporated into the development of the project and its long-term impacts.

TFA's advocacy also prompted some local organizations to adopt TFA's community-centered approach. For example, they helped ensure community engagement was a component of the Atlanta Department of Transportation's new strategic plan.

TFA supported resident leaders and BIPOC developers to participate actively in local development processes.

TFA's TransFormation Academy built new leaders' capacity in ETOD and the intersections between racial equity, housing, transportation, and climate. It has advanced a new Development Watch program. The Development Watch provides graduates, "Resident Leaders for Equity," with a more profound knowledge base, equipping them with tools to track neighborhood developments in gentrifying target geographies.

- TFA's support of BIPOC developers has evolved over the SPARCC initiative. In 2020 TFA member, The Guild implemented a program to make the local development ecosystem more equitable by providing pre-development dollars to a targeted cohort of BIPOC developers. A few years later, Enterprise Community Partners created the Equitable Path Forward Initiative to level the playing field for BIPOC-led developers by giving them more favorable terms and loosening underwriting criteria.

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CAPITAL PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Since 2017, TFA has developed nine capital projects with community members that received SPARCC financial support, primarily through capital grants.

TFA had a lot of potential projects that addressed the intersectionality of SPARCC that did not fit well with SPARCC's traditional capital debt products. They did not find SPARCC debt capital particularly helpful due to having more traditional risk tolerance levels, which seemed to be designed for organizations with established track records versus the grassroots organizations TFA works with who are new to this work. In addition, TFA's potential borrowers required much technical assistance on the capital system and taking on debt was not appropriate in most cases because of a misalignment between a requirement of revenue generation and community-identified projects focused more on social than economic impacts. While working to transform community priorities into capital projects, TFA highlighted the need for capital products that are fast and flexible, making them attractive to grassroots markets. TFA also called for educating Community Development Financial Institutions about the reality of communities, including how they could provide debt differently to make an impact.

Given this reality, TFA mostly accessed the SPARCC capital grants to invest in projects that could support community resilience, most of which were too small and considered too risky to be funded without SPARCC. They found that having tangible projects demonstrates how project could better serve the community TFA appreciated SPARCC's grant funding since similar funding from foundations and national institutions is often quite competitive.

TFA's capital project pipeline was quickly built once SPARCC began. Having an Enterprise Community Partners employee as their capital champion brought knowledge of possible projects and a strong reputation, helping TFA move fast on capital projects. TFA established a decision-making body to vet possible projects, which brought subject matter experts together to ensure proposed capital projects were aligned with the intersectional goals of SPARCC (i.e., racial equity, health equity, and climate resilience).

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CAPITAL PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Project description (SPARCC funding)	How SPARCC contributed
Reverend James Orange Park Recreation Center building ($40,000)	
TFA partners had conversations with local community organizations and residents and contracted with an architect to begin initial designs for a remodel. (2020-present)	Funded updating the master plan. The City of Atlanta was to match funding.
Station soccer ($125,000 in grants for two fields)	
Created two soccer fields on unused land next to MARTA transit stations. MARTA funded four additional fields at other stations. (2018)	Contributed to building costs. Leveraged outside funding.
Tucker Avenue eTOD demonstration project ($100,000 grant, $400,000 loan)	
Mixed-use development including affordable housing units, community space and commercial space.	Contributed to pre-development costs and established a pool of capital to support land acquisition, including an opportunity to purchase options on adjacent parcels.
The Culture Resilience Environmental Workforce program ($142,100 grant)	
Green-infrastructure workforce development project, preventing flooding, creating community gathering spaces and job training. (2019-2021)	Funded eight green infrastructure projects. Leveraged outside funding.
Lifecycle Building Center ($93,940 grant)	
Preservation of a facility supplying affordable materials for home improvements to nonprofits, contractors, and small business owners with limited capital for projects.	Funds were used to replace the electrical system in the 70,000-square-foot facility.
West Atlanta Preservation Initiative ($38,960 grant)	
The Atlanta Land Trust's acquisition of two properties. (2020)	Funds contributed to buying properties that were renovated and sold to low-income buyers.
Urban Oasis Beltline Housing Project ($159,000 grant)	
Mixed-income development adjacent to the Beltline, including 35 units of permanently affordable home ownership, 40-65 units of affordable rental housing, and 5,000+sf of affordable commercial spaces, including live-work spaces. (2022)	Funds contributed to redevelopment costs (environmental review and remediation, architectural plans and rezoning, utility review, revised financial proforma, survey, title, geotech and contract extensions).
The Church Street Four-Plexes ($300,000 grant)	
Local developers and national Incremental Development Alliance faculty supported a first-time developer training cohort to build three four-plex buildings. Provided the first 12 new rental apartments built within walking distance of the East Point MARTA station in four years. This project will demonstrate how 2-4 unit residential infill and adaptive reuse projects can be financed with standard Agency 30-year mortgages. (2022)	A recoverable grant will allow them to acquire the sites and close on a construction loan.

CAPITAL PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Project description (SPARCC funding)	How SPARCC contributed
Groundcover ($300,000 grant)	
(Dill Ave) The purchase of a property by a Community Stewardship Trust (CST) comprised of neighborhood residents. The pilot rehabilitates the long-vacant property by adding a grocery store, three commercial kitchens for emerging food entrepreneurs, community gathering and co-working spaces, and 18 units of permanently affordable housing. The CST will also provide jobs and a mutual aid network providing financial, political and real estate education. (2022) (Ira Street) Co-developed mixed-use project with community members. The project will pilot the Liberated Zones program. The building will house a food coop, a housing cooperative and a space for mutual aid and political education.	Funds will allow the purchase of commercial kitchen equipment for BIPOC entrepreneurs. Funds will also act as a backstop to allow the project's community investors to participate in the funding of the Community Stewardship Trust, which will ultimately be the project owner. Funds would cover 125 investors by year two, enabling the CST to gain investor momentum and launch fully funded when the project opens.

CONCLUSION

Since joining SPARCC in 2017, TFA has grown, strengthened, and learned what it takes to build a collaboration that can move forward community priorities centering racial equity. They built their collective voice and gained political influence in Atlanta by clarifying joint priorities based on community input, building relationships with key stakeholders, and advocating for a more equitable Atlanta. As a result, TFA has moved forward with nine capital projects that strengthen community resilience and demonstrate a new way to conduct community development rooted in racial equity and community priorities. TFA also moved forward with systems changes in community development, advancing models that center community engagement and support BIPOC developers.

TFA is actively working on securing funding for its next phase. They have recently changed their collaborative structure to act as a convener between organizations like MARTA, the City of Atlanta, and other government agencies. In addition, they are considering a role acting as consultants on community engagement with a hyper-local focus. Although committed to accomplishing goals and finishing identified work in their initial target geography, TFA's work is far from done. They are committed to ETOD and pushing for a more equitable Atlanta for years to come.

Center for Community Health and Evaluation
Part of Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute

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The Center for Community Health and Evaluation is an evaluation partner for foundations, nonprofits, and government agencies to determine what works to improve community health. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded this evaluation.

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