

February 2023



# CASE STUDY: Elevated Chicago

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 those that are 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

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

# Elevated Chicago



## SPARCC COLLABORATIVE TABLE: ELEVATED CHICAGO

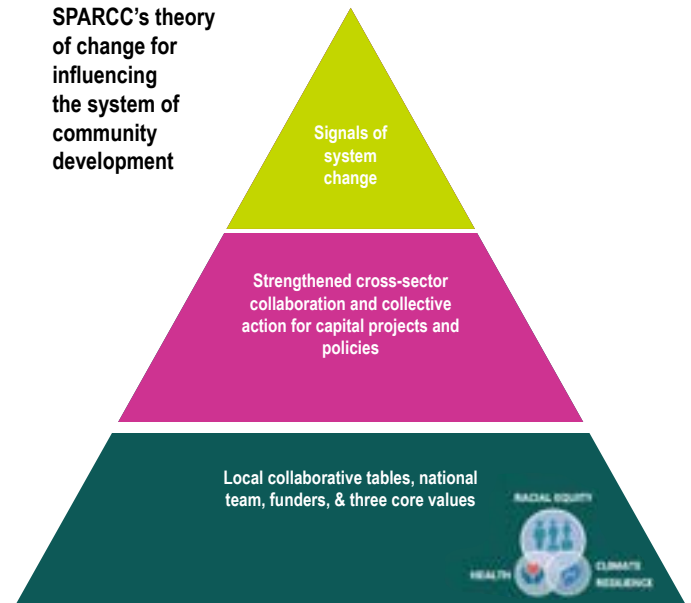
The foundation of the SPARCC theory of change was local collaboratives called “tables” that provided the infrastructure for multi-sector partnership to advance SPARCC’s goals. Tables received operating funding from SPARCC to support collaboration and partnership development. In 2017, SPARCC supported the formation of Elevated Chicago, a collaborative of residents, community organizations, artists, developers, regional nonprofits, community development financial institutions, city officials, policymakers, activists, and philanthropists.

**Elevated Chicago structure:** Elevated Chicago’s governance structure is intentionally designed to facilitate authentic and inclusive community engagement including having power and ownership in decisions affecting the built environment. The table is led by a steering committee consisting of 15 individuals representing various communities and organizations. They also have community-level collaboratives in each of the neighborhoods of focus who have representatives on the steering committee. (See Structure and Support section below for more information.)

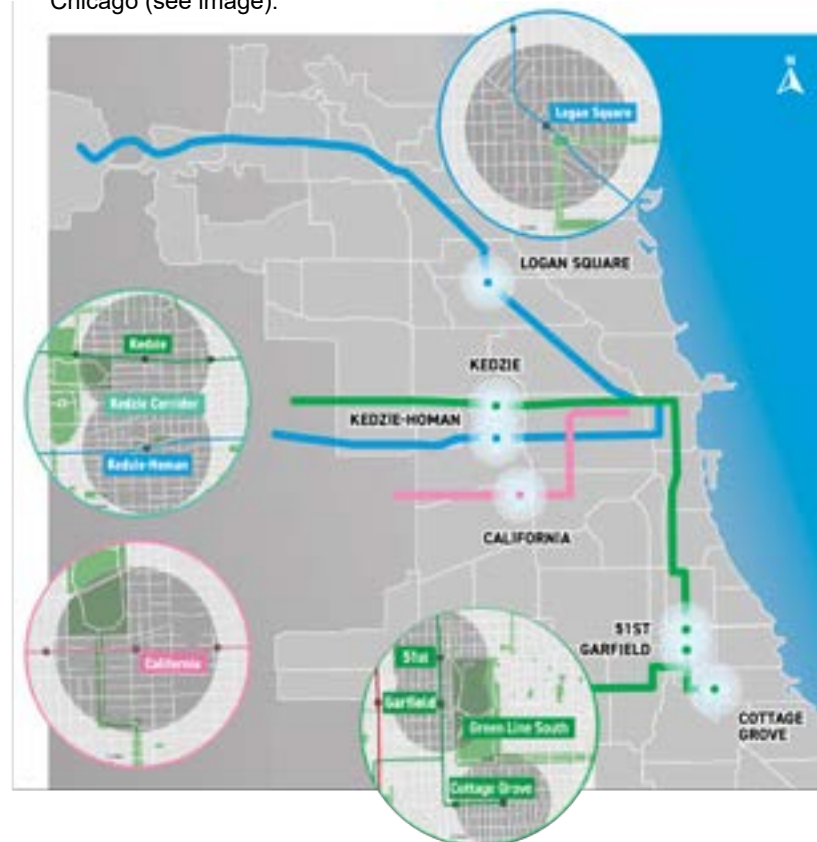
**Elevated Chicago priorities:** Historically, trains have connected people to places. Elevated Chicago believes transit can also connect people to ideas, innovations, and capital, both within and outside of their communities. Since its start, Elevated Chicago has addressed structural inequities that perpetuate racial segregation and urban disinvestment. They achieve this by mobilizing local and national partnerships that bring community-led solutions. While the table evolved during SPARCC, it consistently centered principles of racial equity and equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) through community engagement and ownership.

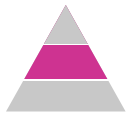
Elevated Chicago’s current priorities and strategies can be found in their workplan, which consistently includes strategies that advance ETOD and center racial equity and strengthen community voice and leadership in policy and capital processes.

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



**Elevated Chicago target geography:** Elevated Chicago started its work by focusing on the strengths and assets of neighborhoods in the ½ mile radius around seven Chicago Transit Authority stations located in the Northwest, West, and South sides of Chicago (see image).





## ELEVATED CHICAGO CONTRIBUTED TO SYSTEMS CHANGES IN COLLABORATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE AND STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS IN CHICAGO

The SPARCC theory of change suggests that local tables contribute to systems change by developing and strengthening relationships and collaborative infrastructure. With the aim of creating both an annual snapshot of collaboration within the tables and understanding change over time, the SPARCC evaluation administered an annual survey with all table members. This survey 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.

Elevated Chicago formed to participate in SPARCC, using SPARCC funding and other resources to build its table structure and processes. Over the course of the initiative, Elevated Chicago increased its ratings in all the essential elements of collaboration, moving most of them from “adequate” to well above “good” (maximum rating: outstanding). **This trajectory signals the evolution of a table with the foundation to collaboratively move systems change priorities forward.** From the beginning, they attended to all the elements of collaboration consistently and intentionally. This approach ensured that Elevated Chicago was a place to advance a collective agenda and allowed members to “bring their whole selves.” This required time, resources (both human and financial), and ongoing effort to build, strengthen, and sustain a truly inclusive and equitable collaborative culture. Featured below are selected highlights in collaboration elements with the most growth.

### Essential elements of collaboration







## SHARED PURPOSE

**Intentional vision setting determined the path for Elevated Chicago.** In the early days of Elevated Chicago, they dedicated time to team building and getting to know each other. This approach served a crucial function in the collective determination of their values. From these values, they articulated their north star: “to erase boundaries, shift power, and de-center elements of white supremacy culture (such as perfectionism, conflict avoidance and competitive individualism) that harm community development.” Elevated Chicago staff played a critical role in being disciplined and continuing to elevate and circle back to that north star to ensure continual alignment and accountability.

**Advancing racial equity is the driving force of Elevated Chicago’s work.** Racial equity is at the center of everything Elevated Chicago does—both in terms of what they prioritize and how they do the work. This is a clear, mandatory value for all partners and an explicit expectation in all table processes. They have consistently communicated to partners that power and resources will first flow to communities who have historically not received their fair share. They achieve this by setting up systems to facilitate authentic community voice and influence in all their work. This is also the lens they bring to their external partnerships from the City of Chicago to national collaboratives.

**Elevated Chicago embraced the intersectionality of the SPARCC initiative and advanced ETOD as the mechanism for achieving their goals related to racial equity, health equity, and climate justice.** Elevated Chicago sees transit (in Chicago and elsewhere) as a connecting asset and ETOD as an opportunity and imperative to advance racial equity, climate, health, and arts and culture to create thriving neighborhoods across the city. The table has successfully brought ETOD as a central priority for the City of Chicago and brings advocacy and learning to ETOD investments and efforts across the country (see below).



## ESSENTIAL PEOPLE AT THE TABLE

**Elevated Chicago was intentional about building a strategic, well-rounded table rooted in community.** From the beginning, Elevated Chicago insisted that its table be in service of residents and community. When recruiting steering committee members, they sought people of varying identities and experiences, both personal and professional.

Across the target geographies, they established a structure for community resident engagement and influence. This structure also integrated involvement from leaders of public agencies, nonprofits, community development entities (e.g., developers, community development finance institutions), and other key sectors (see below for additional information about Elevated Chicago’s structure). Members reported that Elevated Chicago successfully brought together and built relationships and trust among partners who may not have previously worked together and supported them in identifying and achieving collective goals.

“Diversity doesn’t mean that everybody is welcome everywhere, and inclusion doesn’t mean that either. Especially when a member or an organization is behaving against your values, not doing their part of the work, it’s much easier to have the conversation when you have that as a value and you have folks that believe in it...to sit with them and say, ‘hey, is this really the place for you?’”



## STRUCTURE & SUPPORT

Elevated Chicago's **governance structure** ensured diverse perspectives and resident voice directed decisions affecting the built environment and articulated clear roles for moving the work forward. This level of collaborative infrastructure operating in service of racial equity in Chicago took time and intentionality to establish. Key elements of the table include:

- **Steering committee:** Elevated Chicago is led by a Steering Committee representing national, regional, local and community voices and organizations that work on issues of equity, opportunity, affordability, health, culture, and climate resilience.
- **Working groups:** Three working groups are charged with designing and implementing strategies around: 1) Capital and Programs; 2) Systems Change; and 3) Knowledge Sharing.
- **Community tables:** This work is informed and supported by five inclusive community tables associated with the transit stations of focus or eHubs. These tables are comprised of Steering Committee members, community-based partners, and other neighborhood stakeholders.
- **Leadership council:** A council of decision makers and investors from across the city and region supporting work plan implementation and systems change.

This structure supports ongoing, multi-directional learning. Elevated Chicago's work changes the community and community members influence changes within the table in terms of priorities, strategies, and approaches.

**At all levels, Elevated Chicago pays its members for engagement, prioritizing resources to those members who have historically received less (or were expected to volunteer).** From the beginning, a core tenet was paying people for spending time coming to the table and engaging in the work. Elevated Chicago provides additional resources whenever people are asked to do something "extra." Additionally, to promote transparency and trust, Elevated Chicago staff report back to the table how money gets spent and who receives it, including participant stipends.

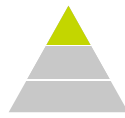
### Elevated Chicago's governance approach





## 5 tips for a strong table from Elevated Chicago

- 1. Focus on the “how” and the “why”** as well as the “what” from the beginning. The strategies and the work will keep changing; however, the reasons people show up, how they work together, and the relationships built are what will last.
- 2. Invest in relationship and trust building** among members early and often, even when people are reluctant. This takes time, persistence, and patience.
- 3. Make racial equity mandatory.** Racial equity work requires all members embrace this core value without exception or negotiation.
- 4. Prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion expertise over subject matter expertise.** Elevated Chicago benefitted from staff members who had deep experience and commitment to facilitating racial equity work.
- 5. Pay people for their time** and live into that value with consistency and transparency.



## ELEVATED CHICAGO CONTRIBUTED TO POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES THAT ADVANCE ETOD IN THE CITY

SPARCC’s aim was systems change. This included changing 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. Elevated Chicago’s policy and practice change work focused on strengthening ETOD within Chicago.

During SPARCC, **Elevated Chicago positioned ETOD as a cornerstone planning and investment approach in the city of Chicago.** ETOD is “the tool Elevated Chicago is using to build a global, inclusive city where all residents thrive in neighborhoods whose health and resiliency indicators no longer depend on race.”<sup>1</sup> This has included collaborating on important policy- and practice-change successes including:

- **Drafting and adopting the Chicago ETOD Policy Plan, in partnership with the City of Chicago in 2020-21.** This was the first ever equitable development plan for the city, developed through an extensive community engagement process over an 18-month period. The plan 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).

ETOD had varying levels of political support prior to SPARCC. However, Elevated Chicago and other partners’ ongoing advocacy, along with a mayoral transition that resulted in ETOD champions taking leadership positions in the new administration, helped catalyze political will. This resulted in two

### 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 following three years.
- Expanded provisions beyond train lines to include ETOD policies for high-frequency bus corridors and improved walkability.
- Translated the plan into six languages, used plain language, featured community-based artists, and avoided jargon to increase accessibility and reach.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sparcchub.org/2022/04/28/sweet-home-chicago-investing-in-equitable-transit-oriented-development-to-keep-the-windy-city-connected-to-its-roots/>



interim successes: 1) adoption of community engagement principles within the Mayor's Office and other city departments; 2) adoption of a transit-oriented development ordinance amendment that included an explicit equity focus in 2019.

- **Implementation of the ETOD policy plan through meaningful investment and infrastructure to advance the vision.** Momentum around ETOD continued and, in October 2021, the Chicago City Council approved a 2022 budget that included \$10.2 million earmarked for ETOD. Additionally, Elevated Chicago co-led the development of a technical assistance table to support plan implementation. This cross-sector table includes decision makers across city departments, community development finance institutions, real estate technical assistance service providers, communications experts, among others as a foundation to support cross-agency collaboration related to ETOD projects.

In 2022, the City Council adopted the Connected Communities Ordinance, which has been described as the most comprehensive ETOD ordinance in the nation. It updates and modifies zoning code and policy to address historic disinvestments in Black and brown communities, and avoid displacement triggered by gentrification. Among other provisions, the ordinance makes affordable and accessible housing easier and more economical to build near transit, triples the amount of land eligible for parking reductions and density incentives, and improves pedestrian safety. The ordinance was collaboratively developed over three years by Elevated Chicago, City departments and leaders from community and citywide organizations.



Starting in early 2021, additional infrastructure for process changes also resulted from Elevated Chicago **coordinating and piloting two cohorts of the Equitable Development Ambassadors program.** Each cohort included around 20 ambassadors working on an ETOD project in cross-community, multi-generational teams. Ambassadors learned about creating a vision, developing a project, budgeting, completing a proforma, and incorporating storytelling. They developed these skills all while building community power and strengthening networks for equitable, ethical development. The program has also built capacity and advanced learning within the city by engaging in deep partnership with community and lifting up the values of inclusivity and transparency.

All this work has **increased understanding of and support for ETOD in Chicago, helped secure other public and private funding,** and created opportunities to partner on proposals for federal funding for ETOD projects. For example, Elevated Chicago partnered with the Mayor's Office to submit for federal funding of over 25 projects based in the eHubs. Elevated Chicago staff reflected that this work benefitted from their ongoing relationship and trust building with the City of Chicago over the years.





- **Positioning Elevated Chicago and its partners to influence ETOD practices nationally.** Elevated Chicago has influenced and informed the national ETOD conversation through broadly sharing their success and lessons learned. As in its own work, Elevated Chicago brings an emphasis to the “why” and “how” of ETOD alongside the “what.” This method highlights the principles of authentic community engagement and advocates for ETOD as an approach for resiliency, recovery, and healing.

In addition to work directly expanding ETOD, Elevated Chicago (in partnership with the Transformation Alliance in Atlanta) **implemented the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion learning cohort to train municipal leaders in authentic EDI strategies and processes.** The first cohort focused on decision makers within the City of Chicago and those with influence in advancing an equity agenda within their department or agency (e.g., Department of Housing, Department of Transportation). Participants examined equity from an individual, organizational, and institutional perspective and received tools to help operationalize equity within their organizations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the content was delivered virtually. While the program went well in terms of engagement and adapting to challenging circumstances, Elevated Chicago staff reflected that this work would be more powerful and effective if they were able to do it in-person to build relationships and facilitate deeper, more honest dialogue.





## ELEVATED CHICAGO CONTRIBUTED TO SYSTEMS CHANGES RELATED TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL STRATEGIES AND INVESTMENTS

Along with policy and practice changes, SPARCC was designed to shift the systems of community development. This includes both:

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

Since 2017, Elevated Chicago has successfully leveraged SPARCC capital resources and technical assistance, along with partnerships with local developers, finance institutions, and government institutions, **to secure over \$10 million for ETOD projects** in all its eHubs. Additionally, due to the influence of Elevated Chicago, in 2021 Chicago's Department of Housing allocated \$800M in LIHTCs for ETOD, and in 2022 Chicago's Department of Planning allocated \$10M for ETOD development, predevelopment and T.A., assisting 60 projects across the city. Along with specific development projects (see table below), Elevated Chicago has supported capital-related infrastructure and process changes including:

- **Applying a capital screen process** to all development projects to ensure values alignment in the areas of racial equity, health, climate resilience, and arts and culture. Additionally, as in all its work, Elevated Chicago provides the scaffolding and support for community engagement so that residents have influence in the development that occurs in their neighborhoods.
- **Establishing a predevelopment fund** to bridge gaps in funding and provide resources for key activities that need to happen prior to larger investment. In the first half of SPARCC, Elevated Chicago partnered with the Chicago Community Trust to seed a pool for predevelopment grants with SPARCC capital grant investment (\$500,000). The funds were available for predevelopment costs for projects prioritized by eHub community tables. They were available for third party costs and could stay in a project during and post construction, if deemed necessary. Funds could also be invested into projects during post construction in order to leverage other resources.
- **Advancing community ownership through identifying community ownership models and strengthening supportive infrastructure** through the Community Incubation Lab (managed by Enterprise Community Partners and in partnership with the North Memphis VOICE coalition). This allowed additional SPARCC funding to be allocated to ETOD projects identified through the Equitable Development Ambassador program discussed above.
- **Helping to create the Here to Stay Land Trust** in Logan Square in 2019. Here to Stay is an anti-displacement and homeownership model for moderate-income, long-time residents of Logan Square and two neighboring communities. It is a scalable, multi-pronged strategy that preserves the stock of naturally occurring affordable housing in the target area. This strategy creates a competitive, self-regenerating acquisition fund, rehabbing multifamily buildings, and cultivating a pipeline for low to middle-income families. It celebrated its first sale and welcomed its first homeowners in July 2022 and received \$5 million in state funding in 2023.



## CAPITAL PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Project description (SPARCC funding)	How SPARCC contributed
<b>Overton Center of Excellence</b>	
Green Line South. The Overton Center for Excellence is an arts, business, and technology hub for the Bronzeville community and beyond. This project provided a place for young adults and budding entrepreneurs for the Bronzeville renaissance currently underway.	Provided funds for a consultant to determine opportunities to make the building more energy efficient.
<b>Latinos Progresando's Community Resource Center (\$133,000 grant; \$1,770,000 loan)</b>	
California Pink Line. The community resource center will serve as a hub for providing access to immigration legal services, behavioral mental health screening, and treatment, trauma-informed group counseling sessions for all ages, and a robust referral system.	Grant funds supported pre-development due diligence and site preparation. Loan funds supported construction costs.
<b>Esperanza Health Center (\$100,000 grant; \$400,000 loan)</b>	
California Pink Line. Esperanza is a 20-year-old federally qualified health center that plays a critical role in the mental and physical health of residents on the West Side, including those with immigration status concerns and LGBTQ+ needs.	Capital grant will be combined with \$400,000 of SPARCC loan funds to be used to build out an estimated 15,000 sf of leased office space located at Western Avenue for occupancy by Esperanza's administrative staff.
<b>Garfield Park Community Council's Garfield Green Project (\$372,000)</b>	
Kedzie Green Line. Garfield Green is a new, 40-80 unit housing development, known as C40; it will be developed by Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) at Kedzie and Fifth Avenues, along with a City of Chicago-designated "Resilient Corridor."	Tenant improvements for 4,300 sqft. ground floor commercial space to reduce barriers to entry for BIPOC entrepreneurs. Small business and economic development consultant to assist with recruiting and supporting local small business for commercial occupancy and leasing up space.
<b>Foundation for Homan Square's Affordable Homes for People With Disabilities (\$300,000)</b>	
Kedzie Blue Line. The construction of 21 units on currently vacant land will provide affordable units accessible for people with disabilities as well as those transitioning out of long-term care facilities.	Close the final gap in funding sources. The project has seen escalating costs which have slowed the planned closing and created the need for additional capital grant support from SPARCC. The additional \$300,000 in funding is expected to expedite closing to meet the updated closing project timeline.

Successes in accessing and leveraging SPARCC capital occurred despite initial—and, in some cases, ongoing—challenges. SPARCC capital resources were not as flexible as Elevated Chicago and site partners originally expected. Projects identified and prioritized by community tables were more suited for grant funding versus debt. SPARCC's more flexible funding (e.g., operating grants, innovation grants) was useful in supporting much of the process-oriented work and paying members for their engagement. Additionally, the length of time that it took to move through SPARCC's capital process, combined with the steps needed for community engagement, was in tension with Chicago's hot real estate market. Elevated Chicago benefitted from expertise and support from their real estate, community development, and community development finance institution table members.



## CONCLUSION

SPARCC supported the establishment of Elevated Chicago, a hub for collaboration and partnership to advance racial equity through ETOD in the City of Chicago. Elevated Chicago strengthened the local cross-sector, community development network by intentionally developing a governance structure that prioritizes resident voice and building trusting relationships among partners. The value of Elevated Chicago in the city is evident through the level of influence it has in decision-making processes and the additional funding it has secured to support its work beyond the grant period of SPARCC.

Elevated Chicago has successfully positioned ETOD as an approach for economic recovery and resilience in Chicago, including contributing to supporting policy change, developing processes that center community engagement, and securing funding. Additionally, Elevated Chicago successfully accessed various types of SPARCC and other capital resources. The result was \$10 million invested in ETOD projects and built environment changes in Black and brown communities that historically have not benefited from community development investments and are experiencing the pressures of displacement. Additional results included two new ETOD policy plan and zoning ordinances, and \$10 million in funds devoted to ETOD projects and T.A. to supplement \$800 million in affordable housing near transit. This work has prompted changes in how community development happens in Chicago and Elevated Chicago is poised for longer-term impacts within the city and beyond.

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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.

