The work of Lift To Rise was born from a deep, mutual sense of urgency to change the trajectory of what it means to grow up, live, and work in the Coachella Valley. Too many Coachella Valley residents face desperate conditions, compounded by a disconnected ecosystem of public, community- and faith-based organizations and actors—an ecosystem which effectively guarantees a mismatch between service provision and communities. The enduring plight that so many residents face has been intensified and exacerbated by our unique demography and geography, which have taken on a whole new relevance amidst our current political climate and ongoing dialogue about race, inclusion, and belonging in America. In order to make progress against this overwhelming tide of need, toward a future where Coachella Valley families are healthy, stable and thriving, working together requires fixing our region’s broken systems, which neglect to tackle the underlying forces keeping residents impoverished and disconnected from the opportunities and resources they so desperately need.

Data represents a cornerstone of our effort to create a more inclusive, equitable Coachella Valley. Lift To Rise uses data to build a rigorous, shared understanding of the circumstances that residents face, including their needs and opportunities—an essential prerequisite to inform our collective impact work. In the organizing stages of this work, we quickly recognized that we needed to engage in a way that would allow us to address the multiple layers of disadvantage operating across the Valley, and to overcome the long-standing silos that prevent collective engagement toward the shared vision of a more inclusive, equitable Coachella Valley. Lift To Rise employs a collective impact approach that catalyzes both institutional and grassroots actors to shift their attention and activities toward mutually reinforced interventions that address the underlying causes of poverty in the Coachella Valley.

To achieve this goal, Lift To Rise uses data in two critical ways. First, Lift To Rise uses data as a way to transform the narrative that describes life in the Coachella Valley. The Coachella Valley is dominated by strong narratives that promote the vision of the region as an idyllic playground for wealthy tourists and retirees. This perception overshadows the persistent crisis facing a large share of residents, and particularly families: nearly half of residents live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, and more than 80 percent of area children qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. Effective intervention to support impoverished families requires understanding their struggle and coping strategies, and establishing the primary goal of better serving this population. Data is a necessary prerequisite to this task. Lift To Rise uses data to create a common baseline understanding for partners to assess local need and challenge embedded assumptions that can prevent partners from addressing root cause issues. Therefore, acting from an evidence-based foundation can enable partners to align their efforts to address resident need and the underlying drivers of inequality in the region.

Second, Lift To Rise uses data to inform intervention and measure change. Lift To Rise structures its activities through Collection Action Networks (CANs), comprised of representatives from stakeholder community organizations and agencies working in the Coachella Valley. The CANs use a “plan-do-study-act” framework of rapid improvement cycles that involves identifying key, measurable performance measures and outcomes for each iteration of strategy implementation, and using iterative evaluation to create ongoing learning toward continual strategy improvement. Data underlies the work of the CANs, to identify spaces in which intervention is needed, formulate strategies in response, engage in interventions, and evaluate impacts using embedded performance measures. This approach establishes a practice of ongoing learning within the CANs, using data to track progress along established indicators and alter interventions in rapid response to ongoing learning and changing conditions.
1. Data as a way to transform the narrative

The ongoing work of Lift To Rise has exposed a fractured narrative in the Coachella Valley in which poverty lies hidden in plain sight, but misunderstood by decision-makers and the institutionally connected alike. Particularly as the nation has become embroiled in an immigration crisis, the need to irrevocably shift the conversation surrounding poverty, need, and intervention in the Coachella Valley has become particularly acute. Narrative building is essential to render visible the nature of struggle and need in the region, and foster policy discussions that overcome long-standing silos. Lift To Rise’s research and practice thus far has underscored the extreme marginalization faced by at-risk populations, including immigrant communities, which allows their needs and conditions to be consistently overlooked and insufficiently addressed.

To effectively alter systems within the Coachella Valley, we must foster an honest, inclusive conversation, informed by deep research, which permeates across communities, to shape policymaking and practice in the Coachella Valley. This approach recognizes that research constitutes an intervention in itself in a rural area where data is lacking and inaccurate cultural models dominate conversations across policy and practice. Research is a central mechanism to generate a deeper, more rigorous understanding of community conditions, to enable effective response, but also to undermine the misconceptions that permeate community-based work across the Coachella Valley.

As part of this work, Lift To Rise is working to improve the availability and accessibility of data in the Coachella Valley. The Neighborhood Data for Social Change web portal will provide Coachella Valley residents, practitioners and policymakers with high-quality and policy-relevant neighborhood-level data. The project provides a robust data platform that compiles and organizes neighborhood-level data across ten different policy domains, to allow practitioners to more easily analyze and disseminate findings. In addition to empowering policymakers and local leaders with the data needed to enable evidence-based policy decisions, the platform will allow Coachella Valley residents to tell stories about their local neighborhoods, to help build a rich, authentic, and evidence-based narrative of life in the Coachella Valley.

2. Data as a way to inform intervention and measure change

Based on extensive quantitative and qualitative research undertaken in its first two years, Lift To Rise recognizes the crisis conditions that an overwhelming share of Coachella Valley families face, such as being forced to make life-threatening trade-offs between food and energy during the scorching summer desert heat. Their extreme and enduring plight necessitates urgent interventions that must operate to concurrently help families address immediate, pressing financial needs, while also developing long-term strategies to increase pathways to opportunity for low-income families.

This iterative process of concurrent design, implementation and evaluation draws from a social innovation framework, which recognizes that traditional models of program design and evaluation advance disconnected and sequential solutions that, inherently, are poorly situated to tackle complex issues within dynamic contexts. The flexible, responsive co-production of design that Lift To Rise employs is undertaken in partnership with the USC Sol Price Center for Social Innovation, a founding partner of the initiative whose work is to develop ideas and illuminate strategies to improve the quality of life for people in low-income urban communities. In partnership with the Price Center, research has become deeply embedded in the work of Lift To Rise as a means to generate understanding about local need, design interventions that directly respond to local conditions, and ensure ongoing progress through evaluation. In this way, data shapes intervention both at the outset and throughout, through ongoing learning and iterative evaluation. Therefore, data creates the information and learning necessary for Lift To Rise to attempt to disrupt the complex ecosystem of conditions that keep marginalized Coachella Valley residents in poverty, to help foster economic opportunity for all residents across the region.