Neighborhood Resilience Post COVID-19

Embedding Systems Change to Build Back Equitably

RESILIENT CITIES CATALYST

White coats for Black lives march in downtown Seattle, Washington with many diverse health care providers carrying protest signs of different black lives matter messages.

ABOUT RESILIENT CITIES CATALYST

Building on the pioneering legacy of 100 Resilient Cities (100RC), senior 100RC executives have now established Resilient Cities Catalyst (RCC). RCC is a new non-profit designed to help cities build the capacities and partnerships needed to understand, prioritize, and concretely address their risks and chronic stresses as they pursue their strategic goals or recover from crisis.

RCC partners with city governments, businesses, neighborhoods, and community stakeholders around the globe to:

1. Develop an enabling environment to build strong partnerships between cities and their communities allowing them to drive policy, planning, design, finance, and institutional resources for resilience-building efforts.
2. Ensure that ideas are turned into meaningful action by addressing gaps between project plans, project implementation and desired impacts.
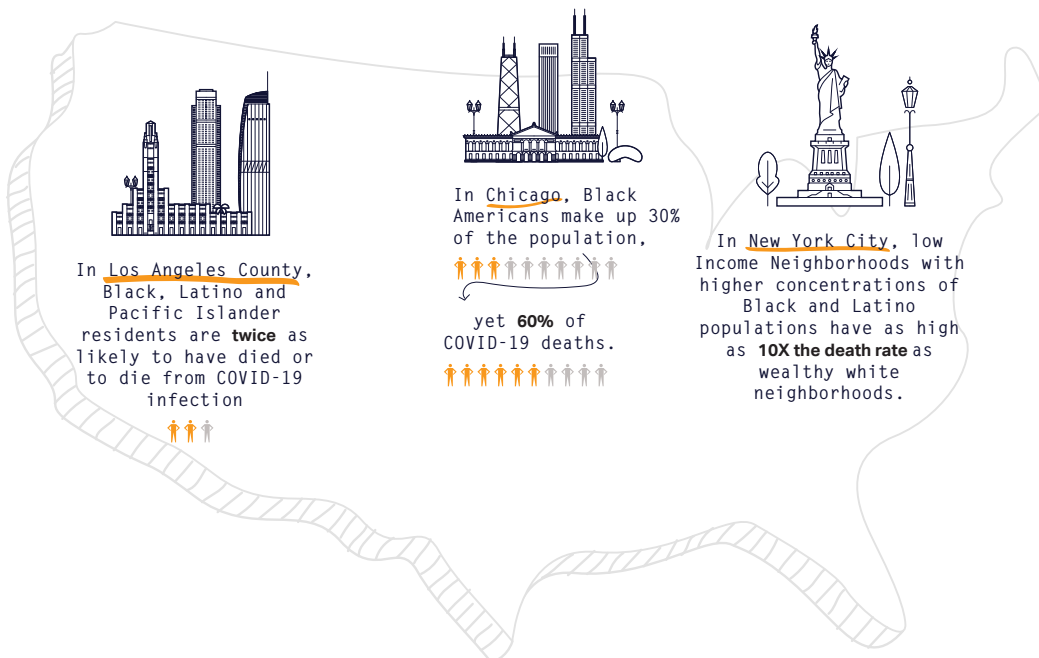3. Share and replicate learnings through a growing community of practice.

ABOUT CORINNE LETOURNEAU

Corinne LeTourneau is a Founding Principal at Resilient Cities Catalyst. In this role, Corinne leads our North America practice to drive systems change and equitable solutions for Cities. Corinne has over 15 years of experience working in the Government and Non-Profit sector. Corinne's expertise includes developing resilience action plans in key neighborhoods and cities, designing resilience initiatives, and catalyzing change agents in government and beyond.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis in the US reveals what many already knew; our systems are failing vulnerable populations and people of color. The statistics are staggering. Hospitalization rates were highest among Native American, Black, and Hispanic and LatinX populations. Race and income have largely determined who lives and dies at the hands of COVID-19.

In the country's largest cities, the virus disproportionately struck nearly all minority groups.

In Los Angeles County, Black, Latino and Pacific Islander residents are **twice** as likely to have died or to die from COVID-19 infection

In Chicago, Black Americans make up 30% of the population,

yet **60%** of COVID-19 deaths.

In New York City, low Income Neighborhoods with higher concentrations of Black and Latino populations have as high as **10X the death rate** as wealthy white neighborhoods.

Compounding the stress and angst of losing loved ones, communities of color are seeing a disproportionate share of permanent business closings and job losses. Between February and April, 40% of Black-owned businesses shuttered, while 17% of white-owned businesses closed, according to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research. And Bureau of Labor Statistics data through April showed joblessness for the Black community at 17% versus 12% among whites over the same time. This, only over the pandemic's first wave.

For communities of color, poverty and neighborhood inequities led to materially higher death rates and financial hardship. Systemic racism fostered conditions for these inequities and set the stage for enduring, irreparable health and economic pain. There is a path forward that can start undoing years of neglect. But we must take action now.

And we are. As the pandemic pressed on in the United States, the nation's once empty streets are now filled with protesters calling for justice after the death in May of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis. The Black Lives Matter marches

Racial distribution in select cities. 2010.

Los Angeles

New York

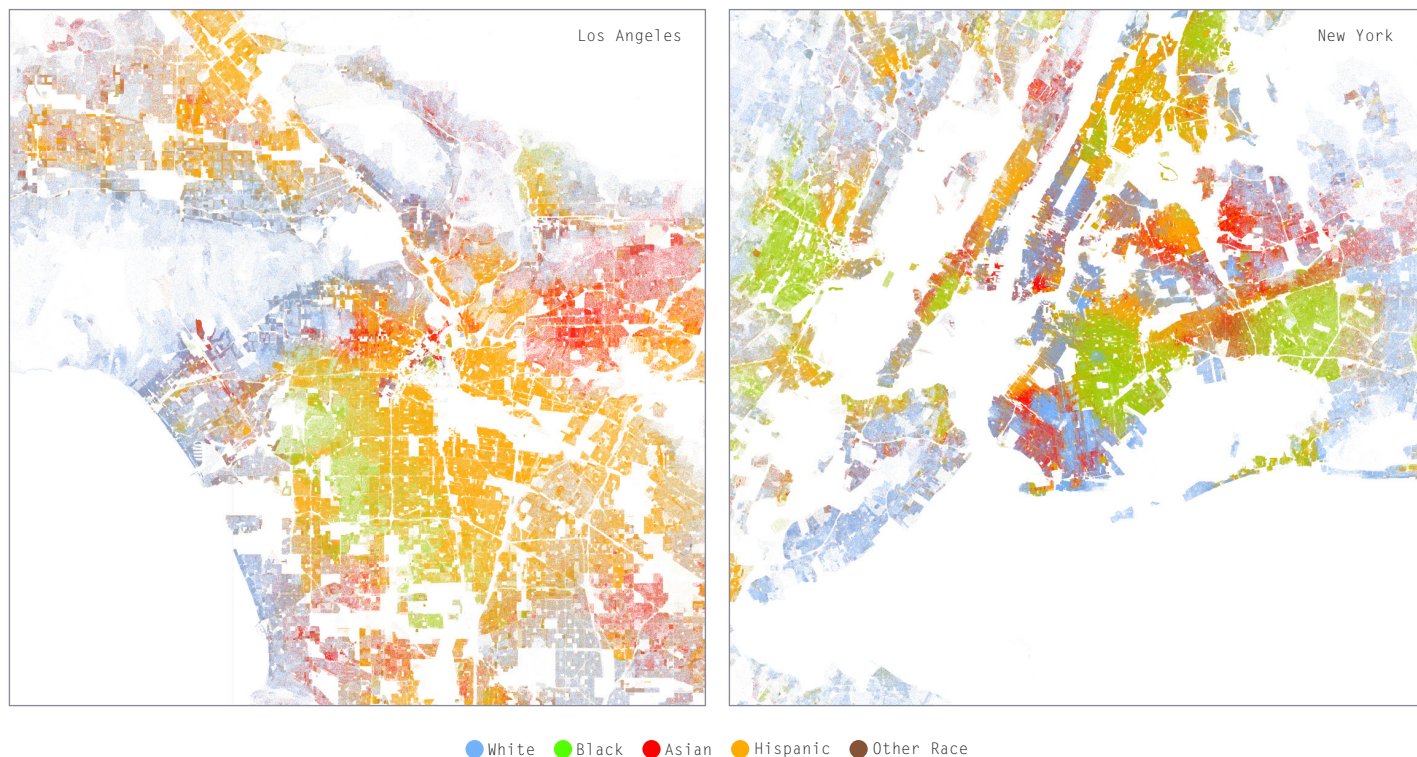● White ● Black ● Asian ● Hispanic ● Other Race

Image Copyright, 2013, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator)

channel a societal reckoning with systemic racism inflicted on Black communities for generations in all walks of life - in health, education, employment, and of course, the criminal justice system.

The heartbreaking stories and statistics cry out for action on not only the immediate shock event, but, more importantly, on the systemic issues and everyday stresses felt by these communities. These same communities that disproportionately suffer from COVID-19-related ailments are also more likely to suffer from excessive force at the hands of the police, and are often at a higher risk from future climate shocks.

Galvanized public opinion and action creates a perhaps once-in-a-lifetime moment to change history. There is hope. In my work with cities across the US, I've seen firsthand how bold leadership and reimagining programs and policies can dismantle and fix system failure across cities and neighborhoods.

Historic system failure

The US created government agencies at local, state, and national levels to respond to critical societal needs. But, over time, many of these agencies lost touch with their original mission of service as they grew in size and complexity. The vast majority lacked flexibility to shift their structure or scope as needs changed beyond predictable, rote services delivery. Worse yet, political leaders only empowered these agencies to contain the problem rather than tackling root causes. These legal and governance system

failures laid the groundwork for the disproportionate impact of crises like COVID-19 on communities of color.

Compounding public agency shortcomings is the enduring legacy of policies and practices long undone. Redlining, for example, was outlawed decades ago. But the impact of the practice that denied mortgages to applicants of color in predominantly white communities with rising property values is still felt today. Some 80 years after redlining began, three-fourths of these discriminated neighborhoods are still low-to-moderate income today. In another example, workforce policies enacted by the New Deal ushered in reforms intended to support working-class Americans. But while these programs boosted wages in predominantly white communities, they largely excluded occupations held by workers of color.

> These policies, and countless others, have created enormous wealth gaps between white and Black families. In 2016, a Federal Reserve Bank study found that white families on average had a median net worth of $171,000 while Black families had a median net worth of $17,600.

As a result, neighborhoods today that are predominantly poor (with poverty rates of 40% or more) remain so; growing up in a low-income neighborhood also limits economic mobility, studies show. This, in turn, crimps economic growth for communities of color in a vicious cycle, due to poor investments, low performing schools, and lack of access to quality housing and services.
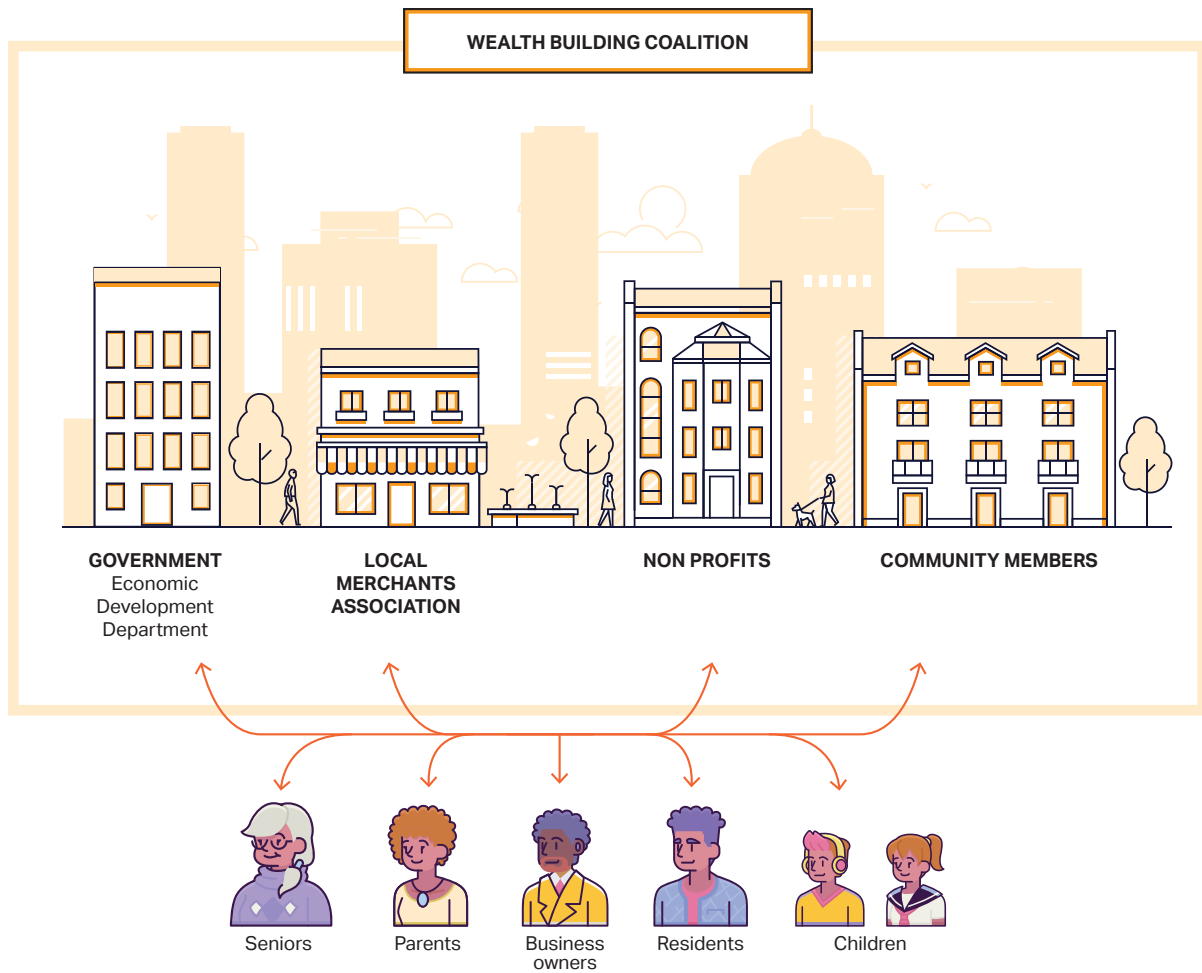
Redlining in select cities. 1940.

● A "Best" ● B "Still Desirable" ● C "Definitely Declining" ● D "Hazardous"
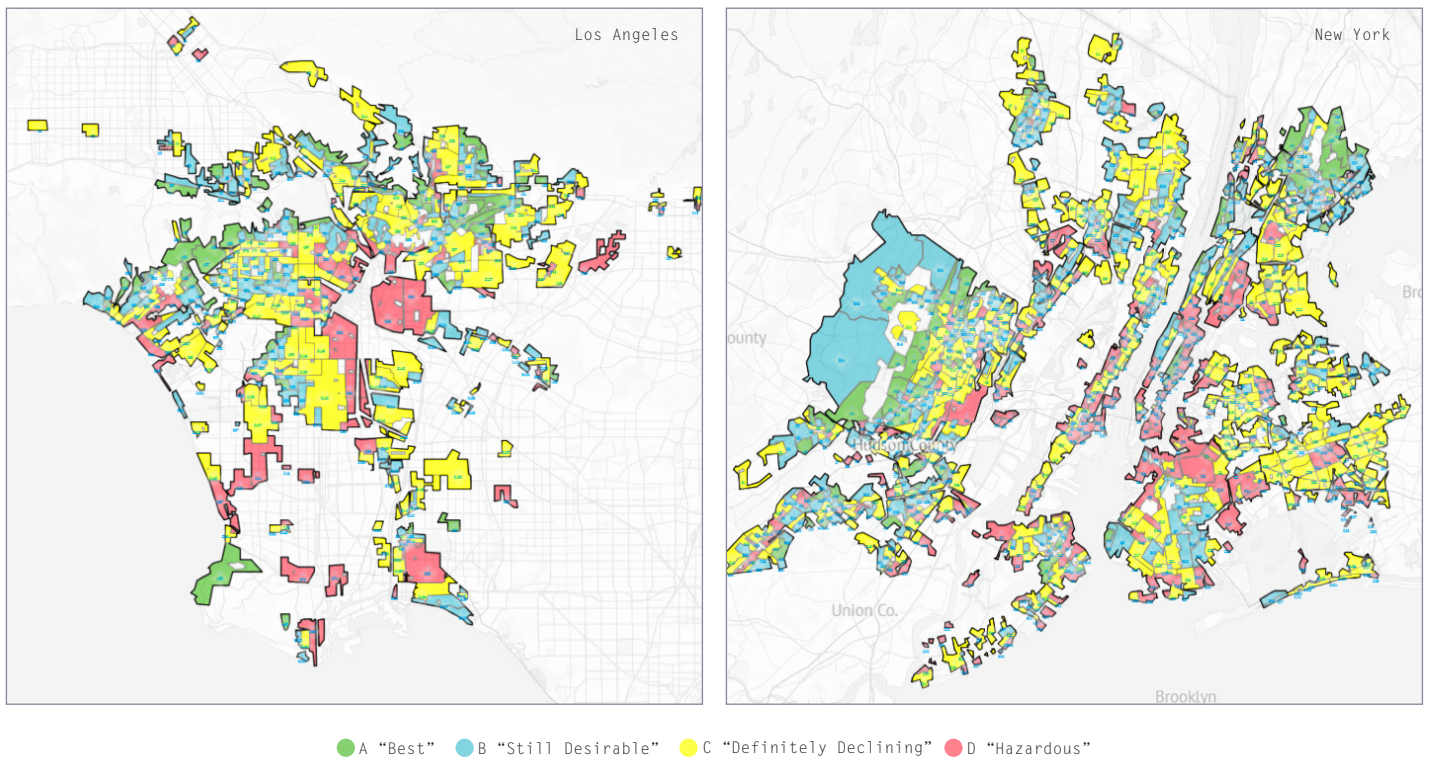
Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America. University of Richmond's Digital Scholarship Lab and others.

Insecurity rooted in poor policies further fosters fragility across vulnerable communities, hurting them in an outsized way over shocks ranging from pandemics, to climate events, to economic recessions.

> To fix the inequity imbalance, we must connect and coordinate the service of different agencies at many levels of government that have historically worked independently while working in parallel on longer-term policy change. For instance, to address the racial wealth gap, we cannot assume that job placement programs work towards placing people of color in careers with higher earning potential. Similarly, we have to examine overlapping obstacles to access to capital for, for example, affordable housing that is likely to appreciate in value, small business development and savings and investment plans.

WEALTH BUILDING COALITION

GOVERNMENT
Economic Development Department

LOCAL MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION

NON PROFITS

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Seniors

Parents

Business owners

Residents

Children

Defunding failed systems

As is now glaringly evident, in cities across America today, wealth disparities set the stage for unjust health outcomes born from intentional segregation and systemic racism sown nearly a century ago. The social determinants of health, or the conditions in the places where people live, work, and play, deeply affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. As a result of health and wealth advantages, residents of predominantly white neighborhoods can outlive their Black peers by 20 years, just miles away.

These health inequities stretch beyond quality health care, into unequal access to fair housing, education, jobs, healthy food, activities, and clean environments.

> With so many of these systemic failures overlapping in neighborhoods, a continued policy and programmatic focus on individuals and their outcomes within these neighborhoods looks misplaced. Improving their lives will require addressing complex, intertwined barriers across a community rather than intervening in just one aspect of an individual's life, such as healthcare or education.

Similarly, fixing injustices in US policing requires a systems-focused lens. Protesters are calling for the defunding of police departments. But the defunding conversation opens the door to a broader dialogue about reforming all our failed systems. Rather than transferring funds from one agency to another, how about imagining new ways to deal with old challenges? Protesters are demanding that dollars be transferred from each city's police budget into community-based programs that heal long-festering wounds, help their people recover, and attack the root causes of inequality. Mayors across the country are starting to heed that call. Like Mayor London Breed of San Francisco who released a blueprint to form a corps of specially trained, and unarmed professionals as first responders to mental health, homelessness, and other non-criminal activity incidents, these professionals would replace police officers in those duties.

To truly recover and support communities of color so that they can better withstand everyday challenges, recovery dollars must reach the hardest hit. Reallocation of funds from Police Departments is not enough. Funds are needed to disrupt the ways programs address the root causes of these crises. New programs and policies that link efforts across government, non-profit, philanthropic, and community-based groups can bring about systemic, inclusive change.

This task is not impossible. I have worked in communities and with local governments across this country and have been inspired by the ways they embrace innovation and are constantly seeking greater impact. Community organizations are not only meeting the needs of their residents, but they are reaching out to partner organizations to co-design complementary services. City governments are designing projects that create multiple benefits and are thinking about how their levers; such as budgeting, zoning, and procurement can foster a more equitable city. Philanthropies are also teaming up with other funders to combine expertise and for dollars to go further. Now, we must catalyze these change agents to collaborate, design, and create the systems change we need.

Resilient Neighborhoods, Resilient Systems

Deeply rooted racism erodes many systems in myriad ways. Now, a global movement is underway to make meaningful change. The Black Lives Matter protests which began in the US have now spread around the world, call for dismantling systems that perpetuate and compound the effects of racism, globally.

To recover from these crises and ensure that this does not happen again, we must build back better. A mere return to the status quo cannot be our goal since the system failed too many. Only by working together to holistically tie the approaches that address the cascading impacts of the COVID-19 crisis to longstanding racial inequities throughout America can we topple structures and systems that widen income, resource, health, and environmental inequities. We can narrow and close these gaps.

We must not waste this moment presented during these crises to address racial inequity, build social cohesion, and confront divisive challenges. No city or neighborhood can bounce forward or really be resilient until it also confronts and takes action on racism. We must honor all those who have suffered by seizing on this opportunity to remake our systems. This blank canvas moment may never arise again.

Tackling root causes

To foster more resilient and equitable systems across our cities, we must prioritize funding and action in our most vulnerable neighborhoods. Building back better starts with hyper-local community-based work that identifies and addresses root causes and sparks transformational change. Empowering local stakeholders can help level bureaucratic barriers to surface and deliver novel solutions. Change is a bottom-up approach that helps create the conditions to show success so that new approaches are used and adapted by local leaders.

Coalitions are the core of this process. Tapping active and visionary members of community-based organizations, government, philanthropy, and other stakeholders can unleash radical collaboration on novel policies and programs for faster recovery and enduring change. Putting the power of the purse in the hands of those who viscerally know their communities' challenges and ways to solve them ensures that benefits from scarce resources reach the most vulnerable.

HERE ARE THE FIRST STEPS TO FOSTER EQUITABLE AND RESILIENT NEIGHBORHOODS. →

1 Prioritize bold, aspirational dialogues on systemic racism

Start an open and honest dialogue about racism.

Transforming systems requires uncomfortable conversations that confront deep trauma inflicted by years of persistent, unpunished bias such as racism. Hyperlocal teams and stakeholders must create a space to lean into difficult conversations and develop strong and decisive action plans based on those dialogues.

For example, in 2016, the City of Boston launched Boston Talks on Racism, an action from the Resilient Boston strategy. For Mayor Martin J. Walsh, the conversation marked an important milestone in Boston's history, and represented the city's dedication to "answer the call to put the safety, the rights, and the equity of everyone in our city at the top of our agenda, every day." Following the citywide conversations, each of Boston's neighborhoods held a facilitated dialogue on race. Open to all Boston residents, the discussions provided a continuation of efforts to acknowledge systemic racism evident in Boston, and work toward racial equity. The neighborhood dialogues sought to inspire community-based groups, philanthropic institutions, businesses, academic institutions, the health-care sector, faith-based organizations, youth groups, and members of mass and social media, to fulfill commitments of working across their fields to advance the critical step of community-level reflection. These conversations served as a key input to the city's executive order relative to racial equity that requires all city departments to proactively engage in a Racial Equity and Leadership (REAL) Training Program, including data collection and evaluation of how racial equity is being advanced across departments.

Boston Talks on Racism.

"To bounce back stronger following COVID-19 and to address systemic racism, cities must engage in difficult conversations about racism at the Community Level. Neighborhoods are the key to unlocking bold ideas to create systems change."

—LORI NELSON, BOSTON CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER.

2 Rally around shared, ambitious outcomes

Bring together a broad coalition of community members, community-based organizations, and government stakeholders to articulate and develop plans to meet ambitious goals.

The choice of what to tackle first can be a critical success factor. Seeking out ways to boost community wealth, for instance, may be more appealing to community members than, for example, a focus on education--and thus rally multiple agencies and non-profits to work together. A starting point might be sharing indicators on goals for new jobs created or small businesses launched -- while plotting and planning for longer-term systems change.

Coalition members can provide unique data and programmatic contributions and methods to improve the lives of community members and, ultimately, achieve a shared vision of success. Steady progress will require similar quantitative and qualitative input from different organizations and agencies.

For example, United for Brownsville, is a unique partnership between neighborhood residents, community-based organizations, government and philanthropy in the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York that is rallying around the shared outcome of improved early childhood outcomes in the neighborhood. By focusing on a critical systemic change outcome, United for Brownsville has built partnerships with local families and social service providers resulting in a robust collaborative infrastructure for improving the early childhood system in pursuit of racial equity in their neighborhood. The coalition leverages an improvement methodology around tracking this shared data where they have established a shared measurement system among all the service providers, developed mechanisms to improve pathways to essential early childhood services, and compiled key indicators into a population-wide measure. Using this data enables families and service providers to partner with each other and city agencies to identify opportunities to move the needle on key early childhood metrics. This type of collaboration requires trust to establish data-sharing across organizations and agencies in ways that can be difficult across government silos and non-profit organizations. The foundation of coalescing around data has also allowed this collaborative to grow into the "go-to" resource during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March, local stakeholders have expressed to United for Brownsville their struggles to sort through the uneven quality and distribution of essential services.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic struck New York City, United for Brownsville has been distributing nearly 18,000 pounds of food and essential items with staff and volunteers from the local community.

In response, United for Brownsville was able to quickly post a resource guide for families to meet their key needs during this crisis. The inequitable situation is not unique to the age of coronavirus; these are enduring issues that have affected Brownsville for decades. Realizing the need to adjust its services in this new era of COVID, United for Brownsville plans to advance its work in a new COVID reality, continuing to distribute these resources while identifying unmet basic needs for families.

"As a community member, and United for Brownsville Fellow, I saw firsthand the importance that community voice has in properly responding to a crisis. The Family Advisory Board and the coalition we built enabled us to respond quickly to share critical resources across the community."

—ATHENIA RODNEY, FAMILY ADVISORY BOARD FELLOW, UNITED FOR BROWNSVILLE.

3 Reimagine Community Programs and Services

Test and scale innovative and multi-benefit projects and programs that address root causes and gaps to meet realistic, relevant goals.

For example, a neighborhood-based center for improvement and service design would enable a coalition of stakeholders to both track key indicators and innovate around new projects and policies based on direct feedback from the community. Projects should tap proven and novel techniques like human-centered design to better deliver vital, linked services that can fuel other areas of growth, in say, income stability or wellbeing.

Across the country, Design Labs have been popping up across City governments as a means to coalesce different agency partners to break down silos and transform community services for the benefit of the user. In Oakland, the City launched the Civic Design Lab in January 2018, an action in their Resilient Oakland Playbook. Oakland's Civic Design Lab (CDL) applies human-centered design and systems thinking to public sector problems, starting with the question: "Who are we designing this policy or service for?" This includes incorporating a racial equity lens to ensure fairness accessibility in CDL's work.

By deploying a systems-based, design thinking methodology, CDL can upend the current siloed approach towards urban governance by integrating different departments to support big picture city management. The CDL team has been addressing some of the city's intractable problems, such as closing the gap on financial empowerment for underserved youth. By focusing on economic opportunity for Oakland youth, the CDL team was able to conduct in-depth working sessions with young people who helped prioritize redesigning summer jobs as a key priority area to help young people access employment opportunities and get on a long-term trajectory towards financial empowerment.

> "The Civic Design Lab is a much-needed tool to re-imagine government services and catalyze government leaders around community-led design solutions to our most pressing issues whether it's access to housing services, financial empowerment or infrustructure design. This approach can help governments and communities create resilient programs that build back better as we recover from the impacts of COVID-19."

—KIRAN JAIN, GENERAL COUNSEL,
UC BERKELEY ECOBLOCK PROJECT.

4 Transform Community Governance

Launch a new community governance structure anchored in shared data, funding, community feedback, and partnerships to spark systems change.

Since the formation of the first settlement houses, place-based solutions such as grassroots community-based organizations have successfully helped boost incomes and investment in low-income communities. They have designed models to oversee and bring to completion their long-term transformational work. In other times of crisis, municipalities have formed new entities, such as business improvement districts and conservancies, to create new financing models to maintain small business corridors while ensuring that natural resources flourish.

Today, the concept of collective impact has gained traction as a way to make cross-sectoral improvement in communities. This concept recognizes that it takes a larger coalition of nonprofits to move the needle on some of our most intractable problems.

There is also growing momentum for special purpose organizations to address the complex impact among our small business community following COVID-19. For instance, Forward Cities is exploring ways to speed up small business recovery by creating entrepreneurial support organizations with a different self-employed lens, for guidance and support that may be far more relevant and useful than that provided by many agencies to communities of color.

Indeed, the COVID-19 crisis is laying bare the need for better mechanisms for collaboration and partnership across government silos, non-profits, and community members. This will undoubtedly be more difficult as budgets are slashed in Cities across the country. At this time of crisis across municipalities, now is the moment to develop a new, sustainable model for localized collective action.

The recovery from COVID-19 will require a new neighborhood governance model to ensure that funding targets problems and solutions, and that innovations reach those in need and subsequently scale. New tools for financing such as value capture, leveraging infrastructure investment, and other municipal incentives should be explored. Bringing community perspectives to the fore will also help continuously refine perspectives and solutions, for better and more valued outcomes.

Neighborhood-based systems change work will require new financing structures and channels that blend existing forms of government and philanthropy funding while leveraging new forms of financing. Finally, this approach will cement much-needed cross-sector collaboration among different service providers, government agencies, and community stakeholders for future improvements and wise decisions. By building on legacy and current, crisis-era learnings of the community development and collective impact movement, we can create a new type of neighborhood institution to advance more resilient communities -- today.

A new inclusive chapter

Today, the United States is still suffering from the impacts of COVID-19 as cases surge across new hot spots. Yet, people are still mobilizing. The collective will is crying out for systemic, enduring change. Let's capture and channel that energy into eradicating systemic racism, together. Let's build mechanisms that go beyond band-aid approaches to fix our flawed systems. Let's fund and catalyze new solutions that make our communities more resilient, to truly meet the call to build back better.