



Why Process Matters for Achieving Equity Goals

How Inclusive Economic Development Initiatives Are Embedding Inclusivity in Their Plans for Growth

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The COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate health and economic effects on historically excluded communities have underscored the racial inequities and economic precarity many Americans face and have laid bare an economy that does not work for all. Widening economic inequality and racial disparities across American cities prevent people of color, families with low incomes, women, and other historically excluded groups from benefiting from and contributing to economic growth.

As our country begins to look to the other side of the COVID-19 crisis, a tremendous opportunity exists to do away with harmful policies and practices and reimagine systems that enable everyone to contribute to and benefit from economic recovery. Growing evidence suggests that economic and racial inclusion is critical for boosting economic competitiveness, generating faster growth, and supporting economic resiliency (Donohue, McDearman, and Barker 2017; IEDC 2016; Poethig et al. 2018; Uslaner and Brown 2003). To accomplish these goals, many local leaders are not only creating new programs and policies but also adopting new processes that transform the way they work.

For this brief, we sought to learn how local economic development actors focused on equity and inclusion goals are shifting their planning processes to ensure that economic development plans and programs better align with the priorities of residents who have experienced structural barriers to economic opportunity. To explore this question, we conducted a scan of available literature on inclusive economic development initiatives and conducted interviews with national leaders focused on economic development and local leaders from the Shared Prosperity Partnership, or SP2 (discussed in box 1).

For many of the SP2 sites, developing more inclusive planning and decisionmaking processes is a critical ingredient to achieving transformational change. However, they are finding that tactical guidance on how to do so is still emergent (Hackler and Halpern 2020). Many research efforts have identified what inclusion looks like in outcomes (Donohue, McDearman, and Barker 2017; Poethig et

al. 2018; Stacy and Fiol 2021), but few focus on what it looks like applied to a decisionmaking process. The following questions guided our research:

1. How are economic development leaders shifting to more inclusive planning when they adopt inclusion and equity goals, if at all?
2. What are the opportunities and barriers in inclusive growth efforts for elevating the voice and power of historically marginalized residents?
3. What does sharing decisionmaking power with historically marginalized communities in economic development look like? What is the process? Who is involved and what is their role?

We begin with a brief synthesis on what we learned about how local economic development leaders are applying an inclusion lens to their work. In the next section, we share insights and illustrative examples from our conversations with local economic development leaders spearheading inclusive economic development initiatives. We close with a set of reflections on what we learned.

BOX 1

The Shared Prosperity Partnership

The Shared Prosperity Partnership—a collaboration of the Kresge Foundation, the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, and the Urban Institute—convenes local leaders in nine cities across the United States to discuss challenges to inclusive growth and provide data, research, and access to national experts, networks, and financial resources. The nine cities are Arlington, Virginia; Cleveland, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; Fresno, California; Kansas City, Missouri; Memphis, Tennessee; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Minneapolis–Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Nationally, the Partnership elevates promising models through publications, public forums, and a national summit to spark dialogue among practitioners and support evidence-based policy at the state and national levels.^a

We interviewed the following individuals to inform our research:

- Jade Arn, Brookings Institution
- Jennifer Bradley, Kresge Foundation
- Lafayette Crump, City of Milwaukee
- Bradford Davy, Fund for Our Economic Future
- Ja'Net Defell, Community Desk Chicago
- Justin Entzminger, Innovate Memphis
- Sidra Fatima, Kresge Foundation
- Julianna Greene, BLDG Memphis
- Elwood Hopkins, Kresge Foundation
- Ianna Kachoris, Chicago Community Trust
- Chae Kim, Kresge Foundation

- Gretchen Moore, formerly of Fresno DRIVE
- Ian Nunley, Hyde Family Foundation
- Will Oliver, Fresno County Economic Development Corporation
- Tony Panciera, MKE United
- Tashayla Person, Civil Council of Greater Kansas City
- Sandra Richardson, Chicago Community Trust
- Eric Robertson, Community Lift
- Jennifer Vey, Brookings Institution

^a “About the Partnership,” Shared Prosperity Partnership, accessed February 6, 2022, <https://www.sharedprosperitypartnership.org/about-the-partnership/>.

What Is Inclusive Economic Development Planning?

Economic development is the process of creating an environment that supports high-quality jobs, expands skills in the labor force, and improves quality of life for residents in a community (Francis and Randall 2017). *Inclusive* economic development promotes growth while combating inequities in economic outcomes that persist even as the economy grows through traditional economic development.

Early work documenting inclusive economic development efforts shows that many of these efforts are including changes to their planning processes as part of their core strategies. Although the research connecting a shift of this type to more inclusive outcomes for residents is relatively nascent, many in the field believe that being more inclusive during the planning and decisionmaking phases of economic development is a necessary component to attaining more inclusive outcomes and better aligning solutions with resident priorities.

BOX 2

How We Define “Economic Development Leaders”?

In this brief, we use the term “economic development leaders” to refer to people whose work focuses on economic development in local, state, and federal policymaking, planning, and regulatory agencies. These agencies include municipal economic development departments, chambers of commerce, local workforce development boards, the US Economic Development Administration, the US Small Business Administration, state departments of labor, state business licensing and regulatory agencies, and their nonprofit and private-sector partners.

These various actors use a range of economic development strategies in their work, such as business attraction and retention, small-business development, entrepreneurship programs, workforce development and job training, licensing and certification, the development of business improvement districts and other commercial districts, procurement, and business grants and loans.

One such change is to engage a broader set of actors than have traditionally been included. Inclusive economic development requires actors in this field to collaborate with other local organizations that are “driven by different cultures and politics, pursue distinct goals, and respond to nonoverlapping metrics” (Donahue, McDearman, and Barker 2017; Parilla 2017). Research shows that collaboratives that are better able to engage a set of diverse actors to codesign strategies—beyond just those who work in economic development—will be better able to respond to complex economic challenges and achieve outcomes that benefit more people (Liu 2016). These actors can include “learners, workers, community advocates, and other stakeholders representing a mix of demographic groups, various types of organizations, and assorted neighborhoods, [and] perspectives” (Schmitt, Gutierrez, and Hooker 2020). By inviting these types of actors to be included in decisionmaking, the collaboratives are working to close the disconnect between “those closest to place-based inequities and those with the institutional power to alleviate them” (Love et al. 2021).

Another way places are making economic development planning more inclusive is by including community residents at decisionmaking tables. This includes collaborating directly with residents substantively and early in the economic development planning process. This represents a shift from traditional planning, in which economic development organizations inform residents of a project that is already under way or consult residents briefly later in the development process, to more frequent, deeper engagement (Hackler and Harpel 2020). Engaging residents as decisionmakers is essential to creating a process to work together effectively to identify and address community goals and priorities.

Creating an inclusive economic development planning process takes work. It requires that those involved take deliberate steps to ensure that their efforts deliver inclusive outcomes, challenge decisionmaking hierarchies, and commit to long-term collaboration (Liu 2016; Poethig et al. 2018; Schmitt, Gutierrez, and Hooker 2020).

Insights on Emerging Practices in Inclusive Economic Development Planning and Decisionmaking

Through conversations with local economic development leaders working on inclusive growth initiatives, we observed three overarching practices for making the economic development planning and decisionmaking phases more inclusive:

- Broaden decisionmaking tables to ensure decisions better reflect resident priorities.
- Rethink how capital is raised and invested in historically excluded communities.
- Collaboratively develop economic development equity and inclusion measures.

For many places, change has been incremental, especially as places seek to ascertain the appetite for this type of work and learn how far they can go to achieve equity goals.

Broaden Decisionmaking Tables to Ensure Decisions Better Reflect Resident Priorities

Our research found that one way places are making the planning process more inclusive is by broadening decisionmaking tables to include noneconomic development actors who work more closely with residents, such as community-based and advocacy organizations. Additionally, our interviewees shared that it's not enough to just bring new community leaders to the table. Rather, broadening decisionmaking tables should also include training everyone (not just the new members) to understand the root causes of inequities in a region and elevating the role of residents in governance structures.¹ In this section, we highlight two illustrative examples of localities that have recalibrated their governance structures to align their work more closely with resident priorities.

FRESNO DRIVE

The Fresno Developing the Region's Inclusive and Vibrant Economy (DRIVE) Initiative is a 10-year community investment plan that identified a portfolio of investable initiatives aimed at increasing economic mobility, addressing racial disparities, and supporting a sustainable environment in Fresno.² The DRIVE Initiative is sponsored by the Central Valley Community Foundation (CVCF).

To develop the plan, CVCF convened a 300-person steering committee representing over 150 organizations from a diverse group of civic, community, and business leaders to develop a draft "10-year aspiration" for where they wanted the Fresno region to be. The number of people convened and the wide range of organizations represented on the steering committee was unprecedented for Fresno, and according to the DRIVE Investment Plan, represented "many diverse and contrasting points of view."³ Since DRIVE's launch in spring 2019, DRIVE has been run by a 60-person executive committee that has representatives from a wide range of organizations and policy domains.

To mobilize such a wide set of actors to design and implement a collaborative plan, DRIVE leaders have dedicated significant time and resources to ensuring that everyone participating in the collaborative has a common knowledge base about race, inequities, economic development, and community engagement, and they have spent time building relationships among members and the organizations that participants represent. DRIVE leaders have even gone so far as to list "shared analysis and understanding of racism, its root causes, and its manifestations in Fresno and in DRIVE priority areas" as one of their "foundational outcomes" in their theory of change.⁴

To build knowledge about racial equity in Fresno, the collaborative decided to create a Race Equity Committee within the broader governance structure to drive this learning process and help all collaborative members translate these learnings into their plans. DRIVE members participate in a series of "shared analysis" training sessions, where participants engage in self-reflection and have deep dialogue with others to explore how power, white supremacy, oppression, and structural racism affect access to economic opportunity and what those forces look like in their community.

In addition to developing a foundational knowledge of how race and racism affects economic development strategies and practices, the DRIVE executive committee also engaged in learnings

around how to fully and respectfully engage historically excluded residents in the development of their plans. DRIVE engaged a racial equity consultant to train DRIVE members in the “Spectrum of Community Engagement to Empower for Impact” developed by the International Association of Public Participation. This knowledge-building work will prepare the DRIVE executive committee and working groups across the initiative to foster more in-depth participation, share decisionmaking with community members, and ensure that community members feel prepared for this new role.

Recognizing that DRIVE members also had varying levels of familiarity with the processes, terminology, and strategies involved in regional economic development, staff and leadership of the Fresno DRIVE Initiative worked with research organization partners to develop a lineup of educational presentations that laid out the building blocks of economic development nested in the region’s context and history. This helped ensure that all DRIVE members, including neighborhood leaders, community advocates, and those traditionally focused on community development, could communicate fluently with those in the group who worked in the economic development field.

As a next step in ensuring that community members’ voices are elevated within DRIVE planning and decisionmaking efforts, DRIVE has received funding to establish a Resident Leadership Council (Hackler and Harpel 2020). Although the details of the Resident Leadership Council are evolving, current plans for the council will include residents and grassroots leaders who will colead DRIVE alongside the executive committee. The council will provide guidance to shape DRIVE’s initiatives and governance structure and will serve DRIVE’s goal of transferring power directly to residents. Engaging residents in this way is new territory for DRIVE, and although engaging residents holds immense promise for helping the collaborative to craft appropriate solutions to Fresno’s challenges, doing so will require significant time and resources to onboard these residents to the initiative and prepare them to lead the work moving forward.

MKE UNITED

MKE United is a diverse team of community leaders representing downtown Milwaukee and its adjacent neighborhoods. MKE United’s Greater Downtown Action Agenda works to ensure that downtown revitalization benefits residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. At the start of their work, the Downtown Action Agenda had an executive committee with institutional representatives from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Greater Milwaukee Committee, the City of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Urban League, and LISC Milwaukee. MKE United wanted to ensure this group of powerful institutions considered and integrated priorities from local community leaders as they developed their plan, so they invited 10 community organizers to take part in a series of trainings on economic development and then join some of the executive committee meetings.

Despite these efforts at including the community leaders, community leaders felt that the opportunities to engage in the MKE United process did not create sustainable and long-standing opportunities for them to share their expertise and insights. Following the trainings, the community organizers presented recommendations to the MKE United executive committee with suggestions to institutionalize the feedback loop and create leadership space on the executive committee for some of them. The community leaders’ advocacy resulted in MKE United adding two new seats for community

leaders on the executive committee.⁵ MKE United pays the community leaders for their time and expertise on the executive committee. Through these steps, MKE United is hoping to increase transparency and trust building in their planning process. They believe that by focusing on creating a more inclusive planning process, they will be more likely to achieve equitable outcomes for Milwaukee residents.

Rethink How Capital Is Raised and Invested in Historically Excluded Communities

Developers and investors can play a huge role in a region's economic development. By deciding where and in what to invest, private investors can contribute to the economic growth and opportunity in a community or thwart growth by failing to provide needed capital. Because of centuries of racial discrimination and unequal access to economic opportunities, Black and Latinx households have considerably less wealth than white households (Aliprantis and Carroll 2019). Black and Latinx individuals are also less likely to have savings accounts and own businesses, stocks, or real estate.⁶ These disparities in opportunity matter because they determine who can help shape and benefit from a region's prosperity and who will be left behind or get pushed out when a region experiences economic growth (Fedorowicz et al. 2019).

Increasing opportunities for people of color and people with low incomes to invest in their communities has the potential to reduce wealth inequities, create neighborhoods that reflect the priorities of those living in them, and spur economic growth. In this section, we highlight two emerging practices for rethinking how capital is raised and invested in historically excluded communities.

THE FUND FOR OUR ECONOMIC FUTURE

In Cleveland, the SP2 lead, the Fund for Our Economic Future, a funding alliance made up of more than 40 organizations and individuals dedicated to advancing economic growth, and their partners are assessing the feasibility of launching a Community Investment Fund in the Clark-Fulton neighborhood. Clark-Fulton is a diverse neighborhood in Cleveland, with a Latinx community making up 46 percent of the population with many new residents from Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries. About 40 percent of Clark-Fulton residents have incomes below the federal poverty level, and although the neighborhood's proximity to employment centers has attracted several new developments, the area experiences high vacancy rates and foreclosures.⁷

The Community Investment Fund is a vehicle for Clark-Fulton residents to participate in the investment economy and invest small dollar amounts to collectively purchase assets in their neighborhood. To shape Community Investment Fund investment opportunities, staff and partners at Fund for Our Economic Future engaged residents to understand what community ownership means to them, to learn about their interest in potential investments, and discuss their financial ability to participate.⁸ Understanding these considerations, if Fund for Our Economic Future decides to move forward with creating the Community Investment Fund, they will study the market of interest and identify the asset they wish to purchase. The funds can be used in a variety of legal structures that allow capital to be aggregated in this way, including community real estate investment trusts, pooled income funds, charitable loan funds, and qualified Opportunity Zone funds.

COMMUNITY DESK CHICAGO

Cleveland isn't the only city trying to increase investment opportunities for residents of color. Community Desk Chicago, a program affiliate of the Chicago Community Trust, is also working to increase the flow of capital into low-income communities and communities of color. Community Desk Chicago (the Desk) was launched in 2019 to dismantle systemic financial roadblocks and facilitate access to capital investment in historically disenfranchised and disinvested Chicago neighborhoods. The Desk staff knew that they were interested in shared ownership models as a way to accomplish this goal, but rather than diving headfirst into creating a new investment vehicle in one community, they decided to undertake a collaborative exploratory research phase that would allow them to build their knowledge on the models and share what they learned to a wide range of groups in Chicago. To do this, the Desk staff used their connections to bring together real estate advisors, lawyers, foundation staff, community organizations, and community development financial institutions to gather their perspectives on what was needed to create a successful community investment vehicle and research early case studies of shared ownership models.⁹ From there, they developed a framework consisting of the five components their research showed that all community investment vehicles need to be successful and guidance on how to structure a community investment vehicle based on what its desired impact might be. Describing why it was important to put this framework together, Ja'Net Defell, director of Community Desk Chicago, said, "The framework captures critical inclusive components such as community governance but also leverages private market expertise to identify considerations for a capital raise and investment returns. The mix of stakeholders and collaborators involved in the design of the framework helped us to balance community priorities with market conditions."

Collaboratively Develop Economic Development Equity and Inclusion Measures

Focusing on inclusion and equity is also shifting the way economic development initiatives measure their progress (Stacy and Fiol 2021). Recognizing that growth has not been shared by all, many inclusive economic development collaboratives are revising their definitions of success to include a focus on the quality of economic growth and whether it is shared by marginalized groups like women, people with low-incomes, and people of color (Stacy and Fiol 2021). In terms of planning, our interviews revealed that economic development leaders are using newer, more collaborative processes for developing these equity and inclusion measures. In this section, we highlight two examples of how SP2 sites are doing this.

FRESNO DRIVE

Through DRIVE, Fresno County's Economic Development Corporation (Fresno EDC) is leading Fresno's Impact Economy initiative to rethink what kinds of businesses and growth opportunities the EDC should be attracting to the community. A new priority that emerged for this group is to focus on recruiting not just on businesses that hire the most people or bring the greatest amount of revenue into the community, but rather to recruit and incentivize businesses that generate equitable, inclusive and sustainable growth and that have minimal negative impact on a community (either by causing environmental harms, gentrification, or otherwise). To reflect this shift in priorities, the Fresno EDC is

developing an Inclusive Community Scorecard alongside community partners to change how they measure potential new companies' social, economic, and environmental impacts in the region.

To develop the new Scorecard Indicators, Fresno EDC partnered with the Harvard Business School to adapt their Impact Weighted Accounts methodology that evaluates the total impact of businesses. Fresno's Impact Economy will incorporate this framework to evaluate local dimensions of business impact, such as environmental, product-related, and diversity, equity, and inclusion metrics for employment. Adopting these indicators will allow community members and policymakers to more easily compare the benefits of an incoming business to its potential costs. Most importantly, the Scorecard will center voices and perspectives of community members who have been historically excluded from this work. Currently, a community engagement strategy is under development with leading practitioners in the field. Once in use, the Scorecard will guide capital toward specific industries, businesses, and occupations that offer the greatest "total net impact" and align with Fresno's community-informed priorities related to economic growth and social and environmental impact.

MEMPHIS INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Through their involvement with the Brookings Institution's Inclusive Economic Indicators Lab, a coalition of Memphis-based organizations (Innovate Memphis, the Greater Memphis Chamber, and BLDG Memphis) worked to develop a new set of metrics to drive and track Memphis leaders' efforts to work toward more inclusive economic outcomes (Berube and Bateman 2021). This partnership represented a unique collaboration between Memphis's economic development and community development actors and the beginning of broader efforts to engage a larger, more cross-sector group of regional stakeholders to create new inclusion-driven and equity-aligned economic development success measures. Through their engagement in this work, the Memphis team changed both who they engaged to generate the metrics and rewrote the definition of economic success itself.

The Inclusive Economic Indicators Lab guided partners through a new process to create their own metrics. The process began by widening the circle of actors who were invited to develop a shared set of indicators for inclusive economic growth. From there, Memphis and others in the lab tested and refined their metrics by soliciting feedback and iterating on the metrics with key stakeholders (Berube and Bateman 2021).

At the end of the engagement, the Memphis partnership had generated a framework for inclusive economic growth that focused on "people powered prosperity"¹⁰ and created a set of metrics that reflected key tenets of shared prosperity: foundations for thriving households, economic enablers, and prosperous economic outcomes.

Concluding Thoughts and Areas for Further Inquiry

The groups highlighted here are on a journey toward achieving more inclusive and equitable economic development outcomes. As these groups recognize that it's not just about the destination, but also how you get there, these groups have attempted to revamp their planning and decisionmaking

processes to include more diverse voices in economic development conversations, rethink how capital is raised and invested in historically excluded communities, and collaboratively develop success measures.

The examples we shared of this work are early efforts, and as such, it is too soon to say whether the shift to more inclusive planning processes will lead to more inclusive outcomes for community members. However, we believe that the strategies presented in this brief provide a solid foundation for local economic development decisionmakers to pilot new ways of working.

Importantly, as these organizations work to achieve equity and inclusion goals, they must commit to long-term engagements where leaders can build trust with communities, achieve early wins that can demonstrate the intentions of the work, and transition to engagement methods that give community members real power and decisionmaking authority.

Notes

- ¹ See Love et al. (2021), Hackler and Harpel (2020), and Mary Bogle, “Can a New Park Help Span the Economic Divide in the Nation’s Capital,” *Urban Wire*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/can-new-park-help-span-economic-divide-our-nations-capital>.
- ² See <https://www.fresnodrive.org/about>.
- ³ See “Draft Fresno DRIVE Investment Plan,” Fresno DRIVE, October 31, 2019, https://www.fresnodrive.org/_files/ugd/69d6c8_96962f42d00c4bbe8482ef2a7bb17f80.pdf.
- ⁴ “DRIVE Race Equity Plan,” Fresno DRIVE, August 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lltj1AJPR7ufCDENTmf48U34rlfS3JhW/view>.
- ⁵ “Project Team,” MKE United Greater Downtown Action Agenda, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://www.mkeunited.com/project-team>.
- ⁶ Signe-Mary McKernan, Caroline Ratcliffe, C. Eugene Steuerle, Caleb Quakenbush, and Emma Kalish, “Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America,” Urban Institute, updated October 5, 2017, <https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>. See also Michelle Fox, “As Interest in Investing Grows, People of Color Still Lag Behind, CNBC Survey Finds,” *CNBC*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/08/23/as-interest-in-investing-grows-people-of-color-still-lag-behind-cnbc-survey-finds.html>.
- ⁷ “NIT: Clark-Fulton,” City of Cleveland, Ohio, accessed January 7, 2022, <https://www.clevelandohio.gov/node/164175>. See also “A Community Master Plan - Ch 4,” Clark-Fulton Together, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://clarkfultontogether.com/clark-fulton-together-ch-4>.
- ⁸ Ricardo León. “Good Growth: Driving a New Community-Ownership Paradigm in Cleveland,” the Fund for our Economic Opportunity, April 30, 2021. <https://www.thefundneo.org/good-growth-driving-a-new-community-ownership-paradigm-in-cleveland/>.
- ⁹ Information comes from Ja’Net Defell in an Interview with the author, January 11, 2022.
- ¹⁰ See <https://memphischamber.com/people-powered-prosperity/>.

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