



Place-Conscious Strategies to Restore Opportunity and Overcome Injustice

Five Guiding Principles Illustrated by Building Healthy Communities

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Where we live—and where our children grow up—exerts a profound and lasting influence on our day-to-day well-being, access to opportunities, and life outcomes. But for more than a century, the United States has built a system of separate and unequal neighborhoods. Public policies and institutional practices have excluded Black people and other people of color from neighborhoods rich with resources and opportunities, while starving the neighborhoods in which they live from essential investments, services, and supports. The resulting disparities perpetuate inequities and injustice across all domains of life.

Confronting this system of separate and unequal neighborhoods is essential to an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 recession, which has exposed and exacerbated the long-standing inequities of place and race. “Place-conscious” strategies can help. They focus on restoring disinvested neighborhoods, but they put people at the center of their activities and investments, rather than limiting them to the confines of rigidly defined neighborhood boundaries. These strategies attend to broader regional and market-wide systems, strengthening the links connecting people and communities with the assets and opportunities they need. This brief offers five normative principles to guide and challenge place-conscious public policy, philanthropic investment, and on-the-ground action. We posit that place-conscious strategies should (1) confront racism, (2) build resident voice and power, (3) work both horizontally and vertically, (4) plan for residential mobility, and (5) commit to accountability and continuous learning. We illustrate these principles, the achievements they can yield, and the tensions they pose with examples from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, a 10-year initiative launched in 2010 to advance health equity in 14 California communities.

Today, at the start of a new administration in Washington, DC, leaders in government, philanthropy, advocacy, and community are looking to lessons from past experience to shape major new recovery initiatives. Many proposals advanced during the presidential election campaign focus on restoring

disinvested communities and linking them to regional opportunities. And several national philanthropies are investing in major new initiatives with a neighborhood, city, county, or regional focus. Our goal is to inform and influence the next generation of place-conscious efforts to tackle the structural barriers of separate and unequal neighborhoods, support people's well-being and long-term success, and contribute to a more just and equitable recovery.

The US Has Built Separate and Unequal Communities That Undermine Opportunity and Equity

Decades of research show that where we live shapes our health and well-being and our children's prospects for the future (Turner and Gourevitch 2017). Recent analyses of the long-term consequences of neighborhood conditions have heightened policymakers' awareness of the significance of these impacts, providing compelling evidence that growing up in safe, well-resourced neighborhoods improves economic outcomes (Chetty and Hendren 2015; Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2015). Moreover, living in a disinvested neighborhood may undermine outcomes across generations. For example, children whose parents grew up in neighborhoods with high poverty rates scored dramatically worse on reading and problem-solving tests than children whose parents grew up in neighborhoods with low poverty rates, all else equal (Sharkey 2013).

America has built starkly unequal communities, systematically excluding Black people and other people of color from places rich with resources and opportunities, while depriving the communities in which they live from essential investments, services, and supports (Greene, Turner, and Gourevitch 2017). Early in the 20th century, as millions of Black people migrated from the rural South to the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, they were constrained to designated neighborhoods by local zoning ordinances, restrictive covenants, and violence. After World War II, the nation's renewed economic prosperity fueled the development of suburban communities. But federally sanctioned redlining, combined with local policies and prevailing real estate practices, excluded Black families from these new communities, denied loans to communities of color, and destabilized racially mixed neighborhoods (Rothstein 2017). Racial segregation and the denial of capital along racial lines fueled the geographic concentration of poverty, disinvestment by both public and private institutions, and worsening distress in communities occupied by people of color.

By the middle of the 20th century, federal law began to outlaw racial discrimination in housing and lending. But blatant forms of discrimination were replaced by subtler, ostensibly "race-neutral" methods to exclude Black people and (as the country has become increasingly diverse) other people of color from predominantly white communities. The legacy of early forms of discrimination has also proved stubbornly enduring. Living in disinvested neighborhoods often blocks people of color from the educational opportunities, jobs, and wealth building necessary to gain access to well-resourced neighborhoods, while generations of white families have benefited from all the structural advantages of opportunity-rich neighborhoods. And today, reinvestment can sometimes perpetuate the legacy of segregation, as higher-income, often-white newcomers move into communities occupied by people with

lower incomes and people of color, driving up rents and property taxes and pushing out longtime residents and businesses.

The crises of 2020—in public health, the economy, and racial injustice—have exposed the inequities of race and place. Black people and other people of color are getting sick and dying, losing their jobs and income, and suffering from food and housing insecurity at higher rates than white people.¹ The pandemic’s health and economic consequences are heightened in communities of color, which are more likely to have structural characteristics that increase the likelihood of exposure, community transmission, mortality, and job loss.² Segregation also contributes to overpolicing in communities of color, police violence, and inequitable incarceration rates (Gordon 2019; Mesic et al. 2018; Nellis 2016; Siegel 2020).³

Place-Conscious Strategies Can Help Tackle Today’s Urgent Challenges

Looking ahead, our country faces daunting challenges as we struggle to recover from the COVID-19 recession, grapple with the persistence of racial injustice, and heal from the hateful and divisive rhetoric of the past several years. Confronting and dismantling the systems that sustain separate and unequal communities should take center stage in these urgent efforts because these systems stand in the way of a genuinely equitable recovery.

During the Great Recession, policymakers and practitioners striving to support an equitable recovery fiercely debated the relative merits of “people-based” versus “place-based” investments. This long-standing debate—see, for example, Boger and Wegner (1996)—pitted policies that provide direct assistance to struggling individuals and families (such as the earned income tax credit, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, housing vouchers, or job training) against policies that aim to strengthen their communities (such as the Community Reinvestment Act, HOPE VI, or the Community Development Block Grant). Many proponents of people-based policies either dismissed the argument that neighborhood conditions might undermine the effectiveness of their preferred proposals or advocated for helping families move to better neighborhoods as an alternative to neighborhood reinvestment and restoration.

Manuel Pastor and Margery Austin Turner responded to this debate with a framework for “place-conscious” policies and investments (Pastor and Turner 2010). They rejected the dichotomy of people-based versus place-based policies, highlighting evidence that conditions in places profoundly undermine people’s opportunities and outcomes and that community distress results from regional forces of disinvestment, sprawl, and exclusion. Their place-conscious framing aimed to “simultaneously improve neighborhood conditions, open up access to opportunity-rich communities,” and ensure low-income people and places are not left out of broader regional growth and development strategies (Pastor and Turner 2010, 1).

In the years since, this framing has been expanded and applied to shape and advance efforts to improve the well-being and long-term success of people living in communities suffering from disinvestment and injustice. An Urban Institute team identified key attributes differentiating place-conscious strategies from the history of place-based investments for tackling deep and persistent poverty (Turner et al. 2014). The US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty—convened by the Urban Institute with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to identify bold strategies for dramatically increasing mobility from poverty—identified “place” as an essential pillar.⁴ The Partnership argued that “every child and adult should have the chance to thrive in a place of opportunity and safety within a caring community.” It advanced proposals to “transform communities, remove barriers that limit where people can live and learn, and encourage more economically diverse neighborhoods.” And it identified essential principles undergirding an ambitious proposal for coordinated regional strategies to reverse the legacy of segregation, disinvestment, and exclusion (Turner et al. 2018).

This brief updates Pastor and Turner’s original framework for place-conscious action. It is inspired and informed by evolving practice and policy, by new evidence about the lasting impacts of neighborhoods on people’s life outcomes, by work from the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, and by many Americans’ recent awakening to the persistence of racism and racial injustice. Our goal is to inform and influence a new generation of investments in hopes they can more effectively dismantle the structural barriers sustaining separate and unequal neighborhoods, support people’s well-being and long-term success, and contribute to an equitable recovery.

We draw upon experience from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative to illustrate these principles, demonstrate what place-conscious work looks like in practice, and acknowledge its challenges and tensions.⁵ Building Healthy Communities began in 2010 as an ambitious, 10-year initiative to achieve health equity in partnership with 14 California communities. In the decade since, the initiative’s scope and vision has evolved to “improve health status by building ‘people power,’ transforming policy and public systems, and expanding opportunities in communities that have been historically marginalized” (Farrow et al. 2020, 1).

Building Healthy Communities may seem a surprising exemplar because it did not originate as an initiative primarily aimed at transforming places. Rather, its goal was to improve health and health equity. But The California Endowment recognized that conditions in the communities where people live profoundly influence their health, and it commissioned new research showing wide disparities in life expectancy and other health outcomes between neighborhoods in the same cities (CSH 2014).⁶ Building Healthy Communities was launched to address those disparities, investing in organizations and activities focused within the 14 participating communities. The foundation has been transparent about the challenges, missteps, and lessons learned as the initiative evolved, sharing its evolving goals, success measures, and ways of working (The California Endowment 2016; Preskill et al. 2013). This transparency provides important insights into both the potential and the complexity of place-conscious work.

Diversity of The California Endowment's 14 Building Healthy Communities Sites

Site	Racial and Ethnic Composition (%) ^a						Foreign born (%) ^b
	White	African American	Latinx	Asian or Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaska Native	Other	
Boyle Heights (Los Angeles)	2.0	<2.0	94.3	2.3	<2.0	<2.0	49.0
Central Santa Ana	2.6	<2.0	93.7	2.1	<2.0	<2.0	54.2
Central/West Fresno City	8.4	9.1	68.6	12.3	<2.0	2.5	33.2
City Heights (San Diego)	13.1	15.0	55.1	15.0	<2.0	2.8	41.5
Del Norte County and adjacent tribal lands	66.5	3.3	15.9	3.6	5.5	10.2	6.9
East Oakland	4.2	39.6	47.6	6.1	<2.0	4.1	33.3
East Salinas (Alisal)	3.8	<2.0	92.4	2.6	<2.0	<2.0	52.1
Eastern Coachella Valley	2.2	<2.0	93.4	<2.0	<2.0	7.4	40.4
Central Long Beach	5.8	12.7	63.3	15.9	<2.0	3.9	41.3
Richmond	5.7	36.5	50.3	5.6	<2.0	3.5	34.5
South Sacramento	24.1	12.2	37.6	22.1	<2.0	5.8	28.6
South Kern County	13.9	3.1	78.9	2.5	<2.0	2.9	39.0
South Los Angeles	<2.0	19.0	78.5	<2.0	<2.0	<2.0	44.2
Southwest Merced/East Merced County	22.7	4.5	61.2	9.4	<2.0	2.9	29.9

Source: Racial and ethnic composition information come from Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, Jared P. Sanchez, Madeline Wander, and Anthony Perez, *Getting to Where You Want to Go: Demography, Economy, and the Region* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Program for Environmental and Regional Equity [USC PERE], 2013).

^a Data from USC PERE, at the block group level.

^b Data from USC PERE, at the tract level.

Many Types and Scales of Work Can Be “Place Conscious”

Place-conscious strategies recognize the importance of the places people live and may focus investments and activities in particular communities. But these strategies do not limit their activities and investments to the confines of narrowly defined neighborhood boundaries or assess their impact based on outcomes within those boundaries. They put people at the center of their actions and investments because people's experiences, though profoundly influenced by place, are not bounded by their neighborhoods. And place-conscious strategies attend to broader regional and market-wide systems, strengthening the links connecting people and communities with the assets and opportunities that improve families' quality of life and long-term outcomes. They also bridge conventional policy domains because the challenges families face in health, education, safety, and work are interconnected.

We do not intend here to establish a rigid definition of how initiatives, policies, or programs qualify as place conscious. Instead, we consider place consciousness to be a strategic approach that can be applied in multiple contexts. For example, a comprehensive community change initiative can adopt and apply a place-conscious approach, as can a regional equitable development initiative or a rural economic development initiative. Some place-conscious efforts target a single site, while others involve multiple sites pursuing shared goals, engaging in cross-site learning, and, in some cases, forming a network of sites advancing reforms at a city, state, or national scale (Sally et al. 2020).

A wide diversity of substantive challenges can motivate place-conscious action. Efforts to address physical blight, improve residents' health or children's educational achievement, reduce violence, preserve cultural assets, expand employment, or build family financial security can all become entry points for more comprehensive place-conscious strategies. None of these domains is self-contained, so when an initiative engages on the ground, listens to residents, and begins tackling the intersecting challenges and barriers they face, their work inevitably cuts across conventional policy domains or silos.

These efforts may also define "place" differently. Some may focus on disinvested neighborhoods within a city, while others aim to tackle challenges at a citywide or regional scale or in a rural area. Again, as these initiatives hit the ground and engage with residents, however, they recognize the importance of working at multiple scales. Sometimes they zoom in to particular neighborhoods—or even blocks—where a challenge may be most severe, while at other times, they zoom out to reform city or state policies that block solutions or to expand access to regional opportunities and resources residents need.

Funders of place-conscious strategies include both government and philanthropy. In many cases, the funders establish outcome goals or articulate explicit strategies or theories of change that participating sites must adopt. But implementation inevitably evolves differently from one site to the next; implicates public policy, philanthropic investment, and community action; and adapts to changing circumstances, residents' priorities, and evidence about what works. To have any realistic expectation of impact, they must be sustained over years or decades.

From the Harlem Children's Zone to Promise Neighborhoods

Launched in 1997, the Harlem Children's Zone seeks to dramatically improve outcomes for children growing up in a 97-block area in New York City by providing high-quality educational opportunities and comprehensive services to families. The initiative has achieved notable results in recognizing and responding to the interconnected challenges facing community residents, increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates. Its vision and success inspired the Obama administration to launch the federal Promise Neighborhoods program. Like the Harlem Children's Zone, the 15 current Promise Neighborhood grantees—both urban and rural—involve community-based partners to support the healthy development of children and youth. Both the Harlem Children's Zone and Promise Neighborhoods implement comprehensive solutions to multifaceted problems, making changes in discrete programs and in larger systems and structures.

Sources: "Our History and Zone Map," Harlem Children's Zone, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://hcz.org/our-purpose/our-history-zone-map/>; "Our Impact," Harlem Children's Zone, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://hcz.org/our-purpose/our-impact/>; and "Neighborhood Infographics," Promise Neighborhoods, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/data-and-results/infographics>.

The Sustainable Communities Initiative

The Sustainable Communities Initiative was an interagency federal program that provided grant support and technical assistance to 143 rural, suburban, and urban communities. These communities identified strategies to advance "livability principles," including increased transportation options, equitable and affordable housing, and economic competitiveness. After launching the program in 2010, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development requested that grantees also conduct a regional fair housing and equity assessment to help evaluate access to opportunity in their regions. Research suggests that the Sustainable Communities Initiative had a lasting impact in many regions, generating insights about spatial barriers to opportunity for communities of color and people with low incomes, leading to recommendations about how to better leverage federal investments and, in some cases, changes in local policies and regional allocation of resources.

Source: Margery Austin Turner, Solomon Greene, Anthony Iton, and Ruth Gourevitch, *Opportunity Neighborhoods: Building the Foundation for Economic Mobility in America's Metros* (Washington, DC: US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, 2018).

Five Principles Should Guide Place-Conscious Strategies and Action

Place-conscious strategies aspire to tackle stubborn challenges of place and race in America. We posit that the persistence and complexity of these challenges demand strategies and action that embody five normative principles (Turner et al. 2014; Turner et al. 2018). Specifically, place-conscious strategies should

- **confront racism**, because racism built and sustains the systems that marginalize and disadvantage people and places;
- **build resident voice and power**, because the lack of power over policies and practices that affect one's life perpetuates inequity and injustice;
- **work both horizontally and vertically**, because the challenges facing people and places span policy domains and demand action at multiple scales;
- **plan for residential mobility**, because neighborhoods are dynamic, with people constantly leaving and arriving; and
- **commit to accountability and continuous learning**, because without evidence, it is impossible to assess needs, craft a strategy that drives toward desired outcomes, or make midcourse corrections.

In our view, these principles apply regardless of whether a place-conscious strategy is funded by government or by philanthropy; whether it is motivated by goals involving health, safety, education, work, or some other domain; and whether it focuses at the scale of a neighborhood, a city or town, or a rural community. We recognize that advancing these principles is daunting and that sometimes they may come into tension with each other. The experience of Building Healthy Communities helps illustrate the achievements these principles can yield and the difficulties they can pose.

1. Confront Racism

Place-conscious strategies must explicitly confront individual, institutional, and cultural racism. Often, efforts to improve outcomes for low-income people and people of color have foregrounded shared prosperity, access to opportunity, or upward mobility. These concepts leave unstated the centrality of racial inequities and injustice, even though they may be understood or implicit. But there is no denying that America's tragic history of slavery, racial violence, and oppression produced today's separate and unequal neighborhoods, along with racist narratives about the inferiority of people of color. This history and the ongoing realities of racial injustice, along with the accompanying narratives, carry profound implications for people's beliefs about who "belongs" in their community, who "deserves" to be a member, and what places are "worthy" of investment. Leaving these implications unstated makes it less likely that the underlying drivers will be confronted or dismantled.

Unwinding the legacy of racial segregation requires fundamental reforms to public policies and private-sector practices. Efforts to improve conditions within individual communities without disrupting the larger structures of segregation and inequality may yield important near-term benefits for some residents but cannot achieve large-scale or sustainable change. Moreover, policy reforms must go hand-in-hand with active work to challenge and replace racist narratives. As long as people of color and the places they live are deemed inferior or unsalvageable, efforts to boost public and private investments in communities long starved of resources will be difficult to justify or sustain. And attempts to open well-resourced communities to people of all races and ethnicities will be bitterly resisted.

This is difficult work, because it surfaces conflict and requires people with power and privilege to face the injustices from which they have benefited. Meaningful reckoning with the history of racism and its consequences for the present-day geography of opportunity is an ongoing process without a defined end point. It cannot and should not happen overnight and thus may delay decisions, strategic planning, and action. Racial reckoning may require funders to reframe their understanding of the work and recalibrate timelines and measures of interim progress. Moreover, community members and other stakeholders may grow impatient with the lack of action or evidence of progress if all an initiative's efforts are absorbed in racial reckoning.

But the long-term payoffs of confronting the racism that produced and sustains separate and unequal communities could be transformative. Systematic efforts to narrow place-based disparities and expand people's choices about where to live can contribute to antiracist narratives by creating more opportunities for people of different races and ethnicities to know each other as neighbors and by restoring ladders of economic opportunity in the communities where many people of color live. This offers the possibility of converting a self-perpetuating cycle of stigma, marginalization, fear, and polarization into a virtuous cycle of engagement, power, respect, and inclusion.

Pursuing Racial Healing and Antiracist Policymaking in East Salinas

In Salinas, California, community organizations and city officials have sought to address underlying tensions and structural inequities through the dual lens of racial healing and systems change. Following several police shootings in 2010 and persistent profiling, the majority-Latinx community in Salinas was distrustful of the police department and government institutions. Building Healthy Communities sought to facilitate healing by convening stakeholders to develop a racial equity agenda. This small-scale effort evolved into a weeklong Governing for Racial Justice training held by the National Compadres Network and Race Forward for more than 100 city staff members and community leaders. The training allowed members of both groups to learn more about one another as individuals and about tools and strategies for realignment. The Governing for Racial Justice Steering Committee grew out of the training and developed a work plan for deepening leadership capacity and incorporating racial equity concepts into budget and policy priorities. Notable results include an economic revitalization plan and infrastructure improvements for a distressed neighborhood in East Salinas, community-informed police trainings, and reforms to government hiring practices and requirements.

Source: Jamilah Bradshaw Dieng, Jesús Valenzuela, and Tenoch Ortiz, *Building the We: Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity in Salinas* (Oakland, CA: Race Forward: The Center for the Racial Justice Innovation, n.d.).

Confronting Racial Injustice by Recognizing Sacred Practices on Yurok Tribal Lands

For the past century, indigenous communities have been prohibited from conducting cultural burns, which are central to the Yurok people's food cultivation practices and spiritual life. Cultural burns help prevent wildfires and sustain diverse wildlife and vegetation and enable the indigenous community to bond with the land. Tribal and nontribal community members partnered with Building Healthy Communities and land-use organizations to coordinate with local, state, and federal agencies to lift restrictions on cultural burning and conducted trainings and education for community members to ensure awareness and safety. With the help of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the first cultural burn took place in April 2013 on seven acres of Yurok tribal land. In 2014, several tribal members founded the Cultural Fire Management Council to ensure the safe continuation of these practices. The council now partners with The Nature Conservancy to conduct two large-scale fires a year.

Sources: "Yurok Fight for Cultural Burning," KCET, accessed February 16, 2021, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/clip/yurok-fight-for-cultural-burning>; and Page Buono, "Quiet Fire: Indigenous Tribes in California and Other Parts of the U.S. Have Been Rekindling the Ancient Art of Controlled Burning," The Nature Conservancy, November 2, 2020, <https://www.nature.org/en-us/magazine/magazine-articles/indigenous-controlled-burns-california/>.

2. Build Resident Voice and Power

Residents of neighborhoods suffering from disinvestment and distress must play leading roles in designing solutions; engaging other community members; holding public officials, civic leaders, and philanthropists accountable for commitments they make; and helping to drive change. Building resident power goes hand-in-hand with confronting racism because racism has intentionally locked people of color out of decisionmaking power, and the absence of power perpetuates unjust policies and systems. Interventions and strategies focused on disinvested places have often been designed through planning processes and implemented by institutions that leave out the residents most affected by racism and poverty. A national philanthropy or federal government agency may establish objectives and prescribe strategies in advance of launching an initiative. And local implementing organizations may fail to invite community members into active roles, even as they engage key institutional stakeholders from across sectors and domains.

Without residents playing meaningful roles at these decisionmaking tables, work may overlook the problems that matter most to residents or the community assets they value. More importantly, leaving residents out fails to remedy the powerlessness that perpetuates structural barriers, inequities, and injustice. In fact, it may even exacerbate the disparities in power that undermine the well-being and potential of both people and places. Poverty reflects not only the lack of economic resources but the lack of autonomy and power in the social, economic, and political realms (Ellwood and Patel 2018). Therefore, supporting people's well-being and success requires the restoration of both individual and collective power.

Strengthening residents' voice and power can help build capacity for sustained activism and influence. Then, residents can hold public- and private-sector institutions accountable for addressing their priorities, delivering on commitments, and reversing policies and practices that drive inequities and injustice. If the imbalance of power that has starved communities of resources and opportunities can be corrected, gains in more tangible outcomes may be more durable, and residents may be able to claim the resources and opportunities they need over the long term.

Ensuring that residents have authentic voice and power is more easily said than done. It means giving people tools and supports for effective and meaningful participation at every stage, not just a chance to “advise” at the beginning or “sign off” at the end but a real seat at the decisionmaking table. It means investing in community organizing groups that can build and shepherd community power. It means reaching past self-appointed community “representatives” to engage the full range of resident perspectives and interests, including newcomers, young people, and others who might bring different or challenging perspectives. It means managing disagreement and conflict, both within the community and with those who hold power over it. And as discussed earlier, it means confronting the ugly truths of racism and its consequences. Thus, meaningful inclusion requires time and may appear to stand in the way of action or require too much from residents without delivering tangible results. Finally, funders may need to provide long-term support for resident engagement, voice, and impact rather than assuming residents can cover the costs of sustained involvement.

In addition to investing money and time in building power, funders must cede control if they mean to build resident power. Residents may set different priorities—or rank goals differently—from those the funder established. And the funder must value and respect the experience and expertise of community members, especially when they lead to different conclusions than traditional sources of expertise or evidence. Thus, a funder may have to revise its outcome goals and success measures in response to resident priorities.

Engaging Community Members in the Citywide Planning Process in Fresno

Fresno's Building Healthy Communities site connected community-based organizations and residents to the city council's formal planning process. In 2011, with support from The California Endowment, six community-based organizations allied together to form Fresno Leaders Advocating for Regional Equity Together, or FLARE. FLARE took a leadership role in meeting with community members and planners to identify needs and potential solutions, synthesizing priorities and recommendations for the general plan update. Community members identified a need "to address the social determinants of health inequities" by remediating health hazards that disproportionately affect low-income communities. They also indicated a desire to create a more positive narrative for Fresno, tailor job growth to current residents' assets, and ensure neighborhood amenities are equitably distributed, accessible, and community driven. In 2014, the city council voted to pursue "Alternative A," which promoted urban development over sprawl and established an Antidisplacement Task Force to better understand and mitigate the challenges facing low-income residents and business owners. The final general plan update included provisions put forward by FLARE and meaningfully involved community members throughout the process.

Sources: John Capitman, Christine Barker, Amanda Conley, Emanuel Alcala, Ana Arenas, Martha Cornejo, Sophia DeWitt, et al., "A Fair and Healthy Fresno: Community Voices on the 2035 Fresno General Plan Update" (Fresno: California State University, Fresno, Central Valley Healthy Policy Institute, 2014); Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, and Anthony Perez, *There's Something Happening Here...A Look at The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, 2014); and "Long Range Plans and the Development Code," City of Fresno, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.fresno.gov/darm/general-plan-development-code/>.

Mobilizing Community Members to Increase Government Transparency in Santa Ana

Building Healthy Communities supported the Santa Ana Collaborative for Responsible Development, a coalition of advocacy organizations and organizers in its campaign to increase visibility of the city council's budget and calendar information. Following joint community outreach and engagement efforts, the Santa Ana City Council passed the Sunshine Law, which mandated meetings between developers and community members during the early project review stage, increased notification of city legislative meetings, provided access to bids on contracts for city services, and made meeting calendars and campaign finance disclosure forms publicly available. The Sunshine Law was considered a major win for activists and an important step toward reducing barriers to civic participation.

Sources: Adam Elmahrek, "Santa Ana Council Approves Sunshine Law," *Voice of OC*, October 2, 2012, <https://voiceofoc.org/2012/10/santa-ana-council-approves-sunshine-law/>; FSG, "Santa Ana Building Healthy Communities Case Study" (Los Angeles: The California Endowment, 2013); and Santa Ana Collaborative for Responsible Development (SACReD), "Santa Ana! Let the Sunshine In!" (Santa Ana, CA: SACReD, 2012).

3. Work Both Horizontally and Vertically

To maximize their effectiveness, place-conscious strategies must work *horizontally*, by integrating efforts across policy domains within a neighborhood, and *vertically*, by activating local, state, and even

federal policy levers and resources. The importance of working horizontally has long been recognized by proponents and practitioners of comprehensive community initiatives. Every barrier people confront and every injustice they suffer cuts across conventional programmatic and policy domains. For example, intermittent employment, unpredictable work schedules, and low wages cannot be addressed without tackling issues of literacy, health, policing, transportation, and child care. Regardless of the problem or inequity that may have motivated or launched an initiative focused on a disinvested community, the substantive scope of place-conscious work inevitably spreads across intersecting domains.

Although work within communities often reveals these critical interconnections, the optimal geographic scale for tackling problems of place varies widely—from the block level to a larger neighborhood, and to city, county, and regional scales. For example, people's exposure to crime and violence may be determined by conditions on the blocks immediately surrounding their home, so a violence-prevention intervention that targets a small section of a neighborhood might be essential. Ensuring access to grocery stores selling healthy foods may call for an intervention that applies to a larger section of the city or town. Preserving historical assets and supporting artistic and cultural practices may extend across multiple neighborhoods, a rural community, or tribal lands. Improving the quality of children's education requires action at the scale of an elementary school enrollment zone and, ultimately, the larger school district. And ensuring access to health care for rural residents may require federal action on health care reimbursement rates or support to build and sustain health care facilities.

Moreover, many of the structural barriers to equity and justice that are so starkly apparent in disinvested communities can be tackled only by action at higher levels of governance. This reality limits the potential impact of initiatives focused solely on collaboration among people and institutions inside a neighborhood. Transformational changes are more likely to be achieved when all levers are activated—when place-conscious efforts reform policies and mobilize resources at city or county, regional, state, and federal levels, as well as within neighborhoods. This insight highlights the potential synergy between neighborhood-level power building and larger policy and systems changes. Place-conscious strategies can mobilize awareness and evidence of challenges people are experiencing in place and the power building that happens in communities to advocate for and drive change at larger scales.

By working intensively in small communities, a place-conscious effort can highlight critical challenges that might not otherwise be recognized or prioritized. But elevating the scale of the solutions to city, county, or state levels can yield more far-reaching policy and systems changes, improving outcomes for more communities and their residents. In addition, working both within and across communities can create mutually reinforcing opportunities for peer learning and power building among community-based organizations.

No single organization can perform all the tasks and activities needed to pursue both the horizontal and vertical work required for effective place-conscious solutions. Although it may be tempting to select a single, high-capacity organization to spearhead an initiative, investors should strengthen the capacities of multiple organizations working in intersecting policy domains and at the neighborhood, city, and regional levels.

At the neighborhood level, strong community-based institutions support residents' empowerment to set and pursue priorities for investments and mobilize capital to address high-priority needs. They can also mobilize resident voices to advocate for change at larger scales. But they should not have to do that work on their own. City- and statewide organizations can be enlisted as partners to advance community priorities and pursue sustainable policy and practice changes that benefit all neighborhoods.

Funders should support capacity building among organizations led by people of color. These organizations have often been deprived of resources and locked out of opportunities to increase capacity. But they may be the most effective vehicles for engaging with community residents, amplifying their voices, and building their power to effect change at larger scales. Thus, a genuine commitment to confronting racism and building resident power requires capacity building for organizations that have been ignored or undervalued.

Working Vertically to Advance Food Justice in South Sacramento

Community-based organizations made healthy food access and eating a priority in South Sacramento, establishing private home and community gardens across Building Healthy Communities target area. Starting in 2009, the community-based organization Ubuntu Green installed 60 private garden boxes in residents' front yards free of charge. Residents received tutorials on gardening and quarterly manuals with healthy food recipes and information on nearby grocery stores and farmers markets. Meanwhile, The California Endowment-funded organizations, including Soil Born Farms, advocated for healthy food access to the City of Sacramento and the Sacramento City Unified School District. In addition to establishing joint use agreements for the operation of community gardens on school properties, the city and school district embedded healthy eating in broader school policies and practices. With prompting and direction from South Sacramento Building Healthy Communities-affiliated organizations, the school district established a Healthy Foods Task Force in 2010 to examine food quality, school cafeterias, and opportunities for teaching students about food. In 2012, Soil Born Farms partnered with five local elementary and middle schools to incorporate school gardens into academic curricula. The school district offered \$10,000 incentives to schools to raise free and reduced-price lunch application rates to 90 percent of enrollment in 2015, bringing in additional state funds. And in 2018, the school district officially adopted Soil Born Farms' school gardening curriculum, with funding to train teachers and implement programming in all Sacramento public schools.

Sources: Dora Bromme, "Garden Boxes in South Sacramento Grow Community, Healthy Food," *Sacramento Press*, July 25, 2011, <https://sacramentopress.com/2011/07/25/garden-boxes-in-south-sacramento-grow-community-healthy-food/>; Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, and Anthony Perez, *There's Something Happening Here...A Look at The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, 2014); and LPC Consulting Associates, *Sacramento BHC: Year 9 Evaluation Report* (Sacramento, CA: LPC Consulting Associates, 2020).

Advocating for School Discipline Reform at the Local and State Level

At the start of the initiative, The California Endowment identified youth leadership development as a primary driver of change in their framework for health equity. As a result, Building Healthy Communities sites have supported young people to become activists and decisionmakers instead of only program participants. Early on, youth in several sites identified school discipline reform as a priority. Students saw harsh discipline policies as an unjust contributor to low graduation rates among young men of color and a source of tension between communities of color and schools. With the help of community-based partners and the statewide Sons and Brothers initiative, students organized campaigns that challenged prevailing narratives about boys and young men of color and advanced specific policy reforms. In Los Angeles, youth took issue with the use of “willful defiance” as justification for suspension. Following coordinated appeals to the school board, young people saw this language eliminated with the passage of the new School Climate Bill of Rights for the Los Angeles Unified School District in 2013. In Fresno, youth met with the superintendent of the Fresno Unified School District to discuss restorative justice practices and alternatives to expulsion and suspension. The school board trustees adopted a resolution to implement a school discipline framework of restorative justice shortly thereafter. In 2013, these local efforts expanded to statewide wins when Governor Jerry Brown signed five school discipline reform bills into law.

Sources: FSG, *Sons and Brothers: Building Healthy Communities Case Study* (Los Angeles, The California Endowment, 2014); Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, and Anthony Perez, *There's Something Happening Here...A Look at The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, 2014); and The California Endowment, *A New Power Grid: Building Healthy Communities at Year 5* (Los Angeles: The California Endowment, 2016).

4. Plan for Residential Mobility

Place-conscious strategies must recognize the dynamic nature of neighborhoods, with people constantly moving in and out as their circumstances change and as larger regional conditions evolve. They should not assume that everyone wants to remain in the same community indefinitely. Nor should their investments prioritize the people who stay. Instead, strategies should create conditions that support the well-being and success of all residents, however long they choose to stay. And they should reach out to engage both newcomers and longtime residents. People who move away may continue to participate or benefit from community services or hard-won policy reforms. And some residents who move away may return later as leaders, entrepreneurs, or investors.

People in the US move a lot, both within the boundaries of a neighborhood or rural community and over long distances. Moving sometimes reflects positive changes in a family's circumstances, enabling them to live in a community that better meets their needs and priorities. In these circumstances, moving can be an exercise of autonomy and individual power. But moving can also be a symptom of instability—of powerlessness and loss of community. Similarly, staying in place may reflect a family's stability, security, social capital, and satisfaction with its home and community, but other times, it may mean that a family lacks the power to move to better housing or a preferred community.

Residential mobility—both voluntary and involuntary—can complicate the intended mechanisms of interventions that focus on disinvested places. Families may leave before they have had time to benefit fully from enhanced services and supports. In some cases, they may be replaced by similar families whose needs remain unmet. In other circumstances, higher-income households may be attracted by new investments and amenities, potentially displacing longtime residents. One way to address these challenges is to help families avoid unplanned or disruptive moves so they can remain and reap the benefits of community investments and opportunities.

Traditionally, many community improvement initiatives have reflected an implicit vision that a neighborhood should function as an incubator for its residents—investing in programs and services that families need to thrive, as well as the amenities that make them want to remain as their circumstances improve. But this is not the only possible vision for neighborhood success. Place-conscious practitioners should also embrace mobility when it represents a positive step for a family. Enabling residents to move to more opportunity-rich neighborhoods—if *they want to*—should be part of a larger vision for improving outcomes. Better outcomes for a family should count as a success, whether they happen inside the boundaries of the original neighborhood or elsewhere. Thus, strategies that expand people’s access to neighborhoods throughout a city or region should be viewed as part of a larger place-conscious strategy, not as an alternative to neighborhood reinvestment and revitalization.

This approach reflects the view that some communities may function as launchpads for their residents, instead of incubators. Like an incubator community, a launchpad offers services and supports that help residents advance economically. But as residents achieve greater economic security, some move on to more desirable locations and are replaced by a new cohort of households in need. Launchpad communities experience high mobility, and even though many residents may be making significant individual progress, the community as a whole might not show much improvement on such indicators as employment, income, or wealth.

Welcoming Residential Mobility in City Heights

Like other Building Healthy Communities sites, City Heights aims to improve neighborhood conditions for both current and future residents through community-led initiatives. When The California Endowment began funding Mid-City Community Advocacy Network as its local convener, Price Philanthropies had already invested hundreds of millions of dollars in housing, community development, and resident services. New research finds that the City Heights population has grown steadily, as more Hispanic immigrants move to the neighborhood. But neither the substantial investments in neighborhood amenities nor the growth in population has caused incomes or property values to climb. This appears to reflect City Heights’ success as a “launchpad,” supporting longtime residents in accessing opportunity within and beyond the neighborhood while welcoming and providing services to a constant flow of newcomers.

Sources: Building Healthy Communities; Brett Theodos, *San Diego’s City Heights Initiative: A Long-Term Impact Evaluation of a Comprehensive Community Initiative* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, forthcoming); and “Community Planning Process: Beyond Healthy Communities,” Mid-City CAN, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.midcitycan.org/bhc>.

5. Commit to Accountability and Continuous Learning

Place-conscious strategies should define, measure, and track progress toward their intended goals to hold themselves accountable and continuously adapt and improve their strategies based on solid information. They build data collection, measurement, and assessment into their work from the outset, basing plans, investments, and actions on evidence (to the greatest extent possible), learning (quickly) from failures as well as successes, and making midcourse corrections in both strategy and tactics.

Often, efforts to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of investments in communities are detached from day-to-day work and provide little support for planning or continuous learning. In the interest of “objectivity,” they may engage research teams that have no direct interaction with local stakeholders. And they may invest in data collection and analyses that primarily serve the funders without providing value to on-the-ground implementation teams or capitalizing on community members’ knowledge.

In contrast, continuous learning efforts engage with on-the-ground planners and implementers, community members, and other local stakeholders as partners, capitalizing on evidence they prioritize and help build, including qualitative and observational data, and producing analyses and results that serve the work they are designing and advancing. This kind of community-engaged research and evaluation can be both relevant and objective if it is pursued with intellectual honesty and transparency.

One way to start is by establishing actionable metrics that reflect the strategy’s intended goals and the conditions required to achieve them. Both the normative goals and metrics that reflect them should be explicit and transparent to all stakeholders. These goals and metrics may reflect desired outcomes for residents. But they may also reflect desired changes in policies and systems, including durable shifts in power and accountability. Once established, metrics can serve multiple purposes in organizing, planning, advocacy, and implementation. They can help set priorities for strategy, investment, and policy change. They can raise the visibility of critical barriers and bring key stakeholders to a common table. When multiple partners agree on explicit and measurable goals, they can hold each other accountable for the actions necessary to achieve those goals, and their work is more likely to remain aligned. Metrics are essential to the continuous learning and adaptation required to achieve real progress. They make it possible to respond to changing circumstances, acknowledge and learn from failures and from successes, and continuously adapt strategy and tactics based on evidence.

Recognizing that people inevitably move a lot has important implications for setting goals and assessing progress. Place-conscious strategies should measure and track the structural conditions that support or block residents’ well-being and success, as opposed to tracking individuals’ advancement. For example, a place-conscious intervention focused on empowering residents to build savings might track the locations (and hours of service) of banks and credit unions, the products and services they provide to enable people with low incomes to build savings, and constraints on the number and practices of predatory lending services within the neighborhoods.

Tensions may arise between the value of measurement and tracking progress toward predetermined goals and the value of resident engagement and power building. If goals and measures are established in advance—often by the primary funder or lead organization—they may not reflect community members’ goals, and they may ignore important evidence that is not captured in official data sources. And as residents gain voice and power, they may prioritize different or additional outcome goals, and they may give greater credence to evidence from experience than to experts’ analyses.

But balancing these tensions can be constructive. Even if preliminary goals and metrics are established in advance, community members and other stakeholders can be drawn into conversations about refinements and extensions that reflect their priorities and capitalize on data they identify. And as planning and implementation evolves, experience may prompt revisions to the initiative’s goals or refinements to the metrics used to track progress.

Adapting Results Frameworks and Evaluation Plans for Building Healthy Communities

At the start of Building Healthy Communities, The California Endowment established a results framework that involved “four big results”—improved school climate and wellness, access to high-quality health coverage and services, reduced childhood obesity, and reduced youth violence—and 10 key outcomes. This framework reflected the foundation’s interest in monitoring local and statewide progress toward lasting impact. But by 2014, The California Endowment decided that its original framework was overly prescriptive: it neglected local context and communities by omitting local sites and residents from the conversation. At the initiative’s midpoint, the foundation pivoted to incorporate power building and youth leadership as primary drivers of change. This shift reflected the foundation’s willingness to listen and learn from grantees and community members and a belief in the importance of capacity building and unconventional “wins.” In the revised results framework developed in 2016 and 2017, “people power” was identified as goal #1 of the “North Star Goals and Indicators.” With a new results framework, the foundation evolved toward an ecosystem approach in the final years of the initiative with local capacity building and community power at its center.

Sources: Frank Farrow, Cheryl Rogers, and Jennifer Henderson-Frakes, “[Toward Health and Racial Equity: Reflections on 10 Years of Building Healthy Communities](#)” (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2020); and The California Endowment, *A New Power Grid: Building Healthy Communities at Year 5* (Los Angeles: The California Endowment, 2016).

Opportunities to Learn from the Next Generation of Place-Conscious Strategy and Action

As we write, leaders in government, philanthropy, advocacy, and community are looking to lessons from past experience to shape major new recovery initiatives that overcome the injustices of place and race.⁷ The Biden administration has acknowledged its obligation to “play a critical role in overcoming [the] history of discrimination” and committed to “pursu[ing] a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all.”⁸ And many of the plans advanced during the presidential election campaign focus on restoring disinvested communities and linking them to regional opportunities.⁹ National philanthropies also are

investing in new major initiatives that promote economic mobility and racial equity with a neighborhood, city, county, or regional focus.¹⁰

No generic playbook can prescribe how to embed the five principles discussed here into the design, funding, or implementation of a place-conscious strategy. Instead, planners and implementers will employ different tactics in different contexts and will likely adapt both strategy and tactics over the time required to achieve meaningful impact. But the launch of new place-conscious strategies offers a powerful opportunity to advance these principles and to engage in ongoing learning and field building.

During the 10-year implementation of Building Healthy Communities, The California Endowment demonstrated tremendous flexibility, openness to challenge, willingness to shift course, and transparency about lessons learned in the pursuit of health equity for people and communities. Looking forward, if the instigators and funders of the next generation of place-conscious strategies can achieve comparable humility and transparency, they can learn from one another's successes and missteps, potentially accelerating their collective efforts to dismantle the systems that sustain separate and unequal neighborhoods, expand access to opportunities, and contribute to a just and equitable recovery.

Notes

- ¹ Shena Ashley, Alena Stern, Steven Brown, Ajit Narayanan, Tomas Monarrez, and Margery Austin Turner, "Tracking COVID-19's Effects by Race and Ethnicity: Questionnaire One, Updates on People's Health, Housing, and Livelihoods between April 23 and July 21," Urban Institute, last updated July 30, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/features/tracking-covid-19s-effects-race-and-ethnicity-questionnaire-one>.
- ² Eugene Scott, "4 Reasons Coronavirus Is Hitting Black Communities So Hard," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/10/4-reasons-coronavirus-is-hitting-black-communities-so-hard/>; Christian Weller, "Systemic Racism Makes COVID-19 Much More Deadly for African-Americans," *Forbes*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christianweller/2020/06/18/systemic-racism-makes-covid-19-much-more-deadly-for-african-americans/?sh=261f9b977feb>; and Zinzi Bailey, Sharrelle Barber, Whitney Robinson, Jaime Slaughter-Acey, Chandra Ford, and Shawnita Sealy-Jefferson, "Racism in the Time of COVID-19," Interdisciplinary Association for Population Health Science blog, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://iaphs.org/racism-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>.
- ³ Emily Badger, "'White Flight' Began a Lot Earlier Than We Think," *Washington Post*, March 17, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/03/17/white-flight-began-a-lot-earlier-than-we-think/>; and Nate Silver, "Most Police Don't Live in the Cities They Serve," *FiveThirtyEight*, August 20, 2014, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/most-police-dont-live-in-the-cities-they-serve/>.
- ⁴ "Ensure Zip Code Is Not Destiny," US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.mobilitypartnership.org/paper-categories/ensure-zip-code-not-destiny>.
- ⁵ These examples largely showcase activities that started relatively early in the life of Building Healthy Communities and have had sufficient time to achieve results.
- ⁶ "A Tale of Two Zip Codes," Building Healthy Communities, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.buildinghealthycommunities.org/a-tale-of-two-zip-codes/>.
- ⁷ For example, Blue Meridian Partners has engaged PolicyLink and the Urban Institute to convene a diverse policy working group of local and national practitioners to develop a blueprint for the next generation of federal place-based policy.

- ⁸ Exec. Order No. 13,985, 86 F.R. 7009 (2021); and “Memorandum on Redressing Our Nation’s and the Federal Government’s History of Discriminatory Housing Practices and Policies,” White House, January 26, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/26/memorandum-on-redressing-our-nations-and-the-federal-governments-history-of-discriminatory-housing-practices-and-policies/>.
- ⁹ Asma Khalid and Barbara Sprunt, “Biden Counters Trump’s ‘America First’ with ‘Build Back Better’ Economic Plan,” NPR, July 9, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/09/889347429/biden-counters-trumps-america-first-with-build-back-better-economic-plan>; and “The Biden-Harris Administration Immediate Priorities,” White House, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/priorities/>.
- ¹⁰ Examples include the Boosting Upward Mobility from Poverty initiative funded by the Gates Foundation (see “Boosting Upward Mobility from Poverty,” Urban Institute, Research to Action Lab, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/research-action-lab/projects/boosting-upward-mobility-poverty>), the Power of Place Initiative funded by Blue Meridian Partners (see “Regional Strategies,” Blue Meridian Partners, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.blumeridian.org/funds/regional-strategies/>), Results for America’s Opportunity Accelerator (see “The Opportunity Accelerator,” Solutions Bank, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://solutionsbank.candid.org/solutions/the-opportunity-accelerator/>), Enterprise Community Partners’ Economic Mobility Initiative (see “Economic Mobility,” Enterprise Community Partners, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/solutions-and-innovation/economic-mobility>), and the Strive Together Network (see <https://www.strivetogether.org/>).

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