ABLe Pocket Guide

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Introduction

This ABLe Pocket Guide provides a summary of the 8 step ABLe Change process for community systems change. Use this pocket guide as a "Cliff Notes" version of the full Able Change Manual.

Using this Guide

On the first page of each Pocket Guide chapter you will find a visual of the overall ABLe Process that will highlight which ABLe step you are in.

Below this visual will be a roadmap of the main chapter sections to give you an overview of what is to come.

Pocket Guide chapters provide reference pages from the ABLe Manual using the following icon:

ABLe Manual Pages 145-155

Each chapter will also provide relevant tools and website links using the following icons:

ABLe Process

Define	❶ Define a Targeted Problem
	❷ Determine System Boundaries
	❸ Understand the Community System
	❹ Adopt a Shared Agenda
Design	❺ Design Powerful Strategies
Do	❻ Promote Quick Wins
	❼ Build a Climate for Effective Implementation
Learn	❽ Learn for Continuous Improvement
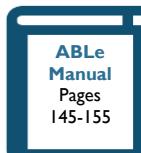
ABLe **tools**

Relevant **MICHIRLearning.org** website sections

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ABLe Change Framework Overview

The ABLe Change Framework is a model designed to help communities more effectively address complex social problems and achieve transformative community change.

Designed by Drs. Pennie Foster-Fishman and Erin Watson at Michigan State University, the ABLe Change Framework draws upon research from the successes and failures of prior organizational, community, service system, and international change efforts.

The ABLe Change Framework is dynamic and adaptive to local conditions and problems, providing stakeholders with the flexibility they need to effectively address targeted community problems.

Approaches to Community Change

Organizations and communities have been working to reduce social problems for decades. However, most efforts face significant challenges and do not achieve their targeted outcomes because change agents take a Simple Problem Approach to solve Complicated or Complex Problems.[1]

What do simple problems look like?

Program or Intervention → Policy/Practice Change / Individual Skill or Behavior Change → Improved Population Outcome

Simple Problems assumptions:
- Known cause for all people and settings
- Same cause for everyone
- Same solution works for everyone, everywhere, every time
- *Example: Recipe*

Over the years, change agents and researchers have realized that the problems facing our communities today are actually far **more complex than simple problems.**[2,3] Some even call the social problems of today – poverty, children not ready for school, health inequities – wicked problems!

What do complex problems look like?
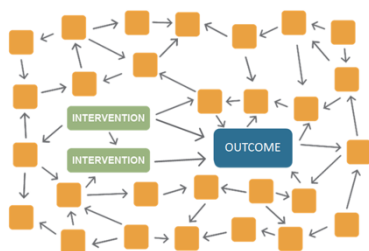
Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007
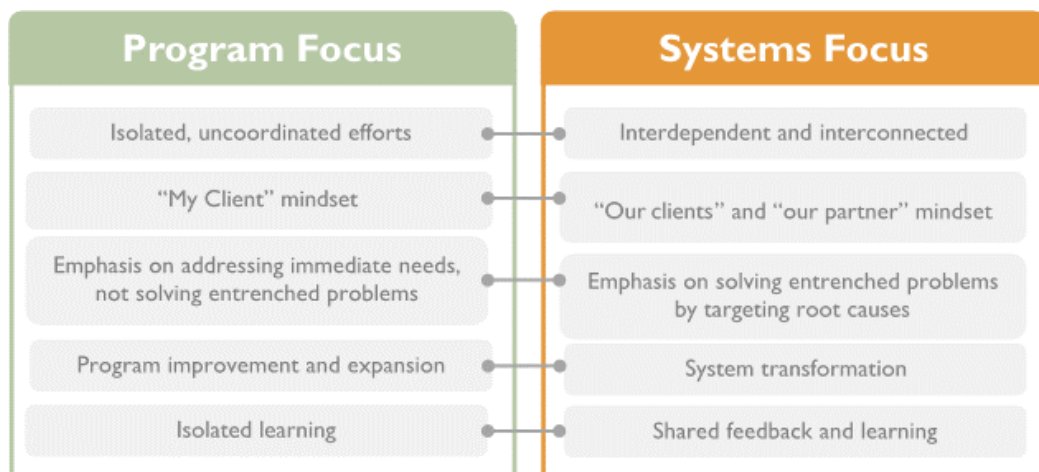
Complex Problem Assumptions:
- Multiple or unknown causes of a problem
- Different causes for different people or settings
- Same solution will NOT work for everyone or everywhere
- Unpredictable time delays
- Unknowable outcomes
- *Example: Parenting*

(Patton, 2011)

Using a Systems Approach

Complex problems are often unpredictable and the conditions causing them often change.[4]

So, no matter how many simple, programmatic solutions you implement, it is impossible to eliminate all of the causes – because causes are dynamic and changing. In fact, some are not even obvious or visible!

In order to solve these types of *complex* problems, you need to use a Systems Approach, which shifts the focus from solely using programs to address complex problems to using a systems-level focus.

Program Focus	**Systems Focus**
Isolated, uncoordinated efforts	Interdependent and interconnected
"My Client" mindset	"Our clients" and "our partner" mindset
Emphasis on addressing immediate needs, not solving entrenched problems	Emphasis on solving entrenched problems by targeting root causes
Program improvement and expansion	System transformation
Isolated learning	Shared feedback and learning

Defining a System

A **system** is a set of *interacting* and *connected parts* that has a *shared purpose* and *functions* as a *whole.*[5]

Outcomes emerge from the patterns of behavior (the habits!) that develop over time as the system parts interact with each other.

These interactions exert influence on system parts and actors, often determining what is possible and not within a system or context.[4]

ABLe Manual Pages 7-10
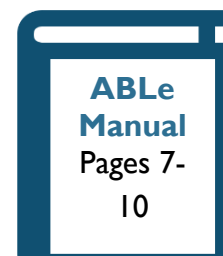
Example Systems:
A family, a neighborhood, an organization, a hospital, a school district, a human service delivery network, the federal welfare system, a city.

Tenets of a Systems Approach

ABLe Change promotes four key tenets of using a Systems Approach to address complex problems.

A Systems Approach…

Sees and Attends to the Whole Person

Many communities are now pursuing an approach to problem-solving that considers how each organization can address residents' **multiple needs** or social determinants of health either directly or through creating a **coordinated service network.**[5]

See **ABLe Manual pages 12-14** for more details

Works to understand and align system conditions and system interactions

Each system includes a unique array of **mindsets, components, connections, regulations, resources**, and **power** dynamics that drive behavior and influence outcomes.[6] In a systems approach, these conditions are examined and strategies are implemented to promote their alignment with change goals.

See **ABLe Manual page 15** for more details

Reveals, Understands, and Works to Eliminate Inequities

Equity is when everyone has the opportunity to make choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education, or ethnic background. The ABLe Change approach engages communities in **understanding current inequities** in order to design powerful strategies that ensure greater opportunities for all.

See **ABle Manual pages 16-17** for more details

Promotes Systems Change

Systems Change is an intentional process that alters the status quo by shifting and realigning **systems parts and their interactions**.[7] Over time these shifts in system parts and interactions lead to new system **Habits and Patterns** which support better outcomes for children and families.[4]

See **ABLe Manual pages 18-19** for more details

ABLe Simple Rules

Simple Rules are guidelines that direct and shape how individuals act within a system (e.g., their habits).[8]

All of us follow an internalized set of simple rules that guide our decisions and behavior (whether we acknowledge it or not!).

The ABLe Change Framework proposes six simple rules that communities can use to collectively pursue systems change.

In combination, these simple rules can transform how community stakeholders work and learn together.

The ABLe Change approach works with communities to help them develop and practice a set of simple rules that will create the transformative systems change and population-level outcomes desired by the community.

ENGAGE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Diverse stakeholders hold unique perspectives on the system, its problems, and possible solutions. Engaging diverse perspectives leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the system and how to change it.
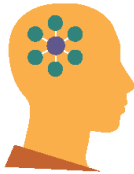
THINK SYSTEMICALLY

Change efforts often target the surface of problems, not the underlying systemic conditions causing local problems. Thinking systemically attends to and shifts system characteristics and their interactions, and the more effective the solutions.

INCUBATE CHANGE

Transformative change is accelerated when communities create the conditions for rapid innovation to occur across the community system. Incubating change includes fostering small actions across multiple community layers as well as leveraging systemic feedback loops to reinforce the change.

IMPLEMENT CHANGE EFFECTIVELY

Great strategic designs for promoting community change are not enough; systems change efforts must also attend to how effectively their proposed strategies are carried out by assessing and building a climate for effective implementation.

ADAPT QUICKLY

Problems facing our communities today are complex and ever-changing. Transformative change requires an ongoing, dynamic process, where understanding, learning and adapting become more important than planning. To adapt quickly, you must identify and quickly respond to emerging problems and opportunities.

PURSUE SOCIAL JUSTICE

In order to really shift the status quo, one must understand disparities in outcomes and opportunities. Pursuing social justice includes identifying, acknowledging, and tackling the inequities that exist.

Action Learning

The ABLe Change Process for Systems Change is organized around effective problem-solving, action, and learning.
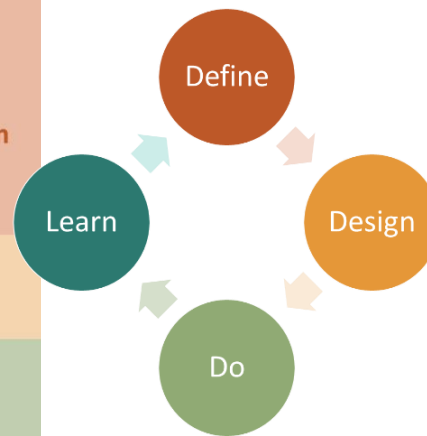
This is often referred to as "action learning."
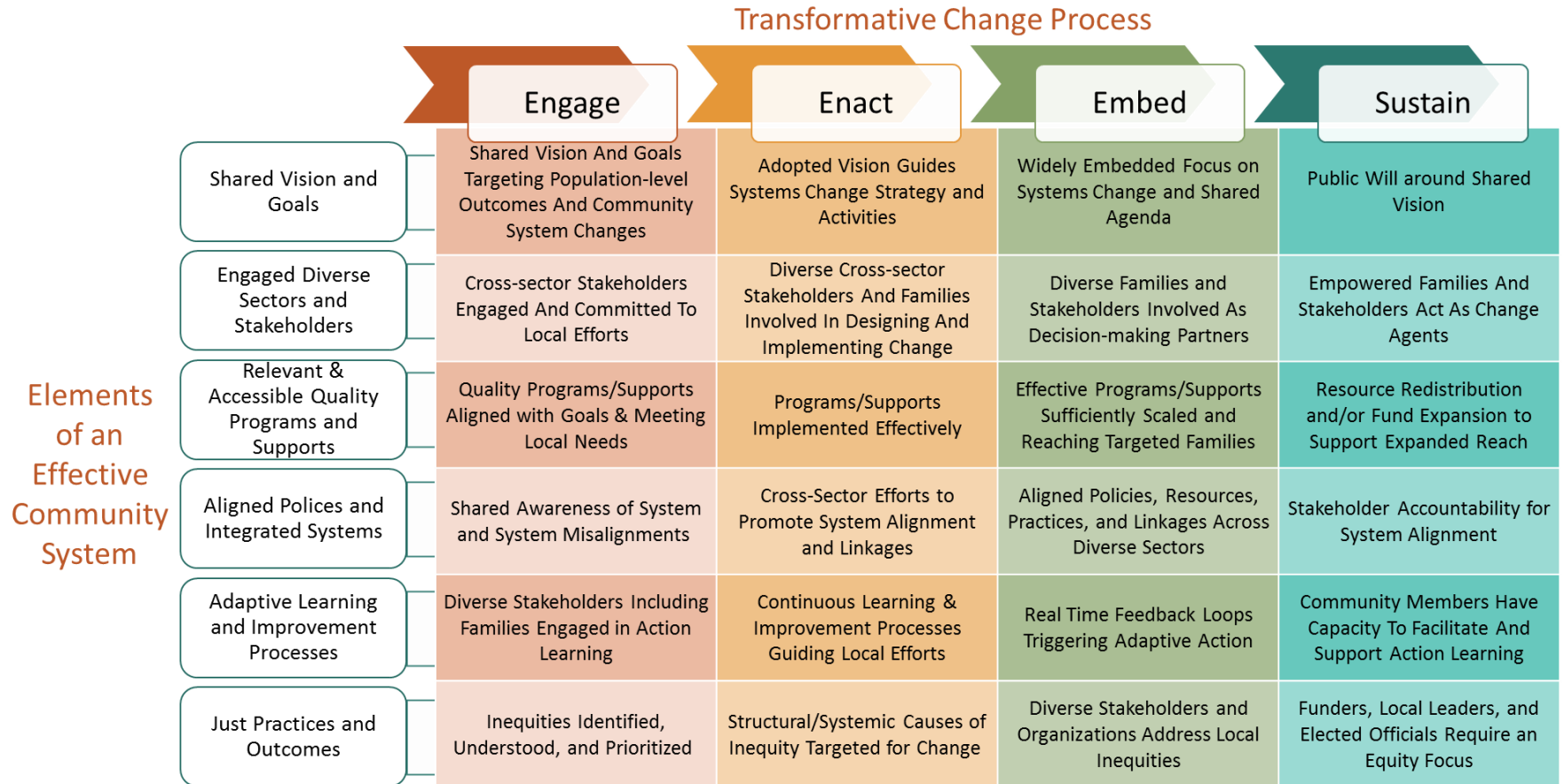

ABLe Change Process for Systems Change

The ABLe Change approach engages communities in an 8-step process to create systems change organized around the action learning cycle described on the previous page. The ABLe Simple Rules help to embed and sustain these steps as a continuous process across the community.

ABLe Process

Define
1. Define a Targeted Problem
2. Determine System Boundaries
3. Understand the Community System
4. Adopt a Shared Agenda

Design
5. Design Powerful Strategies

Do
6. Promote Quick Wins
7. Build a Climate for Effective Implementation

Learn
8. Learn for Continuous Improvement

Elements of an Effective System and Transformative Change Process
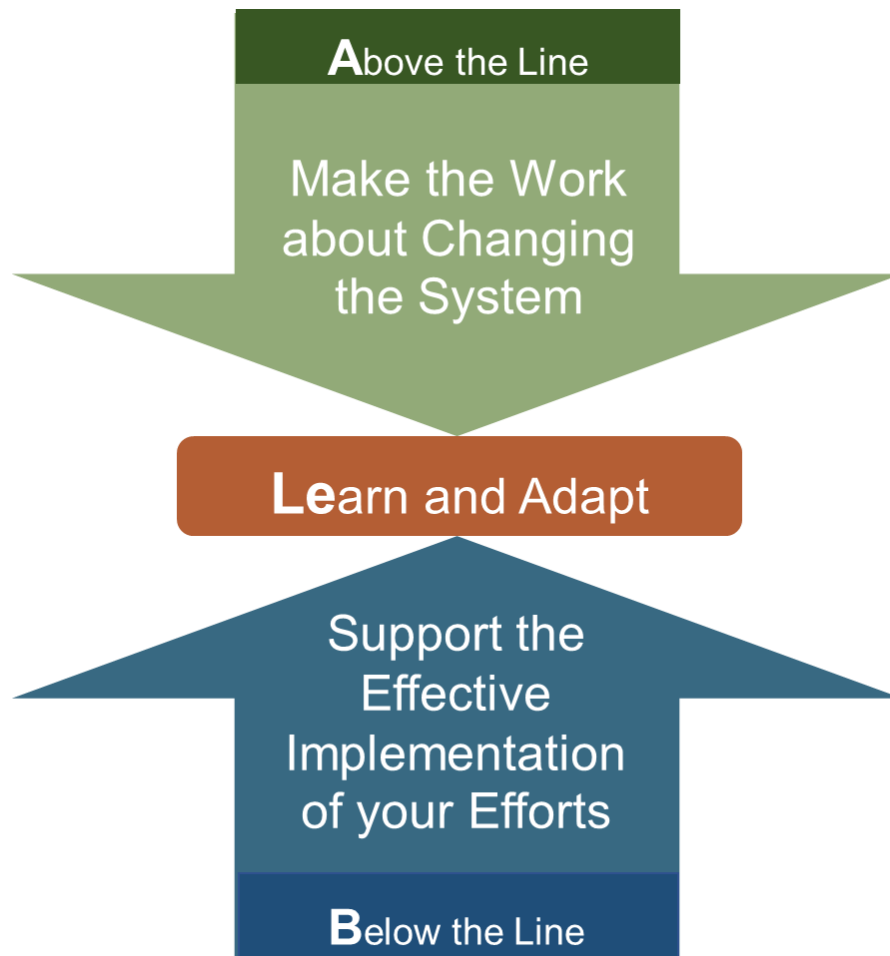
The ABLe Change approach helps communities build six essential elements across four phases of change to bring about an effective system.

Transformative Change Process

Elements of an Effective Community System	Engage	Enact	Embed	Sustain
Shared Vision and Goals	Shared Vision And Goals Targeting Population-level Outcomes And Community System Changes	Adopted Vision Guides Systems Change Strategy and Activities	Widely Embedded Focus on Systems Change and Shared Agenda	Public Will around Shared Vision
Engaged Diverse Sectors and Stakeholders	Cross-sector Stakeholders Engaged And Committed To Local Efforts	Diverse Cross-sector Stakeholders And Families Involved In Designing And Implementing Change	Diverse Families and Stakeholders Involved As Decision-making Partners	Empowered Families And Stakeholders Act As Change Agents
Relevant & Accessible Quality Programs and Supports	Quality Programs/Supports Aligned with Goals & Meeting Local Needs	Programs/Supports Implemented Effectively	Effective Programs/Supports Sufficiently Scaled and Reaching Targeted Families	Resource Redistribution and/or Fund Expansion to Support Expanded Reach
Aligned Polices and Integrated Systems	Shared Awareness of System and System Misalignments	Cross-Sector Efforts to Promote System Alignment and Linkages	Aligned Policies, Resources, Practices, and Linkages Across Diverse Sectors	Stakeholder Accountability for System Alignment
Adaptive Learning and Improvement Processes	Diverse Stakeholders Including Families Engaged in Action Learning	Continuous Learning & Improvement Processes Guiding Local Efforts	Real Time Feedback Loops Triggering Adaptive Action	Community Members Have Capacity To Facilitate And Support Action Learning
Just Practices and Outcomes	Inequities Identified, Understood, and Prioritized	Structural/Systemic Causes of Inequity Targeted for Change	Diverse Stakeholders and Organizations Address Local Inequities	Funders, Local Leaders, and Elected Officials Require an Equity Focus

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What does "ABLe" mean in ABLe Change?

ABLe refers to the key levers for creating transformative community change. Effective change efforts target the following:

Above the Line   **B**elow the Line   **Le**arn and Adapt

See ABLe Manual pages 25-26 for a list of key terms.

Step 1:
Define a Shared Vision or Targeted Problem

Effective community change efforts engage diverse stakeholders in identifying a Shared Vision or Targeted Problem to guide their work.[9]

A Shared Vision or Targeted Problem describes the specific changes a community wants to bring about for itself. A Shared Vision/Targeted Problem provides direction for local efforts, inspires individuals to get engaged, and aligns the energies of diverse individuals and organizations around a common set of goals.[41, 42]

Related ABLe Manual Pages: 49-109

Relevant sections on MICHIRLearning website

ABLe Process

Define	❶ Define a Targeted Problem
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Define a Shared Vision or Targeted Problem Road Map

● Identify Population-Level Problems or Impacts (p. 10)

● Prioritize Problems/Impacts by Looking at Data (p. 11)

● Summarize Priorities into Shared Vision or Problem Framework (p. 15)

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Identify a Population-Level Problem or Impact

Effective community change efforts engage diverse stakeholders in identifying a Shared Vision Impact or Targeted Problem to guide their work.[9]

Some communities prefer to focus on a Targeted Problem because a "problem-solving" approach resonates best with stakeholders. Other communities prefer to define a Shared Vision because stakeholders prefer a positive goal-framed orientation to the work. Either approach can help your community pursue change.

> NOTE: Problems can be turned Impacts by shifting negative language into positive language (e.g., the problem of "obesity" becomes the positive impact of "healthy weights").

Population-level Targeted Problems or Shared Vision Impacts are directly experienced by adults, children, and/or youth. Below are some examples in broad terms.

Example Population-Level Problems	Example Population-Level Impacts
• Obesity	• Healthy weights
• Unemployment	• Employment
• Babies born unhealthy	• Babies born healthy
• Homelessness	• Residents in stable housing
• High school dropout rate	• High school graduation

Explore nested problems or impacts

ABLe Manual Pages 33-35

Some stakeholders struggle to see how their work fits with an initiative's population-level problems or impacts. As a result, these stakeholders do not fully participate in or support the change effort.
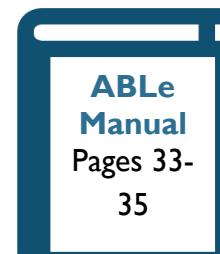
If this happens, engage stakeholders in exploring how problems or goals within a community are **inter-related and nested**. See example to the right.

By exploring how these community problems are inter-related, you can develop a shared focus for the collective effort and stakeholders can see how their work (shown as nested population-level "Little P" problems) connects to your "Big P" population-level problems. As a result, they will more likely support your effort.

Example "Big P" Population-Level Problem		
Babies with low birth weight in the community		
Example "little p" Problem	Example "little p" Problem	Example "little p" Problem
Engaging in prenatal care	Psychosocial stress	Connection to social support

Prioritize Problems/Impacts by Looking at Data

Once you have developed your initial problem or impact framework, it is important to test this framework against local data to make sure it is responsive to the community's needs, aspirations, and priorities.

Too often we rely up on our assumptions when defining a targeted problem. Unfortunately, these assumptions can often lead us to focus our efforts on issues that are not at the right scale or priority level within the community.

Broad Problem or Impact Statement

Targeted Problem or Impact Statement

Ensure your efforts are responsive to the community's needs, experiences, and priorities by exploring local data and drawing on community perspectives.

Explore local data

Look at local data to help you identify exactly what your problem or impact looks like in your community and what you should prioritize for change.

ABLe Manual
Pages 36-37

There are most likely many different types of data points you could explore related to your problem or impact. Take for example the problem "babies born unhealthy." Think of all the ways you could measure whether babies are born unhealthy. Potential data points could include the rates of: low birthweights, premature births, births to drug addicted mothers, etc.

To identify data points, ask community partners what data they typically use to track your problem or impact

You can also look at recent research articles, evaluations, or reports to learn about the best ways to measure and understand these problems or impacts.

Example Data Points on Population-Level Problems

- % of families eating fresh fruits and vegetables daily
- % of families in stable housing
- % of individuals employed
- % of children obese at age 13
- % of adults 18-25 years old with substance use problems
- % of individuals injured from community gun violence
- % of teen pregnancies

As you collect local data, look for data that helps to define or describe your Targeted Problem or Impact. Then, **engage stakeholders** in reviewing this data and prioritizing the data points that are most important to target for change. These data points could become your "indicators of change" and can be used to further describe your problem.

Finding data on local problems

Data on local problems can be found through a variety of sources. Consider some of the following examples as you explore data in your community.

ABLe
Manual
Pages 38-41
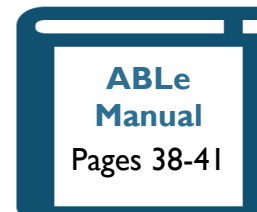
If the data you need does not exist, try partnering with another organization that has current plans or the capacity to collect the data, or if time and resources permit, collect the data yourself. Local evaluators, funders, or universities can be great resources to help in this process. See **ABLe Manual page 41** for more details.

Public Databases

Examples**:**
- U.S. Census
- American Community Survey
- County Health Rankings
- Map the Meal Gap
- Distressed Communities Index
- Health Indicators Warehouse
- USDA Food Environment Atlas
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
- Community Health Status Indicators
- Children's Health Watch

Local Organization or Institution Databases

Examples**:**
- City Office
- Health Department
- Department of Public Safety

Evaluation Reports

Examples**:**
- Program evaluations
- Foundations reports
- Local family surveys

TIP: Focus on finding data that is both recent and local

Recent
- Try to find data within the last 2 years as communities can change over time.
  - EXAMPLE: **Change in Severity**: unemployment rates in almost every community immediately went way up after the housing crisis in the US
  - EXAMPLE: **Changes in Location**: drug activity sometimes moves from one neighborhood to another in a short period of time

Local
- Try to find data specific to your community. Problems can look quite different across places.
  - EXAMPLE: Poverty levels are often centralized in urban locations compared to suburbs

Use data to prioritize inequities

As you explore data sources, look for a way to disaggregate data to see how your problem impacts different populations in your community. These differences often illuminate disparities and could help you identify a particular population to focus on in your efforts.

ABLe Manual
Pages 42-45
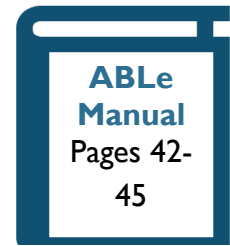
For example, say you want to collect data on the percentage of children experiencing obesity at age 13. In addition to finding data about the percentage of all 13 year olds who are experiencing obesity, consider also gathering data on how different demographic groups of teenagers.

This could include:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Income-level
- Education level
- Age

- Gender
- Location (urban, rural, suburban, or specific neighborhoods)
- Type of household (two-parent, single parent, grandparent caregiver, etc.)

Example Disaggregated Data

The following graphs show how disparities across groups were hidden when only looking at overall obesity rates in Michigan. However, by disaggregating the data by race/ethnicity, a disparity become clear where non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic residents are experiencing higher obesity rates compared with Non-Hispanic White residents.

These disparities could be prioritized for change, and local initiatives could work to understand why they are happening to inform strategy design.

Obesity Among Adults
Source: Michigan BRFS

	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2013
All			

Obesity Among Adults
Source: Michigan BRFS

	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2013
Non-Hispanic White			
Non-Hispanic Black			
Hispanic			
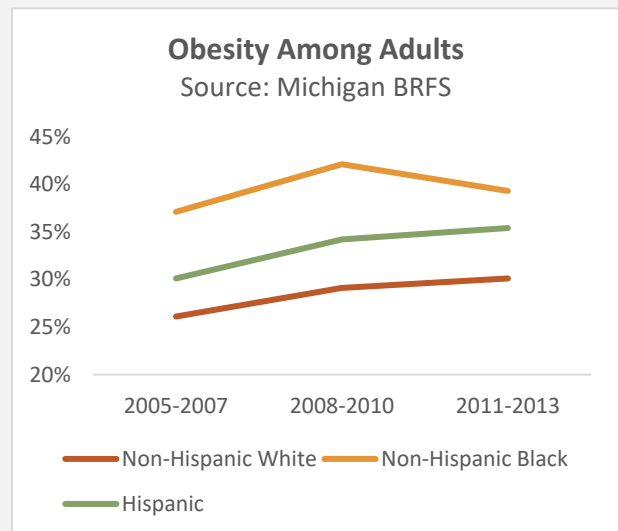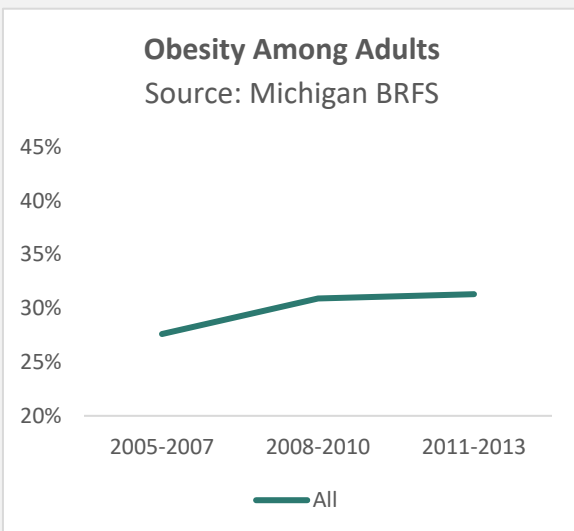
Data Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Why does a focus on inequities matter?

Inequities can exist within both population and community problems. If inequities are not uncovered, understood, and addressed directly, the strategies you use to improve outcomes could inadvertently exacerbate disparities.[1,4] For example:

- **Strategies can Exacerbate Inequities in Access:** The addition of program slots typically benefits individuals with higher resources because they are better able to access those opportunities (e.g., because they have transportation, knowledge of the program, accommodating work schedules, money, social support, etc.).

- **Strategies can Exacerbate Inequities in Outcomes:** Some evidenced-based practices disproportionally benefit or exclude some types of constituents over others – the spread of these practices could lead to greater disparities in outcomes.

See **ABLe Manual page 44** for details on finding inequities at the intersection of multiple demographic identities (e.g., race, gender, income, etc.).

See **ABLe Manual page 45** for details on using "GIS"maps of your community to identify inequities.

Summarize Priorities into Shared Vision or Problem Framework

After exploring data and talking with local stakeholders (including residents) to identify which problems or impacts should be prioritized, summarize your priorities into an initial framework.

This framework should define how the problem or impact is being measured and any related inequities your initiative wants to prioritize for change.

Your initiative can then engage diverse stakeholders in understanding why these Problems/Impacts and related inequities are (or are not) happening using the next steps in the ABLe Change process.

ABLe Manual
Pages 47
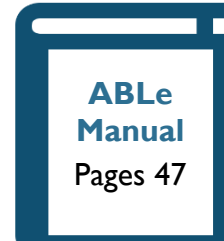
Example Problem or Impact Framework

Prioritized Population-Level Problem or Impact:		
Targeted Inequities:		
OPTIONAL prioritized nested Problem or Impact:	OPTIONAL prioritized nested Problem or Impact:	OPTIONAL prioritized nested Problem or Impact:
Targeted Inequities:	Targeted Inequities:	Targeted Inequities:

Step 2:
Determine System Boundaries

Once your community has defined its Shared Vision or Targeted Problem, decide who and what to focus on with your efforts and who to engage as partners in the work.

Collectively determining system boundaries around a Shared Vision or Targeted Problem can be one of the most transformative processes within a change effort.[9,10] This is because these boundaries determine what is (and is not) targeted for change and who has (and does not have) a role in the effort's ongoing learning and action.

ABLe Manual Reference
Pages: 49-109

Relevant sections on
MICHIRLearning website

ABLe Process

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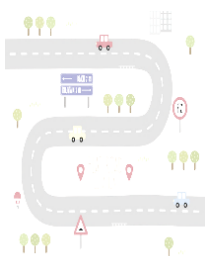
Determining System Boundaries Road Map

Define system boundaries (p. 17)

Develop a process for authentic engagement (p. 19)

Create an empowering context (p. 21)

Define system boundaries

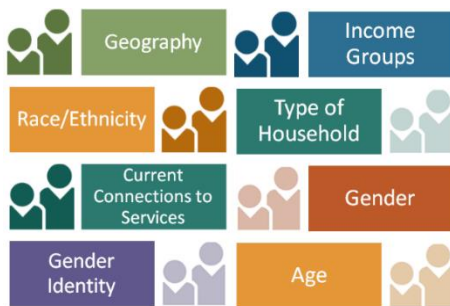## Explore relevant perspectives for the work

Engaging groups or individuals with different perspectives and experiences within the community can help you understand how to more effectively pursue your Shared Vision goals. Here are some categories of perspectives to consider engaging:

Experiencing the problem	• Residents <u>directly</u> experiencing the targeted problem
Providing services	• Public and private service providers
Supporting at the local level	• Stakeholders involved in resident-led, faith-based, local businesses, and neighborhood organizations • Individuals delivering informal supports
Deciding on changes and how resources are used	• Local institutions and local organizational leaders • Local officials • Funders

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Pages 52-54

Identifying Relevant Perspectives
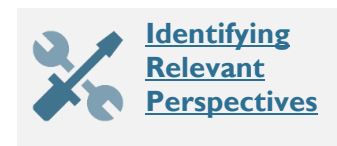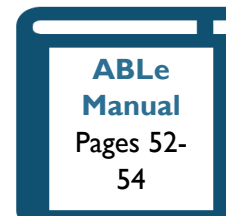
Consider Differences across Residents

Residents have different perspectives and experiences based on the following:

Geography
Income Groups
Race/Ethnicity
Type of Household
Current Connections to Services
Gender
Gender Identity
Age

Consider Essential Subsystems

Organizations or sectors often have multiple subsystems (programs, units/departments).

Behavioral Health
Informal Care
Inpatient
Clinical Care
Home Visitation
Outpatient
Health Care
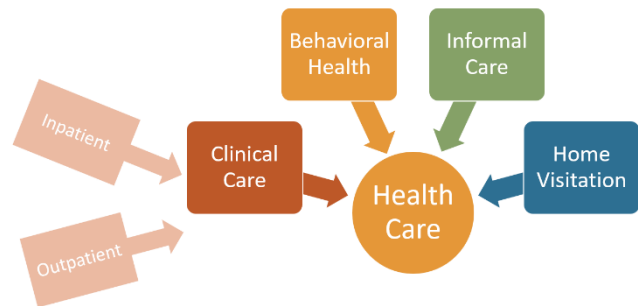
Equity Spotlight: Centering the Margins

Engage individuals experiencing local inequities related to your Shared Vision to "re-center" your effort's focus on their needs and aspirations.

**ABLe Equity Supplement Pages 21-23**
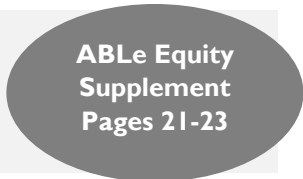
Determine boundaries around who to engage

We all draw boundaries around who and what to focus on with our efforts and who to engage as partners in the work.

Boundaries matter because they determine…
- What problems or goals you target for change
- The solutions you design
- Where the work happens, including who benefits and who doesn't
- Who gets to carry out action
- The resources available for your effort[11]
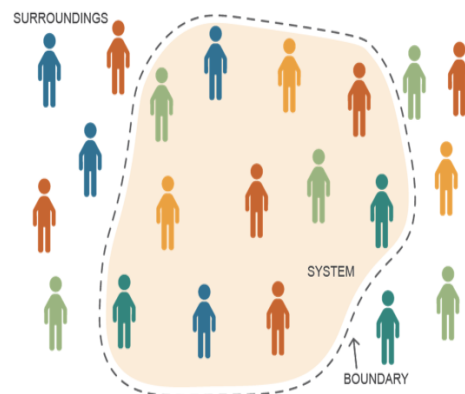
Consider what boundaries you have currently drawn around who is engaged in your efforts, the consequences of these boundaries, and how you want to expand these boundaries moving forward.

	Who is currently engaged in your change efforts?	Who is currently *not* engaged?
Experiencing the problem		
Providing services		
Supporting at the local level		
Deciding on changes and how resources are used		

Questions to Guide your Boundary Dialogue

- Who might have different perspectives or understandings about the problems in our community and how to solve them?
- Who could play a key role in carrying out our efforts?
- Who do we need to include in learning about our progress to make next step decisions?
- Given this, who should be included in all the phases of our efforts –building a community vision, designing solutions, carrying out actions, and learning about progress?
- Who is *outside* these processes? Do we risk our success by keeping them on the outside?

Develop a Process for Authentic Engagement

Determine Engagement Roles

After setting engagement boundaries, determine how to engage them in helping to understand local issues, design and implement solutions, and learn for continuous improvement.

> **ABLe Manual**
> Pages 66-69
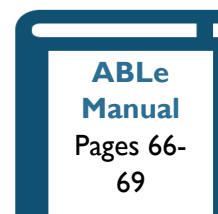
In particular, think about how you will engage residents, including children and youth. The following Engagement Continuum shows a range of ways residents can be engaged in your efforts. You can apply this continuum to other types of stakeholders as well.

| Ignored | Recipient | Consultant | Partner | Change Agent |

Adopted from Arnstein, 1969

IGNORED

No attempts to engage residents. Residents are silenced; community risks blaming residents for poor outcomes instead of the system.

RECIPIENT

Residents participate in services and/or are given information about decisions that have <u>already been made</u>. Residents are silenced, community risks blaming residents for poor outcomes instead of the system.

CONSULTANT

In addition to recipient roles, residents are asked for their input in an advisory role. Residents have no influence over decision-making; they just give info that others use to make decisions. If this is only role, can lead to tokenism and can maintain the status quo in the community.

PARTNER

In addition to consultant roles, residents have influence over final decisions, for example about what problems should be prioritized and how to design strategies. Residents are empowered.

CHANGE AGENT

In addition to partner roles, residents take part in implementing actions such as collecting information about the community, analyzing the information to identify targets for change, co-designing and implementing strategies, and engaging in ongoing learning. Residents are powerful.

Determine Engagement Methods

Decide which methods will work best to engage stakeholders in these roles given your local community context and your capacity (e.g., staff, community partnerships, time, resources, etc.). The following are some commonly used methods to engage residents that can also be adapted for other stakeholder groups (e.g., staff, community leaders, etc.). See the **Change Agent Field Guide** for more details.

Leverage Existing Interactions	Have individuals who have direct or natural interactions with your priority residents (e.g., home visitors, WIC staff, hair stylists/barbers, faith-based leaders, etc.) ask one or two questions with each client/family they touch. You can vary the questions every few months.
Use Existing Meetings/ Gatherings	Identify upcoming community gatherings or meetings engaging priority residents (e.g., neighborhood association meetings, PTA meetings, school open houses, community fairs/celebrations, sports events, religious gatherings, support groups, etc.). Partner with the leaders of these settings to see if they could ask your questions with residents.
Develop a Resident Coalition or Action Team	Support residents in setting up a coalition or action team. These groups provide ways for local residents to give input to local organizations, help make local decisions, and carry out actions. For example, residents can gather information on local needs and develop/carry out their own action ideas to address these needs (e.g., create peer to peer support groups).

See **ABLe Manual** for more examples…

Recipient Strategies: pages 66-70

Consultant Strategies: pages 84-86

Partner Strategies: page 87

Change Agent Strategies: page 88

Change Agent Field Guide: Engage Residents

Habit 1: Engage Residents

Why engage residents!

Change Agent Field Guide pages 3-13
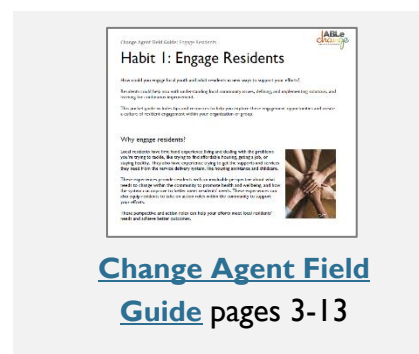
More resources on **MICHIRLearning.org**

Engagement Assessment Tool: to assess local engagement conditions

Engagement Reflection and Action Guide: to reflect on engagement next steps

Engagement Action Plan: to support engagement efforts

Create an empowering context

Active Engagement

Effectively engaging residents in your efforts – whether as partners or change agents – requires both an engagement mindset and empowering process.
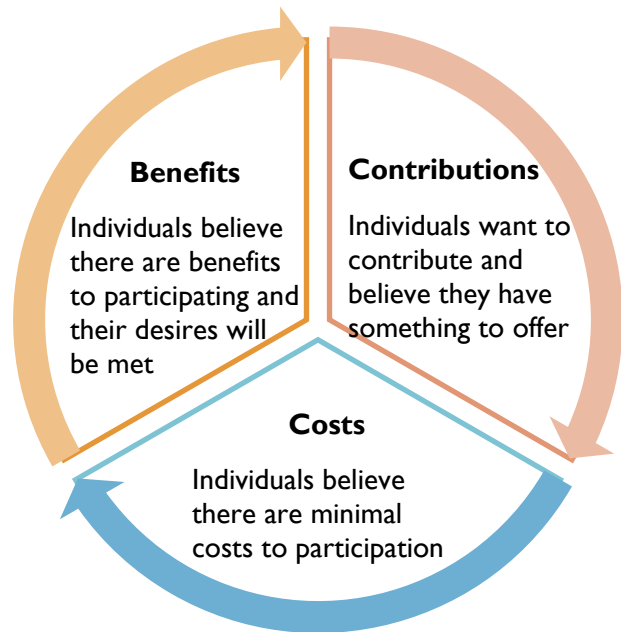
AN ENGAGEMENT MINDSET **+** AN EMPOWERING PROCESS **=** ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Promote an *Engagement Mindset*

An engagement mindset includes a person's attitudes and beliefs about the benefits, costs, and contributions related to the engagement opportunity.

These attitudes determine if they:
- Want to get involved
- Believe they should get involved
- Believe they can be involved

In most studies, this engagement "mindset" is one of the strongest predictors of involvement.[12,13]

Benefits

Individuals believe there are benefits to participating and their desires will be met

Contributions

Individuals want to contribute and believe they have something to offer

Costs

Individuals believe there are minimal costs to participation

See **ABLe Manual** for how to…

Identify and Maximize Benefits: pages 96-98, 106

Identify Contributions: pages 99-101, 105

Identify Costs and Engagement Supports: pages 102-104, 106

Promote an *Empowering Process*

An empowering process is critical for promoting engagement, and includes:[14]

Positive Belief System	•Focuses on strengths, individuals achieving goals, and connection to broader community
Meaningful Roles & Capacity Building	•Valuable, diverse roles accessible for all participants •Opportunities for all to develop necessary skills, knowledge, & relationships.
Support System	•Numerous supports available; peer-based support provided •Sense of community & trust is promoted
Inclusive Leadership	•Shared decision-making - individuals have influence over decisions affecting their lives •Motivational •Respects Diversity

Self-Assessment Tool

See **ABLe Manual page 110** for an assessment you can use with your group to get a sense of what areas can be improved to provide a more empowering process

See **MICHIRLearning.org** for more tools and ideas

Engage Diverse, Active and Able Partners

Develop Clear and Coordinated Roles

Ensure Distributed Leadership

Support Empowered Residents

Step 3:
Understand the Community System

Once a community has defined a Shared Vision or Targeted Problem and who to engage within their efforts, they are ready to understand the community system conditions affecting that vision/problem.

Information emerging from the system scanning process then informs strategy design and action.

Able Manual Reference Pages: 113-181

Relevant sections on **MICHIRLearning website**

ABLe Process

Define	❶ Define a Targeted Problem
	❷ Determine System Boundaries
	❸ **Understand the Community System**
	❹ Adopt a Shared Agenda
Design	❺ Design Powerful Strategies
Do	❻ Promote Quick Wins
	❼ Build a Climate for Effective Implementation
Learn	❽ Learn for Continuous Improvement

Understand the Community System Road Map

Scan Community System Conditions (p. 24)

Engage Stakeholders in Sense-Making (p. 28)

Scan Community System Conditions

Root Cause Analysis

A **root cause analysis** helps you look beyond surface level reasons to understand the deeper underlying causes for why problems happen.[1] It can be done in groups or as an individual, and can use many types of data and information.


ABLe Manual
Pages 113-121

A root cause analysis can be used to examine any type of problem, including:

- **population level problems** (e.g., high obesity rates)
- **social determinants of health** (e.g., limited access to healthy food, lack of jobs, crime, etc.)
- **system or organizational problems** (e.g. lack of coordination or low employee morale).
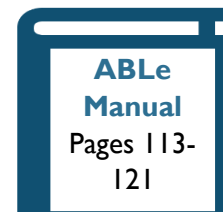
TIP: Consider multiple ecological levels

Ask about root causes at multiple ecological levels of the community. See ABLe Manual page 116 for more information.

County, State, Federal, Tribal Nation
Community
Organizations and Settings
Constituents
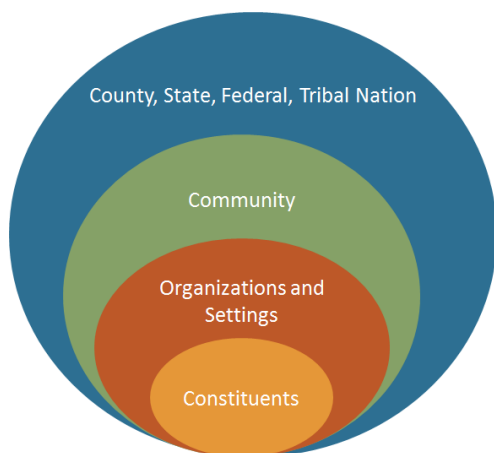
Root Cause Analysis Template

Change Agent Field Guide

Root Cause Analysis Steps

1. Identify a Targeted Problem

What is your targeted problem?

Who is experiencing it, where, and in what ways?

2. Why?

For this problem, ask…

- Why is this happening?
- What is not in place in the community that is causing this problem to continue?

3. Why is this happening?

Prioritize powerful and feasible causes to continue exploring by asking…
- Why is *this* happening?
- Could this have been prevented? If so, what should have been in place but wasn't?

4. Why is this happening here?

Think about the conditions contributing to prioritized causes from step 3 by asking:
- Why is this happening *here* in our community or setting?
- Clarify details for each cause (who, what, where, when, etc.)

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Systemic Root Cause Analysis

Stakeholders often "forget" some important causal factors when engaged in the process, relying only on what first comes to mind. This tendency is problematic because it can reinforce the status quo in a community.

The process can also promote "victim blaming", where stakeholders identify more root causes within people (particularly within residents) rather than within the community system that serve to maintain the targeted problem.

For these reasons, the ABLe Change approach brings a '**systemic lens**" to the root cause process and engages communities in a **systematic process** to identify these deep structures. The deep structures targeted during this process include:

See the following **ABLe Manual** pages for more examples...
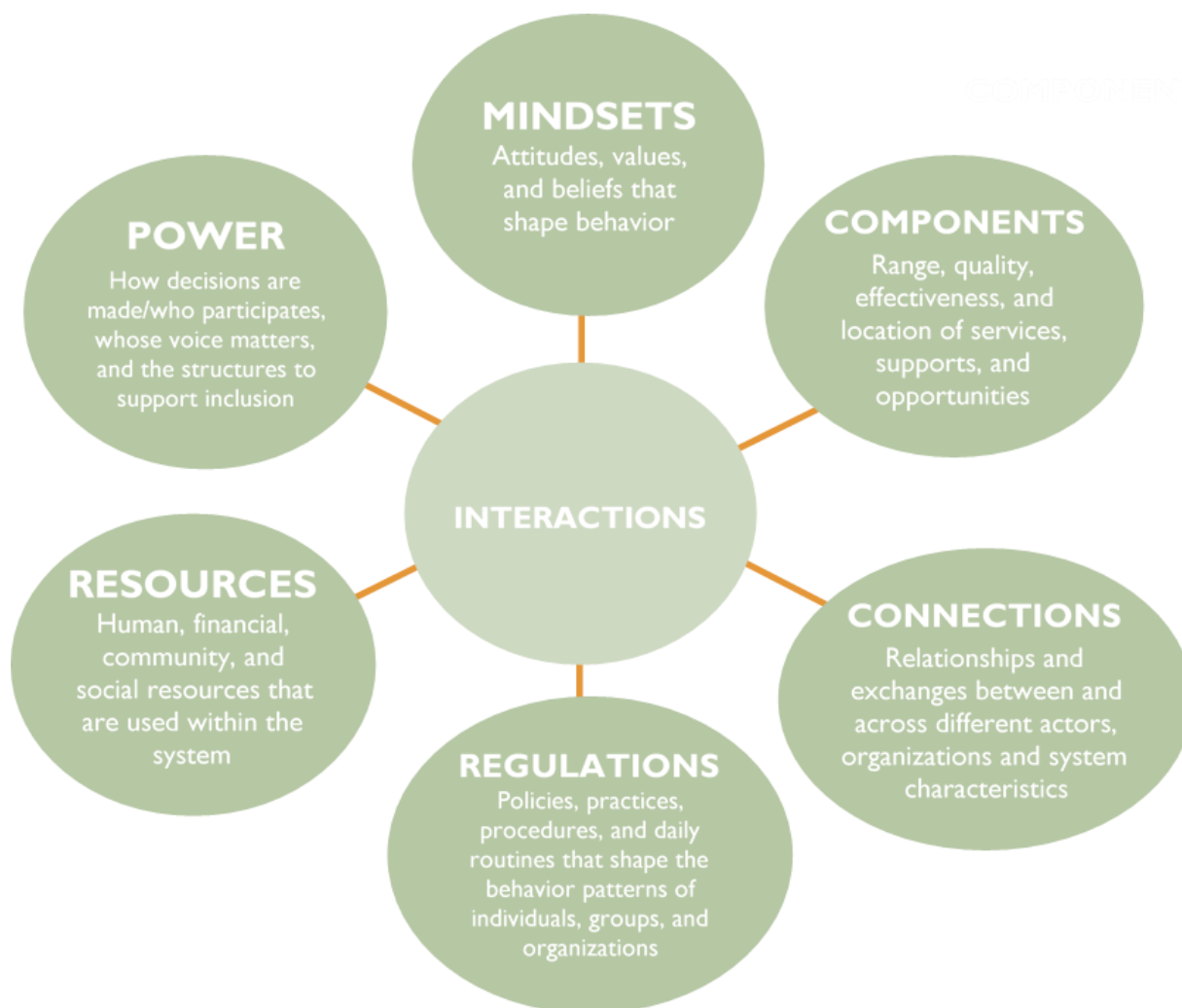
Mindset p.125

Components p.126

Connections p. 127-129

Regulations p. 130

Resources p. 131

Power p.132

Interactions p. 133

MINDSETS
Attitudes, values, and beliefs that shape behavior

COMPONENTS
Range, quality, effectiveness, and location of services, supports, and opportunities

POWER
How decisions are made/who participates, whose voice matters, and the structures to support inclusion

INTERACTIONS

RESOURCES
Human, financial, community, and social resources that are used within the system

CONNECTIONS
Relationships and exchanges between and across different actors, organizations and system characteristics

REGULATIONS
Policies, practices, procedures, and daily routines that shape the behavior patterns of individuals, groups, and organizations
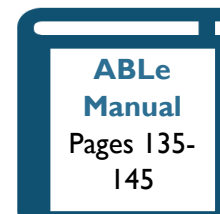
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System scanning

A system scan is a process to systematically gather information from diverse stakeholders about the system, its problems, root causes, and possible solutions. This system data informs your strategy design and action steps moving forward.

You can use a system scan to…
- Plan the focus of new or future efforts
    E.g., writing a grant, starting a new initiative
- Support the implementation of efforts that are already underway
    E.g., supporting the implementation of an existing effort or strategic plan

Engaging different perspectives in the scan is essential for understanding the multifaceted characteristics of your system, as each group will have its own unique view and experience with your targeted problem.[15]

ABLe Manual
Pages 135-145

System Scan Design Guide

System Scan Question Menu

Steps to design a system scan

1.) Decide what you want to learn about in your scan

Consider what you want to learn about both the community system characteristics and the social determinants of health affecting your Shared Vision or Targeted Problem.
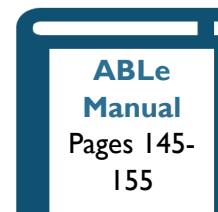
It is helpful to explore several (if not all) of the system characteristics, given that most system issues result from a combination of these characteristics (e.g., mindsets, components, connections, regulations, resources, power, interactions).

ABLe Manual
Pages 145-155

Symptoms

Root Causes

Consider using the following processes to help identify what you want to learn about in your system scan:

Use a Root Cause Analysis. Use this process to explore why targeted problems are happening, and use the scan to gather more information on these root causes.

Use Data. Use local data to identify some of the system conditions or community patterns to explore with the scan.

Follow Signs. Explore issues or patterns that have come up in recent conversations, prior work, or evaluations.

Leverage Interest. Examine issues or patterns that currently have some momentum behind them.

2.) Select who to engage in the system scan

Engage diverse stakeholder perspectives in your system scan to help gain a more complete picture of the community system, issues, and potential solutions. Engaging these stakeholders also builds their awareness of local issues and motivation to take action.
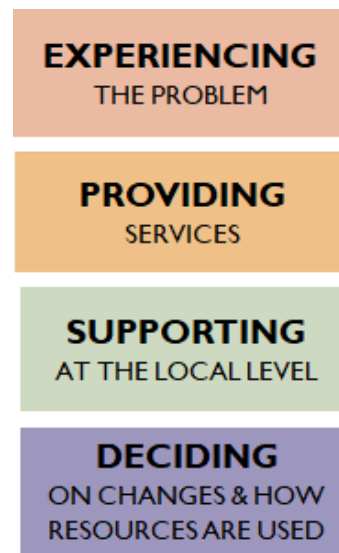
ABLe Manual
Pages 52
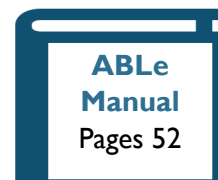
The diagram on the right includes four key stakeholder groups. See page 17 of this guide for more details. In particular, consider the following:

Demographics of your community. *Which residents are living in your community? Who is experiencing targeted problems in your community?*

Perspectives involved in or influenced by the system you are trying to change. *Who in the community system has experience with the system and could provide a unique perspective on why system issues are happening?*

EXPERIENCING
THE PROBLEM

PROVIDING
SERVICES

SUPPORTING
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

DECIDING
ON CHANGES & HOW
RESOURCES ARE USED

TIP: Engage residents from marginalized communities in the system scan to effectively understand and address root causes of local inequities.

3.) Decide how to collect the data you need

System Scan data can be collected in many ways. See the following **ABLe Manual** pages for methods related to:
- large group meeting processes (p. 147)
- a variety of conversation approaches (p. 148)
- surveys (p. 151)
- community observations or audits (p. 153)
- Impact Assessments (p. 154)
- existing data sources

To keep the scan feasible, try to gather information through existing meetings (e.g., staff meetings, coalition meetings), direct service interactions (e.g., home visitation sessions), or natural gathering places (e.g., church worship gatherings, community events) where your prioritized perspective groups are already engaged.

TIP: Get Detail!
Use follow-up questions while gathering system scan data so the information is detailed enough to inform action. See example questions below.

Who? What? When? Where?

Can you tell me more?

Can you give me an example?

Why?

Engage Stakeholders in Sense-Making

Once you have collected SOME system scan information, you can engage stakeholders in making sense of it. **The very process of assessing and making sense of collected data can be transformative for stakeholders**: increasing their awareness and understanding of local issues and sensitizing them to the diverse experiences and perspectives in the community.[9]

ABLe Manual
Pages 161-167
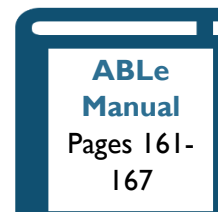
The following pages describe a process you can use to engage others in making sense of information gathered through your system scan.

Organize System Scan Information

COMPILE NOTES. Have everyone who helped collect system scan data type up their notes. Enter these notes into a data summary table (see tool on right).

CLEAN TYPED UP NOTES. "Clean" the typed-up notes to ensure they can be easily understood and sorted. For example:
- add in missing detail so data points make sense
- separate out different ideas within the same comment
- pull out any strategy ideas and put into a parking lot

System Scan Data Organizing Tool

ABLe Sense-Making Guide

CUT OUT DATA STRIPS. Cut out the data points listed in each row of the data summary table into separate strips of paper. OPTION: print each perspective group's data strips on a different color paper (e.g., data strips from family perspective printed on green, data strips from service provider perspective on orange, etc.) so stakeholders can easily see patterns. Example of cleaned data strips:

> There is no shared agreement in the community about who (parents, teachers, care providers) is responsible for developing kindergarten readiness and providing early childhood developmental experiences. This leads lots of kids to enter school not ready. (Early Childcare Providers)

> People in a position of power who make decisions about how programs are designed or what services get funded think they know what's good for families who don't have resources – families like mine. But they don't know. It means services get designed or funded that don't meet my family's needs. (Parents)
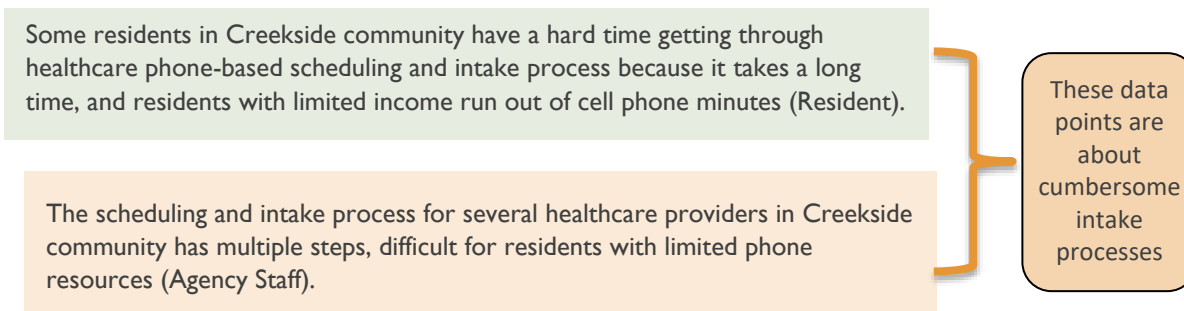
Sort System Scan information

GROUP SIMILAR IDEAS. Look through your root cause data strips and sort similar ideas, problems, or issues into clusters. As you organize the data points into similar "buckets," think about how the clusters relate to each other. Move data points around until you have found clusters that make sense. If one pile has most of the data points, try breaking it up into smaller clusters.
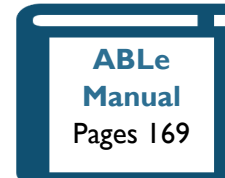
ABLe Manual
Pages 162

> Some residents in Creekside community have a hard time getting through health care phone-based scheduling and intake process because it takes a long time, and residents with limited income run out of cell phone minutes (Resident).

> The scheduling and intake process for several health care providers in Creekside community has multiple steps, difficult for residents with limited phone resources (Agency Staff).

These data points are about cumbersome intake processes

> Few clinics in Creekside community provide appointments after 5pm, making it difficult for residents who can't take off work to access care (Resident).

> Very few health care clinics are open after hours or on weekends – times residents have specifically said are needed (Agency Leader).

These data points are about limited service hours

CREATE THEMATIC LABELS. Create a label or theme for each cluster of data points that describes the key issue, message, or root cause problem. One way to think about these thematic labels is to imagine you are writing the headline for a newspaper article. Make sure the labels are descriptive, providing enough information for others to understand what the problem is and where it exists.

ABLe Manual
Pages 164-166
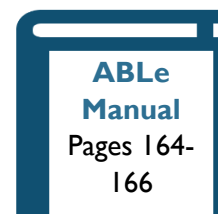
> **Label: Many healthcare intake processes are cumbersome and difficult for residents with limited phone minutes to use**

> Some residents in Creekside community have a hard time getting through healthcare phone-based scheduling and intake process because it takes a long time, and residents with limited income run out of cell phone minutes (Resident).

> The scheduling and intake process for several healthcare providers in Creekside community has multiple steps, difficult for residents with limited phone resources (Agency Staff).

These data points are about cumbersome intake processes
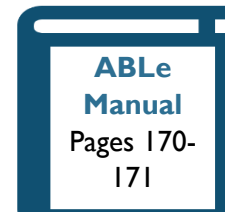
Create a Design Challenge

DETERMINE A DESIGN CHALLENGE. In the ABLe Change process, a Design Challenge is focused on a Shared Vision goal (e.g., social determinant of health, system condition, population-level impact). This becomes the focal point for prioritizing root causes and the strategy design process. Engage local stakeholders in selecting an initial Design Challenge or set of Design Challenges to bring into strategy design. You can select additional Design Challenges over time.

Below is an example Design Challenge focus statement developed around affordable housing. Note that the overall aim of the Shared Vision – improve health and wellbeing of low-income residents – is also included in the statement so it remains the ultimate focus of the work.

Example Design Challenge Focus Statement

Make quality, affordable housing more accessible to meet the needs and improve the health/ wellbeing of low-income residents.

PRIORITIZE ROOT CAUSES. Engage stakeholders in selecting a set of root cause themes (identified through the system scanning process) that are relevant for addressing your Design Challenge. Use the following criteria to help people prioritize root causes that are **powerful** and **feasible**:

POWERFUL Root Causes
- have a big influence on the Targeted Problem/Vision Impact
- have a big influence on the Design Challenge Focus Statement
- affect or involve multiple settings and/or individuals at different ecological levels in the community
- influence other root causes and outcomes in the system
- contribute to inequities in the community

FEASIBLE Root Causes
- are within the scope of work
- motivate local stakeholders to take action
- are seen as important by local residents
- can shift relatively quickly

TIP: Tackle multiple system conditions

Effective change efforts tackle multiple types of community system conditions (see page 25 above).[16] If you notice all of your prioritized root causes are related to the same type of condition, try to identify some additional root causes from other characteristics to boost the effectiveness of your change efforts.
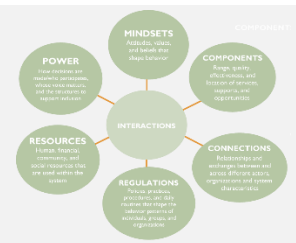
Additional Tips and Resources
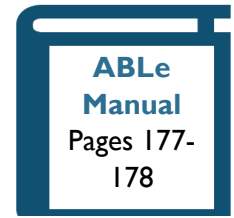
IDENTIFY DEEP ROOT CAUSES.

Some root causes identified in a system scan may not be deep enough to inform strategy design. If it is unclear <u>what</u> needs to change to resolve the issue, ask "why" again.

For example, the root cause outlined to the right in green has a <u>clear solution path</u>. While there is additional information to gather about this situation before moving to action (e.g., what specific policies are needed, what barriers are there to shifting current procedures, etc.), there is <u>no need to ask "why" again</u> for this root cause.

In contrast, you <u>*should*</u> ask why the root cause outlined in red is happening because there could be multiple reasons why housing is not being developed. For example, this issue could be happening because:

- Developers have limited incentives to build affordable housing
- Public opposition exists to building affordable housing in targeted areas
- Zoning regulations limit affordable housing developments near employment and schools

ABLe Manual
Pages 177-178

Design Challenge:
Make quality, affordable housing more accessible to locally disadvantaged groups to promote greater health equity

ROOT CAUSE:

Lack of policies enforcing proactive rental code inspections to address substandard rental conditions

ROOT CAUSE:

Limited affordable housing (including rentals) is being developed near employment, schools, and transit

Asking the question "Why is affordable housing not being developed near employment, schools, and transit?" would help uncover additional reasons, and better guide strategy design to address this situation.

PARTNER TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES NOT FEASIBLE FOR YOUR GROUP TO TACKLE

There will likely be some root causes your efforts are not in the best position to target – but are critical to the success of addressing your Shared Vision or Design Challenge. For these root causes, you will want to connect with others in the community who may be better positioned to do so.

ABLe Manual
Pages 179-180
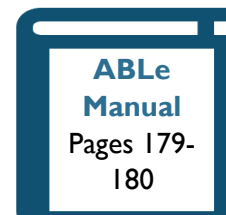
Step 4:
Adopt a Shared Agenda

Once the community has engaged in a system scan to understand community conditions affecting the Shared Vision goals, they are ready to use their prioritized root causes to develop a Shared Agenda.

A Shared Agenda helps stakeholders align efforts around a prioritized set of change targets and can be used to guide strategy design.[17]

Able Manual Reference
Pages: 183-188

Relevant sections on
MICHIRLearning website

	ABLe Process	
Define	❶	Define a Targeted Problem
	❷	Determine System Boundaries
	❸	Understand the Community System
	❹	Adopt a Shared Agenda
Design	❺	Design Powerful Strategies
Do	❻	Promote Quick Wins
	❼	Build a Climate for Effective Implementation
Learn	❽	Learn for Continuous Improvement

Shared Agenda Road Map

Understand the purpose of a Shared Agenda (p. 33)

Develop a Shared Agenda for your efforts (p. 34)

Understand the purpose of a Shared Agenda

A Shared Agenda helps to keep the work focused on addressing root causes related to the Shared Vision or Targeted Problem.
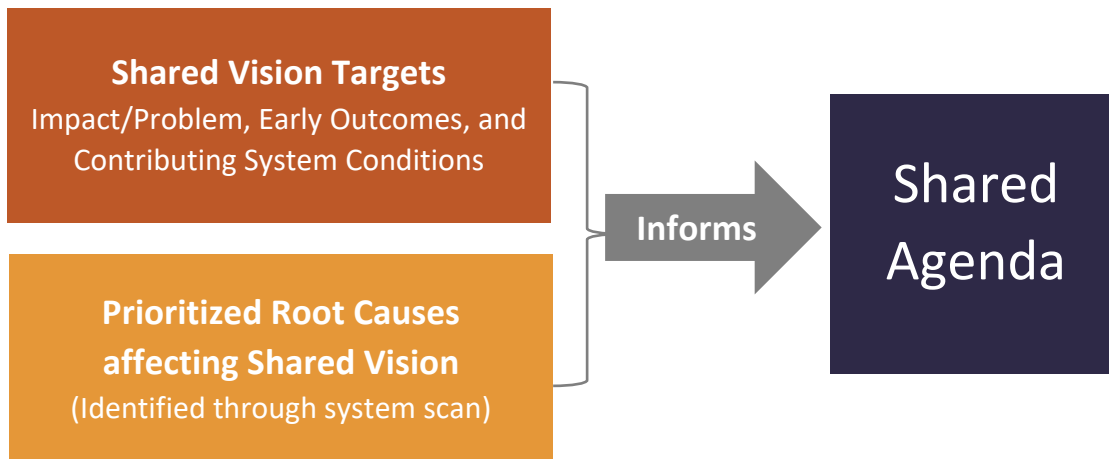
Too often a group's focus can drift from their original priorities – the Shared Agenda helps to align all learning and action around shared priorities.

ABLe Manual

Pages 185
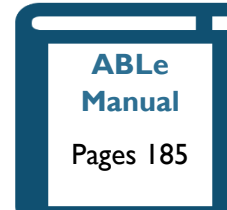
A Shared Agenda:

- provides the same agenda and similar meeting format across stakeholder groups, facilitating movement between and across groups.

- creates a common language to guide the work.

- brings together stakeholder groups to target the same community changes (e.g., access, coordination, health environments, etc.) but allows these groups to pursue unique action and learning from their particular role or system perspective.

The Shared Agenda also helps to raise stakeholders' **critical consciousness** of local community issues. Meetings and conversations can then become focused on understanding and addressing these issues by using the Shared Agenda.

Shared Vision Targets
Impact/Problem, Early Outcomes, and Contributing System Conditions

Informs →

Shared Agenda

Prioritized Root Causes affecting Shared Vision
(Identified through system scan)

Develop a Shared Agenda for your efforts

The Shared Agenda draws from the Shared Vision or Targeted Problem and prioritizes root causes that emerged out of the System Scanning process. Developing a shared agenda will also help your group design powerful strategies to address root causes.

ABLe Manual

Pages 186-188
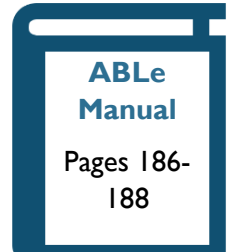
Tip: reword the root cause themes from the system scan into positive objectives to help engage stakeholders around pursuing goals. Add rows as needed to summarize the system change goals.

Impact:	Add the Impact from the Shared Vision	
Goal:	Add Prioritized Community System Conditions or Equity Targets from System Scan	
Objective	**Strategies**	**Agenda Items**
List Corresponding Prioritized Root Cause Themes (worded as positive Objectives)	List emerging strategies to bring about Objectives	List agenda items to pursue strategies and learn about progress

Shared Agenda Template
Easy to use template you can use to adapt the Shared Agenda tool for your efforts.

Example Shared Agenda and Facilitator Notes
An example of how to use a shared agenda

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Step 5:
Design Powerful Strategies

Powerful strategies aim to shift the status quo and bring about a community's Shared Vision.

They are designed to change community system conditions like polices, roles, connections, narratives, power dynamics, and purpose (versus just individual behaviors) in ways that promote local health equity and wellbeing.[1,17]

Able Manual Reference Pages: 189-300

Relevant sections on MICHIRLearning website

ABLe Process

Define	❶	Define a Targeted Problem
	❷	Determine System Boundaries
	❸	Understand the Community System
	❹	Adopt a Shared Agenda
Design	❺	Design Powerful Strategies
Do	❻	Promote Quick Wins
	❼	Build a Climate for Effective Implementation
Learn	❽	Learn for Continuous Improvement

Design Powerful Strategies Road Map

Design Powerful Strategies (p. 36)

Prepare for Implementation (p. 42)

Define Outcomes (p. 43)

Identify Relevant Partners (p. 44)

Design Powerful Strategies

Powerful strategies shift the status quo and work to achieve outcomes in the community's Shared Vision. This includes designing strategies to:

- Tackle Root Causes
- Saturate the Community
- Disrupt the Status Quo
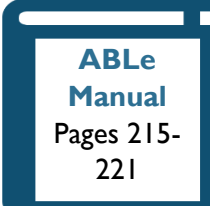- Design for Equity
- Align System Conditions

See the **Example Strategy Guide** for more powerful strategy ideas

Tackle Root Causes

One way to design powerful strategies is to develop multiple strategies to address the prioritized root causes from the system scanning process. It includes the following steps adapted from IDEO:[18]

1. Brainstorm strategy clusters

2. Consider strategy exemplars

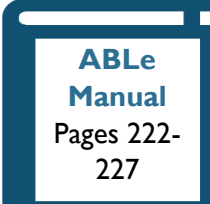3. Prioritize strategy clusters for action
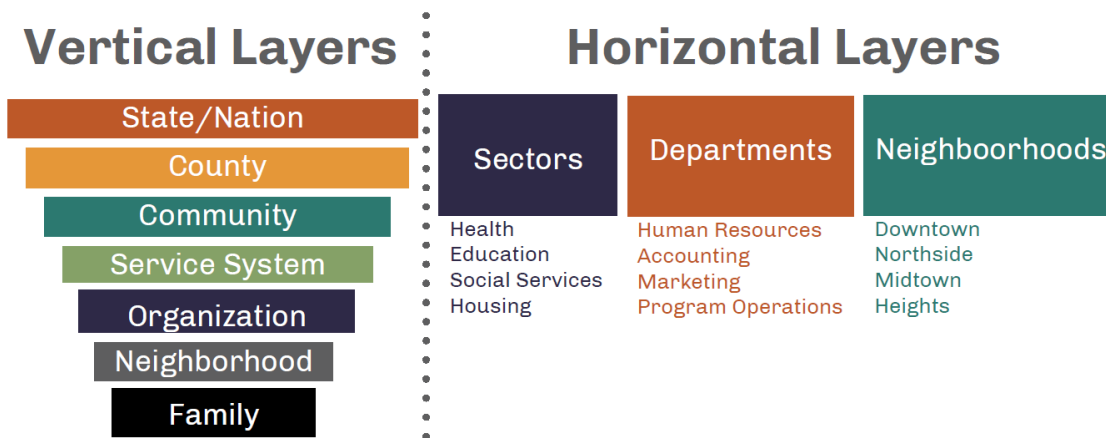
ABLe Manual Pages 215-221

Saturate the Community

PERMEATE ECOLOGICAL LAYERS

For powerful strategies to shift the status quo, they not only need to address root causes, but they also need to be embedded and reinforced by individuals, settings, and processes across vertical and horizontal ecological community layers. This helps new habits, practices, and opportunities to take hold.[19]
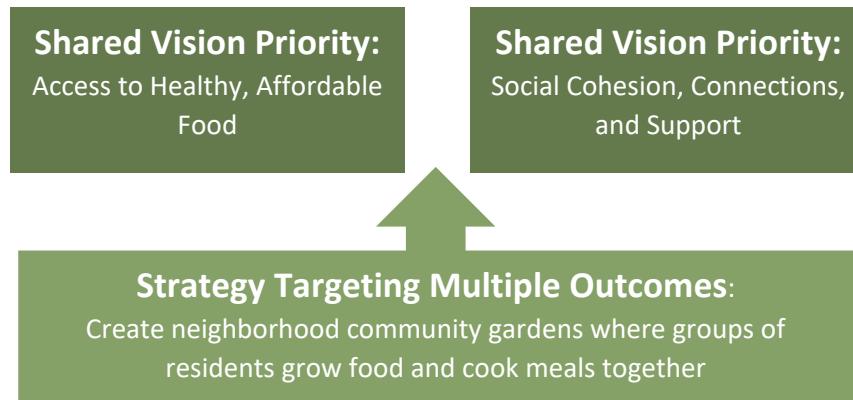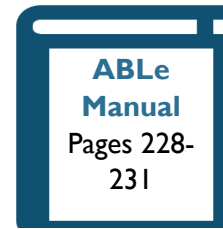
ABLe Manual Pages 222-227

Vertical Layers

State/Nation
County
Community
Service System
Organization
Neighborhood
Family

Horizontal Layers

| Sectors	Departments	Neighboorhoods
Health	Human Resources	Downtown
Education	Accounting	Northside
Social Services	Marketing	Midtown
Housing	Program Operations	Heights

ADDRESS MULTIPLE OUTCOMES

Another way to design powerful strategies is to simultaneously tackle multiple outcomes, such as multiple social determinants, community system conditions, and population-level outcomes related to the Shared Vision. The following is an example of how one strategy addresses multiple change targets.

ABLe Manual
Pages 228-231

Shared Vision Priority:
Access to Healthy, Affordable Food

Shared Vision Priority:
Social Cohesion, Connections, and Support

Strategy Targeting Multiple Outcomes:
Create neighborhood community gardens where groups of residents grow food and cook meals together

Disrupt the Status Quo

ABLe Manual
Pages 232-235

Major movers and shakers in the systems world say that in order to make transformative change, you need to shift the way the work is done. Disruptive strategies flip taken for granted assumptions about how work is done to create more powerful ways to promote transformative change.[20]
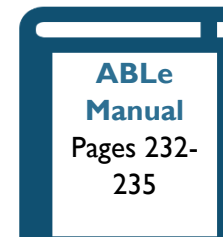
Using disruptive questions can help stakeholders shift, enhance, or expand their strategy ideas to make them more powerful. Consider the following questions and example in your strategy design.

Disruptive Strategy Questions

How could we disrupt:

How this strategy works**?**

Who carries it out?

What roles people play?

Where it happens?

When it happens?

Example:

A hospital renovated a local motel into supportive housing for homeless patients to provide a place for them to heal from medical procedures, get connected to local supports, and prevent long-term inpatient care.

*See **ABLe Manual page 234** for more details.*

Design for Equity

Too often change efforts actually increase local inequities instead of reducing them. Why? Inequities can easily emerge or get exacerbated when strategies don't address root causes of inequities, fail to reach certain populations, and/or create negative, unintended consequences.[21,4]

Use the following approaches to help designstrategies promoting equity.

**ABLe Equity
Design
Supplement**
Pages 4-19
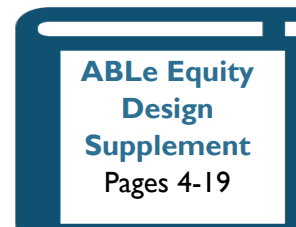
TARGETED UNIVERSALISM. A common approach to tackling community problems is to develop universal strategies to improve outcomes for everyone. Unfortunately, this approach often fails to meet the unique needs of disadvantaged groups. Targeted universalism is an alternative approach that aims to improve outcomes for all groups, but pays particular attention to the needs and circumstance of people experiencing the greatest inequities.[22]

**Equity Design
Supplement**
page 8-10

ENHANCE POWER AND CAPACITY OF GROUPS EXPERIENCING INEQUITIES. Powerful strategies address the root causes of inequities *and* simultaneously create conditions to *promote equity*. This includes enhancing the power and capacity of groups experiencing inequities.[23, 24]

**Equity Design
Supplement**
page 11-13

ADDRESS POWERFUL LEVERAGE POINTS DRIVING INEQUITIES. Powerful strategies can trigger changes throughout a community, organization, or service delivery network.[1,25] This happens when strategies target powerful "leverage points" – such as mindsets, goals, power dynamics, regulations, connections, service components, and resources (listed in decreasing order of power). Consider how you can design strategies to address multiple leverage points at the same time, focusing on the most powerful leverage points possible.

**Equity Design
Supplement**
page 14-16

ANTICIPATE AND ADDRESS UNANTICIPATED CONSEQUENCES. The strategies we use often have significant unintended consequences for people and community outcomes which can exacerbate existing inequities. Anticipate and address these potential dynamics during strategy design by considering the following critical questions:

- Could your strategies create any positive or negative unintended consequences for groups experiencing inequities?
- If so, how can you enhance or address these consequences?

**Equity Design
Supplement**
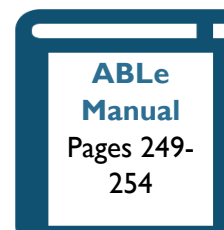page 17-19

Align System Conditions

Strategies do not exist in a vacuum and are instead carried out within an existing community context (see orange boxes below).

- Some aspects of this community context may be **aligned** with your strategies and outcomes (e.g., existing networks support strategies to improve service referrals) and will **support the success of your strategies**.

- Other aspects of this community context may be **misaligned** (e.g., local attitudes and beliefs that cause people to resist new strategies) and can **impede your success**.
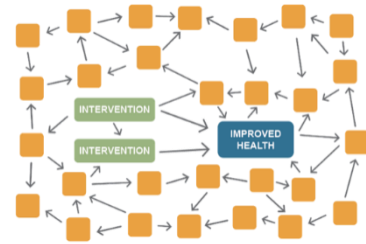
Engage diverse stakeholders in helping to understand any misaligned conditions, and add elements into your strategies to address them.

Doing this BEFORE launching your strategies can increase your likelihood of success.[22,4]

ABLe Manual
Pages 249-254

Example System Alignment Questions	
Mindsets	• What current mindsets could interfere with people's **motivation** to adopt the strategies? • Who might **resist** this new behavior?
Components	• To what extent do current services or programs provide **opportunities** for people to use these strategies? • How **compatible** are these strategies with how services or programs are currently designed or delivered? What needs to change?
Connections	• Is needed **information or resources flowing** to the people or settings trying to adopt the strategies? • Are needed **referrals** in place to support the strategies?
Regulations	• What current **policies, practices and procedures** might get in the way of people's **capability** or **opportunity** to use the strategies? • What policies, practices or procedures are not in place but **are still needed** to support the strategies?
Resources	• Do leaders, program staff, families, youth, and other relevant community members have the **skills and knowledge** they need to successfully carry out or support these strategies? • Are needed **community resources** in place to support the strategies?
Power	• What **new decision-making structures** will need to be developed to support the strategies? Who else will need to be included in decision-making that is currently excluded?

Prototype to seek stakeholder feedback

Prototyping is a process to gather feedback from "end users" (e.g., stakeholders who will be implementing and/or benefiting from the strategy) to test out strategy ideas before they are implemented. Prototyping can help you to:

- COMMUNICATE: Prototypes can often demonstrate ideas better than words, and can be used as a conversation starter with end users.

- RAPIDLY TEST MANY OPTIONS – CHEAPLY: Prototypes are cheap and quick to make, and can allow designers to test out multiple ideas before deciding which to pursue.

- KEEP THINGS MANAGEABLE: You can create prototypes for small chunks of the overall strategy idea and prototype in stages to keep things feasible.[26]

> **ABLe Manual**
> Pages 238-245
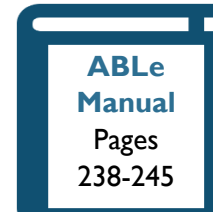
Identify Feedback Questions

Identify specific questions to ask end users (e.g., residents, staff, etc.) to get feedback and test out critical elements of the strategy.

Example Feedback Questions

- How could [insert strategy element] be made easier to carry out in your day to day job?

- What should [insert strategy element] look like?

- Where and when should [insert strategy element] happen?

- Will [insert strategy element] meet the unique needs of [insert prioritized demographic groups] residents? If not, how could the idea be improved?

Develop prototypes

Develop prototypes to help you gather feedback from end users to answer specific questions about your strategies.

See examples to the right for ideas.[18,30]

Role Play	Act out the experience of the idea. Consider props and attire to increase the reality of the user experience
Story Board	Use a comic-book style format to quickly draw out key interactions or processes and create accompanying narrative
Process Map	Map out the process steps used within a strategy using boxes and arrows, or graphics
Physical Model	Build a simple three-dimensional representation of the idea using basic materials – paper, cardboard, pipe cleaners, etc.
Diagram	Draw out the structure related to a strategy – a mindmap can also be considered diagrams
Advertisement	Create a fake advertisement that promotes the idea. Consider using different frames or tones to see which most resonates.

Use prototypes to gather iterative feedback and revise ideas

Use your prototypes to share ideas, get feedback, and learn how to best refine the strategies.[26] Getting feedback on your prototypes keeps end users (and implementers) at the heart of the process.

Example methods

The following are examples of ways to use prototypes to gather feedback. Note that any of the prototypes (e.g., model, storyboard, role play, etc.) can be used during these feedback sessions:

Individual Conversations

- Schedule one-on-one conversations

Group Conversations

- Convene a group of individuals to discuss the prototypes

On the Street Conversations

- Conduct "person on the street" interviews to randomly engage individuals in settings which match the one in which the team's strategy/solution will be ultimately used

Co-Design Sessions

- Invite potential end-users and/or implementers of your strategy to a "co-design" session to help rapidly refine and iterate a prototype together

## Use feedback to inform decisions

The feedback gained from end users and implementers helps to inform the next iteration of prototyping.

The refinement of prototypes continues for multiple rounds until the solution is working well for end users.[26]

ABLe Manual
Pages 238-245
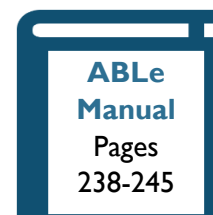
Remember! The goal of prototyping is to <u>learn quickly</u> and keep the feedback, refinement, and iteration cycle moving forward. Gather feedback from <u>just enough people</u> to inform the next refinement of the prototype.

Prepare for Implementation
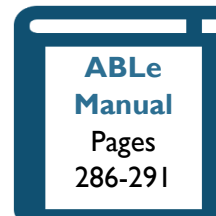
The power of any community systems change intervention or strategy – no matter how well designed – is entirely dependent on how well it is implemented.[27,28]

Effective Strategies	**+**	Effective Implementation	**=**	Improved Outcomes

You can anticipate and prepare for implementation by adding elements into your strategies to support the following implementation processes:

Diffusion: the adoption, use, and spread of strategies and new behaviors across the community.[7&8] Includes promoting:

ⓘ Awareness

What processes can you use to spread the word about this strategy to relevant people who need to adopt it?

👍 Buy-In

What is the best way to describe your efforts so individuals want to participate or learn more?

↗ Scale

How can you expand your diffusion efforts over time to reach other stakeholders/settings?

Use: Stakeholders/ settings are effectively using strategies and continuing to use them over time. Includes promoting:

♞ Effective Use

How can you build local stakeholder capacities to effectively carry out new behaviors?

🕐 Continued Use

How can you embed strategies into existing routines and promote accountability for new behaviors?

Dose: strategies are reaching and benefiting targeted residents, and are powerful enough to make a difference. Includes promoting:
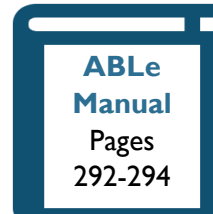
⤴ Reach

How can you increase the number of targeted residents you reach with your strategies?
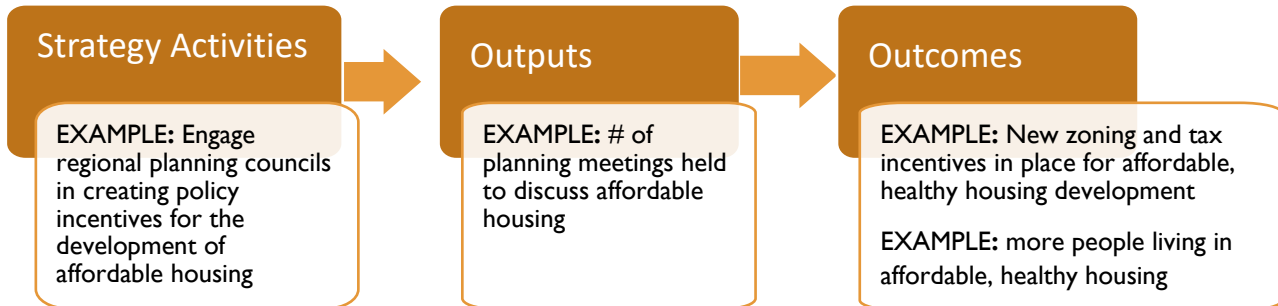
📶 Strength

How can you increase the strength this strategy has to shift relevant outcomes for targeted residents?

Define Outcomes

An **outcome is a change resulting from your strategies** (in contrast with outputs, which are counts related to your strategy activities). Outcomes tell you whether, and how much, your change goals have shifted over time and are important for guiding decision-making about whether to continue, adapt, or scale up your efforts.

ABLe Manual
Pages
292-294

Strategy Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
EXAMPLE: Engage regional planning councils in creating policy incentives for the development of affordable housing	EXAMPLE: # of planning meetings held to discuss affordable housing	EXAMPLE: New zoning and tax incentives in place for affordable, healthy housing development EXAMPLE: more people living in affordable, healthy housing

Preparing for effective implementation includes identifying outcomes you hope to achieve as a result of your efforts.

Identifying these outcomes now will help you track your efforts over time to make sure they are bringing about your desired changes.

Outcome Types

PEOPLE outcomes include shifts in the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or the state of psychological and physical wellbeing of individuals.

PLACE outcomes include shifts in conditions within the community system (e.g., neighborhood, service delivery system, city, county, or region)

Example place outcomes

Policy Outcomes	Environment Outcomes	System Outcomes
Shifts in policies impacting practices, procedures, resource and information flows, referral practices, eligibility requirements, etc. at organizational, community, city, county, state, or federal levels	Shifts in aspects of the physical, built, or social environment. Examples include shifts in parks, roads, worksite conditions, avaiability of affordable housing, etc.	Shifts in how actors and organizations interact, the services they offer, the beliefs driving their behavior, and decision-making processes.

Identify Relevant Partners
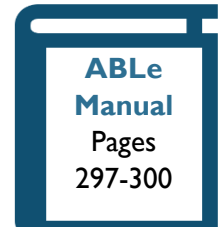
As you prepare for implementation, consider which relevant partners you still need to engage to help support and carry out your strategies. Ask the following questions:

ABLe Manual
Pages 297-300

Who needs to be engaged in these efforts because they are in a position to:
- make decisions as to whether their organization or initiative will adopt the strategies?
- diffuse messages to staff and colleagues about the strategies and new behaviors?
- support successful implementation, including effective use and reach of your efforts?

How can you engage these relevant partners?
- What processes have you used successfully in the past to engage new partners?

Overcoming engagement barriers

Communities often encounter challenges to engaging needed stakeholders, and stakeholder engagement often fluctuates over time.[29] The table below summarizes some common engagement challenges. Refer to the *Preparing Strategies for Action Resource Guide* for examples of how communities have addressed these engagement barriers.

Mindset Barriers	**Lack of Readiness:** stakeholders do not see the change as necessary, desirable or feasible.
	Competing Priorities: stakeholders do not understand how the change complements or fits with their own priorities.
	Prior History: stakeholders remember their community's history of exclusion, ineffective prior change efforts, or cumbersome collaboration efforts.
	Time Commitment Burden: stakeholders worry they don't have the time needed to support this new effort.
Resource/ Capacity Barriers	**Lack of Awareness:** Stakeholders are unaware of the change.
	Lack of Skills: Stakeholders don't feel they have the knowledge or skills to support or implement the change effort.
Regulation Barriers	**Lack of Supportive Protocols/Processes:** Sometimes stakeholders do not get engaged because they do not have the processes and tools to support their efforts. For example, they may lack assessment tools to make good referrals.
	Unaligned Funding Expectations: Funders communicate expectations that are misaligned with your strategies.

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Step 6:
Promote Quick Wins

Diverse stakeholders help to carry out powerful strategies and change efforts by initiating "quick win" actions across the community.

Quick win actions are accomplished within three months or less, meet little resistance because they are easy to carry out, and help build momentum which can lead to larger wins and desired systems change.[31]

ABLe Manual Reference
Pages: 310-319

Relevant sections on
MICHIRLearning.org
website

ABLe Process

|			Define a Targeted Problem
Define	❶		Define a Targeted Problem
	❷		Determine System Boundaries
	❸		Understand the Community System
	❹		Adopt a Shared Agenda
Design	❺		Design Powerful Strategies
Do	❻		Promote Quick Wins
	❼		Build a Climate for Effective Implementation
Learn	❽		Learn for Continuous Improvement

Quick Wins Road Map

● What is a quick win? (p. 46)

● Help partners pursue quick wins (p. 48)

● Track progress using a systems change action record (p. 50)

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UNIVERSITY

What is a quick win?

Transformative change goals – such as improving health equity outcomes – can feel overwhelming, making it more difficult for some stakeholders to move to action. To overcome this natural tendency, communities can engage diverse stakeholders (staff, leaders, community partners, residents) in taking small, fast actions to move the overall change process forward.[32,33] These small actions are called *quick wins.*

ABLe Manual
Pages 304-307
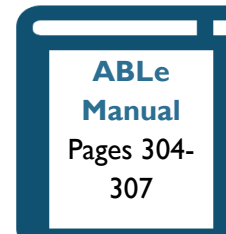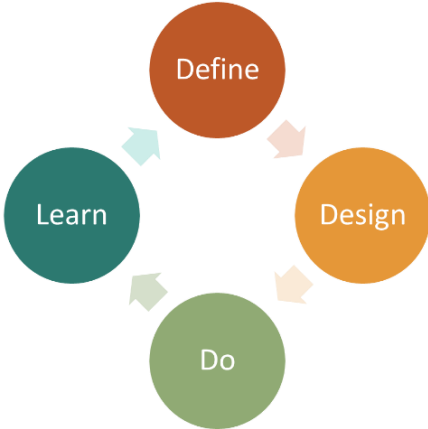
What is a quick win?
A quick win…
- is an action that is accomplished within 3 months or less.
- meets little resistance. Barriers are easy to overcome.
- leads to larger wins and to desired systems changes.

Quick Win → Quick Win

Quick Win

Quick Win → Quick Win

Larger Wins

Systems Changes

Common Types of Quick Win Actions

Gather Information	• Gather data on root causes of why problems/inequities are happening • Gather input on strategy ideas • Gather feedback on implementation progress • Gather data on outcomes of strategies
Develop Materials	• Create data summaries • Develop strategy materials (e.g., new protocols, policies, etc.) • Develop talking points and communication materials
Change the System	• Build local buy-in to support strategies • put new policies and protocols in place • launch social marketing campaign

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Quick wins are important because they…

Reduce overwhelm	Simply put, change is difficult! When change efforts tackle big issues, local stakeholders can feel overwhelmed by the amount of work ahead. Quick wins help reduce this sense of overwhelm and help stakeholders see the possibility of change. Quick wins are small enough to give stakeholders confidence in their ability to make change happen and yet significant enough to make a difference.
Minimize Resistance	Quick wins help reduce system push back because they are easy to carry out. By promoting relatively minor shifts, quick wins avoid triggering resistance to change**.**
Promote Engagement	Diverse stakeholders across the community (cross-sector leaders, staff, community partners, residents, etc.) can initiate quick win actions. This helps efforts permeate the community and promote sustainable changes. Momentum can also build as more people initiate action, fostering greater engagement over time.[32,33] **TIP:** Engage multiple stakeholders in initiating quick wins for the same strategy to generate community wide momentum and buy-in. See ABLe Manual page 311-314 for more details.
Support Systems Change	Quick win actions are essential drivers of systems change. Quick wins can occur at any project stage to help move efforts forward. For example, quick wins can help to: DEFINE: Quick wins focus on revealing and understanding local problems and inequities DESIGN: Quick wins focus on identifying and developing strategies, programs, or other efforts that can be used to trigger desired changes DO: Quick wins focus on initiating action and building an effective climate for implementation LEARN: Quick wins focus on assessing the progress made and identifying next steps

Help partners initiate quick wins

How do you engage local diverse stakeholders (e.g., leaders, staff, residents including youth) in carrying out quick win actions?

Consider how you can:

- Faciliate conversations to help stakeholders identify actions they can take within the next 3 months

- Check-in with stakeholders initiating actions and provide necessary supports

ABLe Manual
Pages 310-312
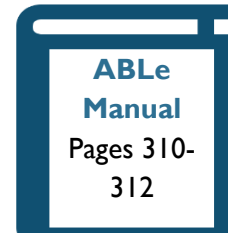
Facilitate conversations to help stakeholders identify quick win actions

Whenever an opportunity emerges within a conversation or meeting to take action, pause the conversation and ask questions to help stakeholders identify feasible quick wins they can accomplish in the next 3 months. Without this intentional pause, opportunities for action are often overlooked and never initiated.

TIP: Ask questions to help stakeholders come up with a detailed plan for how to carry out their quick win actions; this is often a critical support stakeholders need to carry out actions effectively.

Quick Wins Guide

Facilitators' Cheat Sheet to Promote Quick Wins

Example questions to help generate quick win actions

- *What can you do in the next 1-3 months to help move this process forward? [provide examples from **Quick Wins Guide**]*

- *[If stakeholders say they don't think they have time to carry out action…] How can we break this action into a series of smaller, more feasible steps?*

- *Who else can partner to carry out these actions? How can we coordinate these actions?*

- *Let's plan out the specific details for this action…*
  - *What exactly needs to happen (e.g., ask residents for input on strategy ideas)?*
  - *Where does it need to happen? With whom? When?*
  - *What do we need to prepare (e.g., develop questions and note-taking materials etc.)?*
  - *Who can initiate these actions – by when?*

Check-in with stakeholders initiating actions

Stakeholders who volunteer to take action often need support behind the scenes. For example, sometimes people experience barriers to carrying out their actions, or simply forget to do them.

Providing support between meetings can help ensure quick wins are carried out and momentum continues to build to move the change effort forward.[6]

Check-in with stakeholders initiating actions and provide behind the scenes coaching support to ensure actions are carried out and implemented effectively. For example:

- send meeting minutes to recap quick win actions

- contact stakeholders initiating action to check-in on progress and provide needed support

- send reminders to prepare stakeholders to give updates at upcoming meetings

Behind the scenes support can help stakeholders successfully carry out their actions - and experience a win at upcoming meetings and conversations.

Example schedule to support stakeholders initiating action

The following is an example schedule to provide behind the scenes support to help stakeholders carry out their quick win actions between regular meetings.

Meeting #1
- Capture detailed notes during meeting. Be sure to capture specific actions and who is responsible

Recap
- Send meeting minutes to stakeholders within 1 week
- Clearly identify stakeholders with action items

Check-In on Progress
- Contact stakeholders about action item progress
- Provide necessary supports to individuals carrying out actions

Reminder
- Send meeting reminder 3 days in advance
- Ensure stakeholders are ready to report on with action items

Meeting #2
- Ask stakeholders to give updates on action items – celebrate wins, problem solve barriers

# Track progress using a systems change action record

A Systems Change Action Record is a document that tracks the initiation of different types of actions over time and can be used to:

- **Celebrate successes** and build momentum for change
- **Coordinate actions** across the system to promote synergy and alignment
- **Document systems change progress.** Some communities use this action plan as a reporting tool to funders
- **Encourage accountability** across organizations and action learning teams
- **Illuminate gaps** around particular systems change targets

ABLe Manual

Pages 316-318
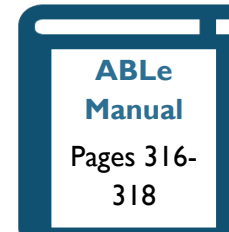
Elements of a Systems Change Action Record

The following is an example of how to set up a Systems Change Action Record. You can add as many rows as necessary to capture all your goals and strategies. Descriptions of each Action Record element are shown in the template below.

System Change Action Record

Example system change action record
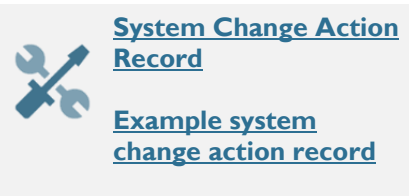
Goal: *[systems change or social determinant of health goal areas from Shared Vision]*

Objectives: *[List Corresponding Prioritized Root Cause Themes (worded as positive Objectives) from system scan]*

Strategies	Initiated Quick Wins	Accomplished Quick Wins	Outcomes
[Add strategies on separate rows to address the objectives (root causes) listed above. Note each strategy could address one or more of these objectives.]	*[Add quick win actions initiated to pursue the strategies. Include the date the action was initiated, and who is initiating it.]*	*[Add quick win actions that have been completed. Include the date the action was completed.]*	*[Add changes in community conditions and/or people resulting from quick wins. See ABLe Manual page 292 for more details.]*

Goal:

Objectives:

Strategies	Initiated Quick Wins	Accomplished Quick Wins	Outcomes

Use run charts to visually track actions over time

Many communities track their quick wins in an electronic database and generate visual summaries called *Run Charts* to display the progress of quick wins over time.[34] These run charts can be powerful tools to inform decision-making on how to focus current and future actions.
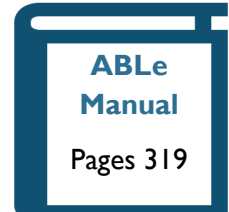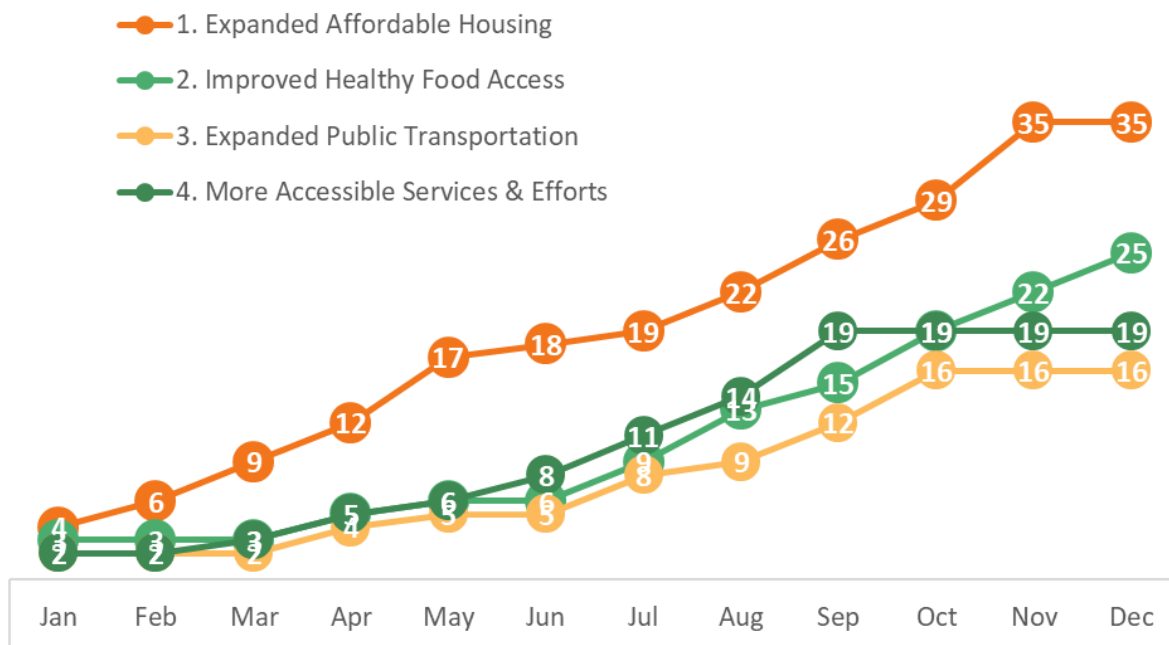
For example, stakeholders can see which of their goal areas have the most and least actions initiated, and use this feedback to adjust their actions moving forward.

Some communities also create individualized action records for key organizations within the collaborative to help them see their progress compared to other de-identified organizations

Below is an example of a run chart showing cumulative actions over time across 4 change goals.

ABLe Manual

Pages 319

Cumulative Quick Wins Initiated by Change Goal

- 1. Expanded Affordable Housing
- 2. Improved Healthy Food Access
- 3. Expanded Public Transportation
- 4. More Accessible Services & Efforts

Quick Win Run Chart Database.
Use this database to generate run chart visuals of quick win actions. Request via email: ablechangeteam@gmail.com

Click the link below to access additional tools and resources on **MCHIRlearning.org**

Step 7:
Build a Climate for Effective Implementation

Building a climate for effective implementation involves putting processes in place to monitor and rapidly address implementation barriers and opportunities as they emerge.

Gathering and rapidly responding to feedback is critical, as even the best-designed strategies will encounter unanticipated barriers during implementation as the system works to maintain the status quo and neutralize the changes you are trying to make.[16]

Able Manual Reference:
Pages 321-342

Relevant sections on **MICHIRLearning** website

ABLe Process

		Define a Targeted Problem
Define	❶	Define a Targeted Problem
	❷	Determine System Boundaries
	❸	Understand the Community System
	❹	Adopt a Shared Agenda
Design	❺	Design Powerful Strategies
Do	❻	Promote Quick Wins
	❼	Build a Climate for Effective Implementation
Learn	❽	Learn for Continuous Improvement

Build a Climate for Implementation Road Map
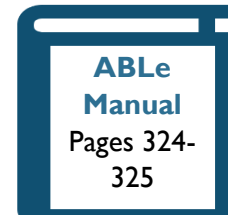
Gather rapid feedback on implementation (p. 53)

Adapt quickly to emerging opportunities and barriers (p. 57)

● Gather rapid feedback on implementation

No matter how well you anticipate and address implementation conditions prior to launching your strategies, unknowable barriers or issues will always emerge.

For example, some critical partners may not learn about your strategies or implement them effectively, or efforts may not reach and benefit targeted people or settings.
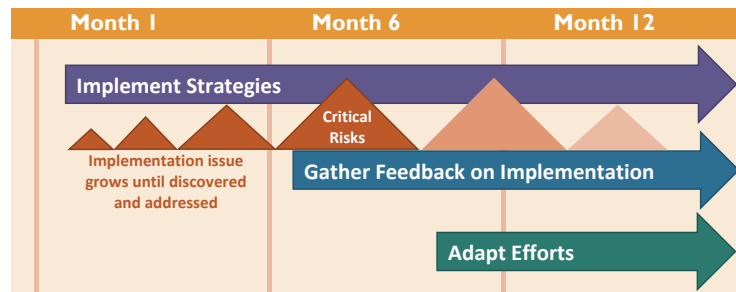
Effective change efforts continuously gather and assess implementation feedback and make real time adjustments to address barriers and opportunities as they come.[35] See the **Plan to Gather Implementation Feedback** tool for ideas on how to plan for gathering this feedback.
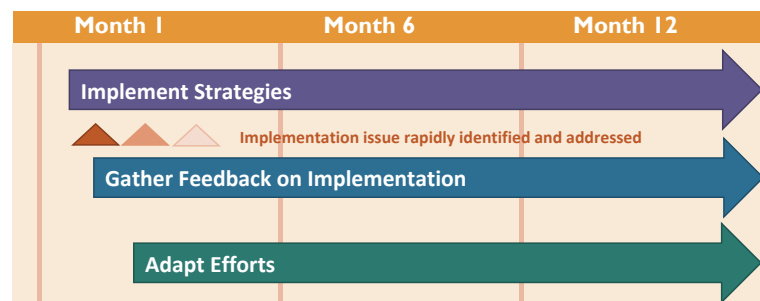
Role of Rapid Feedback

Many initiatives do not gather feedback on how their strategies are being implemented until well after efforts are underway.[35]

This delay in feedback allows initial implementation issues to grow in size and influence, posing greater risks to derail the change effort's success.

Month 1	Month 6	Month 12
Implement Strategies	Critical Risks	
Implementation issue grows until discovered and addressed	Gather Feedback on Implementation	
	Adapt Efforts	

To avoid these delays, gather rapid implementation feedback *as soon as strategies are launched* to quickly identify and address issues.

Rapid feedback helps take the pulse of your efforts, and allows you to immediately troubleshoot problems that may emerge.

Month 1	Month 6	Month 12
Implement Strategies		
Implementation issue rapidly identified and addressed		
Gather Feedback on Implementation		
Adapt Efforts		

Gather rapid feedback on *implementation conditions*

Engage multiple stakeholders (leaders, staff, residents, community partners) in gathering and providing rapid feedback on the implementation of strategies.

Focus this feedback on DIFFUSION, USE, and DOSE processes.
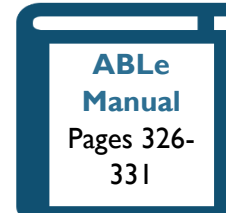
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Pages 326-331

DIFFUSION: the adoption, use, and spread of strategies and new behaviors across the community.[36,37]

ⓘ Awareness

Which stakeholders/settings SHOULD know about this strategy? Which stakeholders ACTUALLY know about this strategy? Why do some still not know about this strategy?

👍 Buy-In

Of the stakeholders/settings who are aware of this strategy…which are committed to adopting or supporting it? WHY are some stakeholders/settings not yet bought into this strategy?

↗ Scale

Which stakeholders/settings SHOULD be adopting or supporting this strategy at this point in time? Which stakeholders/settings are ACTUALLY adopting or supporting this strategy? WHY are some stakeholders/settings not adopting or supporting this strategy?

USE: Stakeholders/ settings are effectively using strategies and continuing to use them over time.

♜♞ Effective Use

To what extent are stakeholders/settings effectively using this strategy? Why is this happening?

🕐 Continued Use

To what extent are stakeholders/settings continuing to use this strategy consistently after ___ months? Why is this happening?

DOSE: strategies are reaching and benefiting targeted residents/settings with enough power to make a difference.

Reach

Which residents/settings SHOULD be reached by your strategies? Which residents/settings are ACTUALLY being reached by your strategies?

📊 Strength

To what degree SHOULD your strategies be starting to shift relevant outcomes at this point in time? To what extent have your strategies ACTUALLY started to shift relevant outcomes?

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Gather rapid feedback on *system alignment*

Once strategies and changes are underway, it is useful to gather rapid feedback on whether new system misalignments (or opportunities) are emerging. This type of feedback is important, as community systems are dynamic and frequently changing, causing new alignment issues to emerge over time.[6]
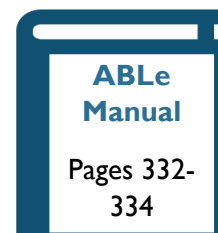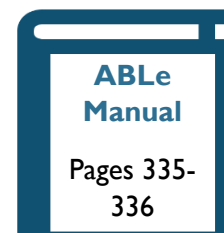
The following are example questions to help gather rapid feedback on system alignment. See this **implementation scanning tool** for more ideas.

> **ABLe Manual**
>
> Pages 332-334

Mindsets	Do stakeholders (leaders, staff, families, etc.) *still* recognize the need for this strategy– in other words, that the strategy or change is **necessary**? **Feasible**? **Beneficial**? What *emerging* beliefs and attitudes could support or interfere with people's **motivation** to adopt this strategy? Who is **resisting** this strategy?
Components	To what extent do current services or programs *still* provide **opportunities** for people to use this strategy? How **compatible** is this strategy with currently designed and delivered services or programs (e.g., availability, accessibility, cultural competency, and quality)? What needs to change?
Connections	Is necessary **information or resources *still* flowing** to the people or settings trying to use this strategy? Are needed **referrals** in place to support this strategy?
Regulations	What *new* **policies, practices and procedures** might hinder this strategy? What policies, practices or procedures are not in place but **are *now needed*** to support this strategy?
Resources	Do leaders, program staff, residents, and relevant community members *still* have the **skills and knowledge** they need to successfully carry out or support this strategy? Does the system *need to start* **using its resources differently** to better support this strategy? Who might see this restructuring as a loss?
Power	To what extent is this strategy starting to **challenge existing power** and decision-making structures? What *new* **decision-making structures** are now needed for the strategy to succeed? Who else needs to be included in decision-making that is currently excluded? What else within the system needs to be altered to support this new structure?

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Feasible approaches to gather implementation feedback

Find feasible ways to gather rapid feedback on implementation from multiple stakeholders (leaders, staff, residents, community partners, etc.), as this will give you a full picture of how implementation is going.

One way to keep these processes feasible is to use existing meetings, naturally occurring conversations, and routine forms to gather feedback. Consider the following example approaches:

| | ABLe Manual
Pages 335-336 |

Collaborative Meeting Check-Ins	Add questions to collaborative or workgroup meeting agendas about people's observations or experiences with emerging implementation barriers, why those barriers are occurring, and what can be done to address them.
Staff Meetings	Use staff meetings to ask relevant staff who are carrying out strategies about their observations or experiences with emerging implementation barriers, why those barriers are occurring, and what can be done to address them.
Interactions with Residents	Have staff in partner organizations ask residents about their experiences with any implementation barriers related to your strategies through natural service interactions (or in the waiting room). If applicable, ask residents about their thoughts on how to address any emerging barriers.
Brief Surveys	Create a <u>brief</u> survey to gather information about implementation barriers, why those barriers are occurring, and what can be done to address them. Distribute survey online, at existing meetings, or through partners.
Existing Documents and Forms	Think about what information you could use from tracking logs, service protocols, websites, communications, meeting minutes, intake forms, sign-in sheets, participation logs, or other documentation currently being used in your community to identify emerging implementation issues. If the information you need is not currently included in these sources, work with partners to add some questions on organizations' forms and protocols (e.g., intake forms, service referral tracking logs, etc.) to help monitor and identify implementation progress.
Observations	Visit settings and places where your strategies are currently being carried out to see how things are going and identify any implementation problems. Or, have others visit on your behalf and report back what they learn.

Adapt Quickly to Emerging Opportunities and Barriers

As you gather rapid feedback on strategy implementation – ask yourself the following: what is working, what is not working, and why?

Engage diverse stakeholders in making sense of implementation feedback and using it to adapt efforts in response to emerging opportunities and needs. This quick problem-solving and adaptation can help your efforts navigate through any unanticipated circumstances (good or bad) to keep efforts moving forward.

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Pages 339-340
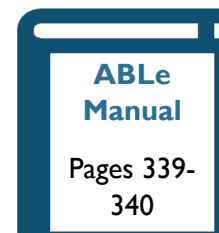
Make sense of implementation feedback in real-time

As you gather implementation feedback, engage stakeholders in making sense of the information in real-time so it can immediately be used to improve your efforts.

For example, engage stakeholders in sharing experiences about local implementation progress *and* making sense of that information *in the same meeting or conversation*.

Help these discussions become a habit at every meeting by creating *standing agenda items* about implementation.

Example sense-making questions

Use the following questions to make sense of implementation feedback.

⊕ **What's working**	Where and how is implementation going well? • What is working? • Why is it working? • How can we reinforce effective implementation strategies?
⊖ **What's not working**	Where and how is implementation <u>not</u> going as well? • What implementation strategies are not working as well? Why? • What implementation barriers are emerging? • How can we address these issues?

Adjust Efforts in Response to Feedback

As you engage diverse stakeholders in making sense of implementation feedback, discuss ways to address emerging issues and opportunities.

Consider the following approaches to adjust efforts in response to implementation feedback:

> "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."
>
> **~Charles Darwin**

Expand Strategies	• In some situations, you will be able to expand your strategies to address emerging implementation needs or opportunities. Refer to ABLe manual pages 341 for more details.
Adapt Design of Your Strategies	• In other situations, it may also be necessary to adapt the design of your strategies to address emerging implementation needs or opportunities. Refer to ABLe manual pages 341 for more details.

Example questions to adapt and move to action

Use the following questions to respond to implementation feedback.

What are we learning?	• What are we learning about emerging implementation successes and how to support them? • What are we learning about emerging implementation barriers and how to address them?
What's needed?	• What changes does our initiative, our organizations, and each of us personally need to make to address these conditions?
What are our next steps?	• What are the next steps – as an initiative, an organization, and an individual - in making the changes we have suggested? • What resources or supports might be helpful?
How can we apply this moving forward?	• How can we collectively apply what we have learned moving forward? How will each of us personally apply what we have learned? • What follow-up would help us apply what we have learned?

Step 8:
Learn for Continuous Improvement

The final step of the ABLe process is to embed an Action Learning process and infrastructure for continuous learning and improvement.

This process can be used to improve the success of current strategies *and* to identify and address emerging needs and opportunities.

Able Manual Reference Pages: 245-382

Relevant sections on **MICHIRLearning** website

ABLe Process

Define
1. Define a Targeted Problem
2. Determine System Boundaries
3. Understand the Community System
4. Adopt a Shared Agenda

Design
5. Design Powerful Strategies

Do
6. Promote Quick Wins
7. Build a Climate for Effective Implementation

Learn
8. Learn for Continuous Improvement

Learning for Continuous Improvement Road Map

Embed an Action Learning Process (p. 60)

Use Action Learning within a Collaborative Infrastructure (p. 63)

Embed an Action Learning Process

Action Learning is a flexible, easy to use problem-solving process where people:

- UNDERSTAND what is causing the problems they see

- DESIGN innovative strategies to address those problems

- DO or carry out action

- LEARN about whether actions made a difference in solving the problem.

Action learning can be used within a variety of situations anytime a problem or opportunity comes up that needs to be addressed. Action learning is also iterative, meaning you will go through each step over and over again as you problem-solve issues in your community.

Define
Understand current and emerging problems and opportunities

Design
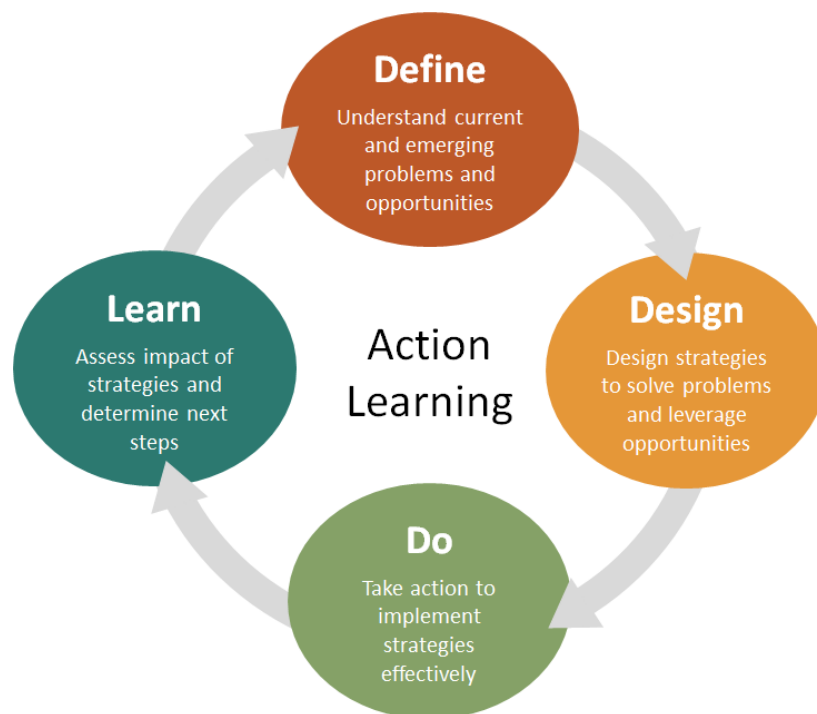Design strategies to solve problems and leverage opportunities

Action Learning

Learn
Assess impact of strategies and determine next steps

Do
Take action to implement strategies effectively

Why use action learning?

The problems facing our communities today are complex and ever-changing. Transformative change requires an ongoing, dynamic process where understanding, doing, learning, and adapting become more important than planning.[38]

Community problems cannot wait for long studies and analysis to occur. Instead, communities can use learning gained in real time through action to improve processes along the way.

One way of doing this is to use action learning to embed connected, continuous learning processes across the community.

See ABLe Manual page 347-350 for more details.

Action Learning Cheat Sheet

Example Action Learning Questions

Consider bringing the following types of action learning questions into your conversations and meetings.

See **ABLe Manual p. 353-362** and **Equity Learn Supplement** for more details and examples.

Define
reveal and understand current and emerging problems and opportunities related to your shared agenda

Reveal:
- What's working to improve [*insert shared agenda goal – e.g., access to services*]?
- What's getting in the way of [*insert shared agenda goal*]
- Which groups or settings are being advantaged and disadvantaged - how?

Understand:
- Why is this happening – what are the root causes? (see page 24 of this guide for details)
- What additional information do we need to fully understand this situation?

Design
develop strategies to address root causes of these problems, and prepare to engage stakeholders in action

Strategize:
- How can we design strategies to address the root causes of this problem and inequities? (see pages 36-39 of this guide for powerful strategy approaches)
- What examples can we learn from?
- Whose input do we need on these ideas? (see page 40 of this guide for more details)

Prepare:
- How can we anticipate and address potential implementation needs?
- Who do we need to engage to carry out and support these strategies and actions?
- What quick actions can we take in next 3 months to move strategies forward?

Do
stakeholders initiate quick win actions to carry out strategies

Track:
- Are actions being carried out - if not, why?
- What implementation barriers are we encountering – why are they happening? (see page 44 of this guide for examples)

Troubleshoot:
- How can we address these implementation barriers? (see page 57 of this guide for details)

Learn
assess if strategies are starting to improve root causes and targeted outcomes and determine next steps based on what you are learning.

Assess:
- Are our strategies starting to make a difference in targeted root causes and outcomes? (see ABLe Manual pages 366-369 for details)
- Are we seeing any unintended consequences from our strategies? (see ABLe Manual pages 370-373 for details)

Next Steps:
- What are next steps given what we're learning?
- How can we support and scale what is working?
- How can we address, re-think, or better understand strategies that are not starting to make a difference?

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Use Data in Action Learning

See **ABLe Manual page 375-377** for more details.

Information and data can be collected and used to inform decision-making throughout the Action Learning Cycle.

For example, data can help groups understand root causes, clarify what to focus on in strategy design, gather feedback on implementation, and learn if their efforts are starting to make a difference. This data can include many different types of information – such as feedback, observations, and/or numbers.

The following table illustrates different types of information and data that could be used to enhance problem-solving related to tackling the problem of access to behavioral health services.

ACTION LEARNING STEP	EXAMPLE DATA related to problem of access to behavioral health services
Define	• Root cause analysis of why residents are not getting access • Number of residents reporting not getting access • Number of required steps within the enrollment process, and how long it takes for an individual to complete all steps • Initial intake and final access numbers from mental health organization
Design	• Number of *desired* steps within the enrollment process according to residents, and how long it would take for an individual to complete this new process • List of shifts in current policies, procedures and operations that would need to occur to support reduction in access
Do	• Reporting from all action teams on whether changes are happening and how it is going • Real-time feedback from residents attempting to access behavioral health services
Learn	• Feedback from action teams on whether problem has been solved • Initial intake and final access numbers from mental health organization • Survey data from residents comparing pre and post experiences

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Use Action Learning within a Collaborative Infrastructure

Too often, our typical approaches for engaging diverse perspectives (e.g., everyone in one large group) leads to little learning and limited action.

See **ABLe Manual Pages** 71-74 and 377

Many communities are instead using Systemic Action Learning infrastructures that engages "parallel and interacting" affinity teams.[27] Affinity teams are made up of individuals from the same system role (e.g. team of residents, team of leaders, team of direct service staff) or who are focused on the same goal (e.g., housing, employment, etc.). Each team focuses on the same Shared Agenda goals, but uses their unique perspective to design and implement actions to create change.

Why Affinity Teams?

- More Balanced Power Dynamics
- Participants have shared experiences
- Minimized differences in participants' capacity
- Legitimizes diverse perspectives
- Creates safe spaces for honest dialogue

Typical Structures	ABLe Structures
Less powerful stakeholders silenced	ALL key stakeholders influence decisions
Too much sharing of information, not enough deciding and action	Emphasis on problem solving and action
Little accountability	ALL stakeholders take action, held accountable
Little learning	Learning and continuous improvement is primary purpose
No supports for implementation	Behind the scenes supports provided

Example Affinity Teams

The following shows two example infrastructures with different types of affinity teams. See ABLe Manual pages 73-74 for more details.

Example Infrastructure 1	Example Infrastructure 2

Leaders Team

Community Supports Team

Direct Service Provider Team

Constituent Team

Provider Team 1: Healthy Births

Provider Team 2: Obesity

Leaders Team

Constituent Team
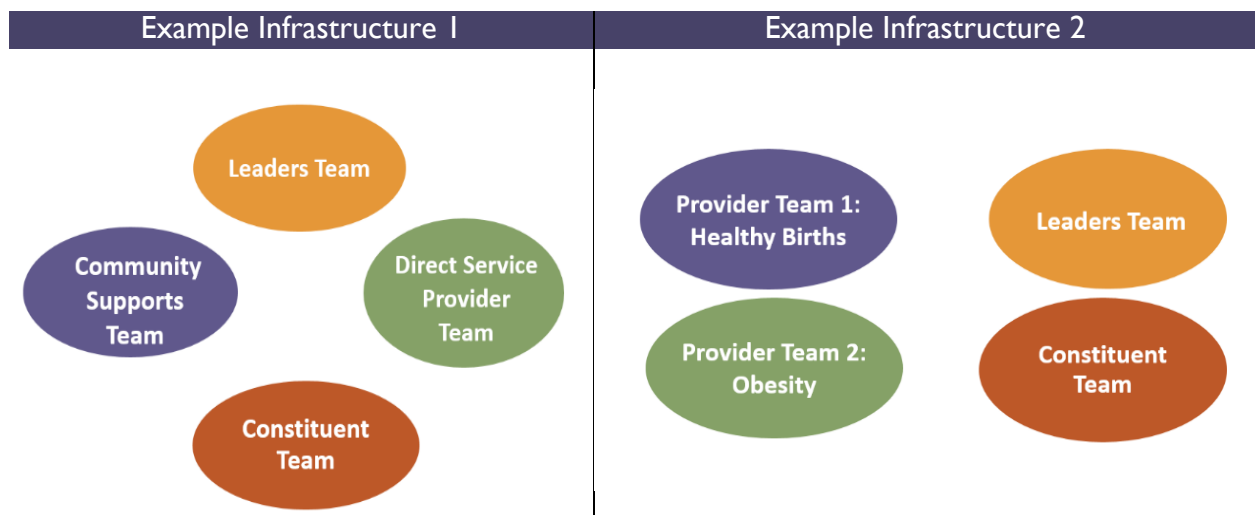
Weave critical information across infrastructure

Over time, the insights and actions emerging from the affinity teams are woven together into a cohesive change effort. Anyone can take on this weaving role by identifying ideas, feedback, and questions that should be shared across groups or stakeholders in the community to improve problem-solving.

Weaving can occur during and across:
- Action team meetings
- Collaborative meetings
- Community meetings
- Informal conversations

See **ABLe Manual page 76-79** and **378-382**

Weaving Feedback Cheat Sheet

Why is weaving important?
Weaving creates information feedback loops that help improve decision-making and system responsiveness.[40] It also aligns ongoing action and learning to maximize impact and avoid interference.

Example Questions
When you hear problems or opportunities come up in converastions, use the following reflection questions to identify who else needs to know about the information to support the work, and make the connection.

- What ideas, feedback, or questions should be shared across action teams?

- How can each team's activities be coordinated together?

- Are there any outside stakeholders or organizations that we could connect with to improve our efforts?

- How can we engage others to help us understand whether our strategies are being implemented effectively?

TIP: Use Coordinating Committees
Coordinating Committes bring together co-chairs from each action team to meet and engage in real-time weaving and problem-solving. The following is a visual example of this central coordinating committee.

See **ABLe Manual page 79** for a self-assessment of your effort's infrastructure

Leaders Team
Co-Chairs
Community Supports Team
Co-Chairs
Central Committee
Co-Chairs
Direct Service Provider Team
Co-Chairs
Constituent Team
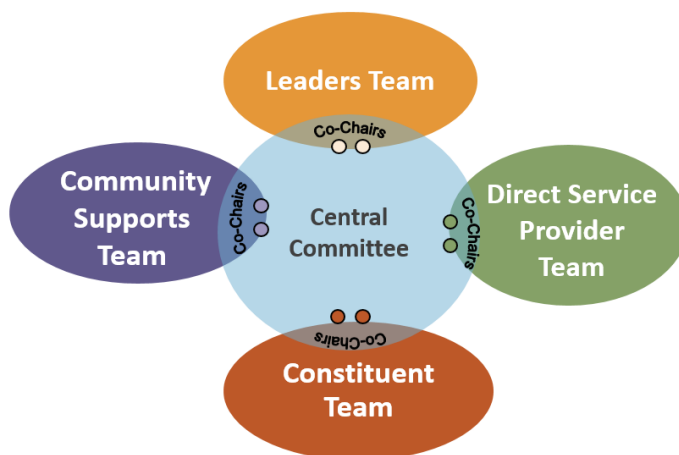
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