

ABLE Change Agent Practices

Tools and resources for community systems change



This guide includes tools and resources to help everyone become a powerful agent of change within their community. Use the self-assessment below to identify which Change Agent practices you are most interested in building. See links in right-hand column to find resources and tools for each area.

To what extent does your organization, agency, or group...	Hyperlinked Resource Pages
1. Use a root cause analysis process to understand why problems are happening before developing solutions.	Systemic Root Cause Analysis Resources page 2
2. Explore system or structural root causes (e.g., mindsets, connections, regulations, resources, components, power) for why problems are happening.	
3. Gather and use input from diverse residents, for example about the needs they see in the community or region, possible solutions, and how to improve programming and/or make your services easier to access.	Resident Engagement Resources page 3
4. Provide opportunities for residents to influence decision-making and/or help carry out our organization's programs, strategies, or change efforts. .	
5. Regularly assess to what extent internal policies, practices, protocols, and decisions are promoting equity or perpetuating inequities in the community.	Equity Resources page 4
6. Collect demographic information (e.g., race/ethnicity, income, gender, etc.) along with relevant organizational/program data so it can be used to identify which residents in the community/region are experiencing inequities (e.g., the worst outcomes compared to other groups).	
7. Put conditions in place to support the effective implementation of your efforts.	Implementation Resources page 6
8. Gather rapid feedback from diverse stakeholders (e.g., priority residents, staff, and other relevant partners) to learn if your efforts are being implemented effectively.	
9. Facilitate meetings in ways that keep the focus on problem-solving - not just information sharing	Problem-Solving Resources page 7
10. Intentionally look for opportunities to share relevant information and action ideas with other local groups and organizations to promote aligned efforts.	
11. Ask questions during meetings to help staff, leaders, and community partners identify quick actions they can complete in 1-3 months to move your efforts forward.	Moving to Action Resources page 8
12. Follow up with stakeholders between meetings to remind them of their action items and provide needed support.	

Use Systemic Root Cause Analysis

Understand causes of a problem before designing solutions.

Too often change efforts focus on addressing a problem (e.g., service providers are not making referrals) without first understanding *why* the problem is happening.³ This can lead to wasted time and resources as efforts focus on fixing *symptoms* rather than *causes* of a problem.

Systemic root cause analysis is a process to identify *systemic* reasons why a problem is happening. Strategies that address these root causes are more effective at solving problems.² The visual on the right shows 6 common types of systemic root causes.

Systemic root causes can help you understand lots of different types of problems including:

- population level problems (e.g., homelessness)
- social determinants of health (e.g. limited access to healthy food, lack of jobs)
- system/organizational problems (e.g. lack of coordination or low employee morale)
- local inequities (e.g., why some groups are experiencing more obstacles to health than others)



Resources to help you use systemic root cause analysis

[Change Agent Field Guide](#)

Step by step guide on how to use systemic root cause analysis to enhance your work (see chapter 2 for information on systemic root cause analysis).

[Systemic Root Cause Analysis Template](#)

Simple questions you can use to ask about system root causes driving local problems during meetings, planning process, and conversations.

[System Scan Question Menu](#)

Example questions you can use to understand system root causes affecting your goals and outcomes.

[Cheat Sheet for Getting Actionable Information](#)

Tips for how to help gather detailed information during conversations to guide strategy design.

Engage Residents

Engage residents in a variety of ways to support the success of your efforts.

Local residents have first-hand experience living and dealing with the problems you're trying to tackle, like trying to find affordable housing, getting a job, or staying healthy. They also have experience trying to get the supports and services they need, like housing assistance and childcare.

These experiences provide residents with an invaluable perspective about what needs to change within the community to promote health and wellbeing, and how the system can improve to better meet residents' needs. These experiences can also equip residents to take on action roles within the community to support your efforts.

[Understanding Perspectives on the Problem](#)

Pennie Foster-Fishman talks about the power of gaining perspectives from community members – especially those being served and their supporters



Resources to help you engage residents

There are many different ways to engage residents. Use the resources below to help identify which approaches will work best for engaging residents within your efforts.

[Change Agent Field Guide](#)

Step by step guide on how to engage residents in new ways to enhance your work (see page 3-13).

[ABLE Video Series on Resident Coalitions](#)

Series of brief videos describing purpose of a resident coalition and ideas for how to help launch one in your community.



[ABLE Case Study: Supporting a Resident Coalition](#)

Case study of how a community launched and supported a resident coalition/action team focused on improving children's health.

[Recruiting for a Resident Advisory Board or Action Team](#)

How to develop and recruit for a resident advisory board or action team to help support your efforts.

[ABLE Photovoice Guide](#)

Step by step guide for how to design and carry out a Photovoice project in your community.

[Engagement assessment tool](#) and [Engagement action plan](#)

Tools to help you plan out how to expand resident engagement within your efforts.

[Involving People Most Affected by the Problem](#)

Resources to engage residents directly experiencing targeted problems/inequities. *Source: Community Tool Box*

[Understanding Culture, Social Organization, and Leadership to Enhance Engagement](#)

Resources to help engage residents from diverse cultural backgrounds. *Source: Community Tool Box*

Promote Equity

Ensure efforts promote equity and avoid contributing to greater local inequities

Equity is when everyone has a fair and just opportunity for health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, America has some of the most extreme inequities in outcomes across groups of people (e.g., related to socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability status, geographic location, etc.).⁵

A focus on equity involves taking dedicated efforts to remove obstacles preventing some groups from accessing opportunities for health and wellbeing *and* putting conditions in place to promote equity (e.g., economic, social, political, and learning power and capacity).



Image from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Resources to help you bring equity into decision-making

[Equity vs. Equality Checklist](#)

Compares which aspects of a policy, program, plan, intervention, or strategy are equity focused vs. equality focused

[Inequities Synthesis Template](#)

Template to summarize data on local inequities to inform decision-making.

[ABLE Video Series: Equity Impact Assessments](#)

Brief videos on how to use an Equity Impact Assessment in decision-making.

[Change Agent Field Guide: Equity Impact Assessments](#)

Step by step guide on how to use an equity impact assessment process to enhance your work (see chapter 4).

[Equity Impact Assessment](#)

A process to help assess the equity impacts of your efforts during any phase of the change process.

[Equity Strategy Design Checklist](#)

Checklist of approaches to help design strategies to reduce inequity and promote equity.

[Prevention Institute Health Equity Tools](#)

Practical tools to help practitioners, advocates, community groups, and policymakers take action to promote equity. *Source: Prevention Institute*

[Promoting Health Equity: A Resource to Help Communities Address Social Determinants of Health](#)

Resources and case studies of how communities have pursued equity. *Source: Centers for Disease Control*

[Systems Thinking and Race](#)

Ideas on how to use a systems thinking approach within their equity efforts. *Source: Project Linked Fate*



Resources to help embed equity within your organization

[Equity Organizational Self-Assessment](#)

Tool to help organizations assess the alignment of internal policies, practices, and capacities with promoting equity.

[Race Matters: Organizational Self-Assessment](#)

Tool to help organizations assess the alignment of internal policies, practices, and capacities with promoting racial equity.

Source: *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

[Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#)

Seven steps to embed racial equity within your organization.

Source: *Annie E. Casey Foundation*

[Better Health through Equity](#)

Case studies of how public health departments have embedded a culture of equity within their work.

Source: *American Public Health Association*

Resources to help talk about equity

[Race Matters: How to Talk about Race](#)

Practical tips and recommendations for how to talk with others about racial equity.

Source: *Annie E. Casey Foundation*

[A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health](#)

Research-based suggestions for how to talk about equity and the social determinants of health.

Source: *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

[Unnatural Causes Website: Explore Health Equity](#)

A list of multimedia resources, reports and videos on how racism can have an impact a person's health.

Source: *Public Broadcasting Service*

[Statisticks Lottery](#)

Brief video describing why some children experience worse outcomes related to success in school and life than others. Helpful for illustrating the types of obstacles often leading to inequities.

Source: *The Campaign for Grade-level Reading*

[Annie E. Casey Foundation Equity Resources](#)

Toolkits, briefs, policy reports, case studies, and data sources related to promoting equity.

Source: *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

[Framing Public Issues](#)

Research-based recommendations for how to frame and talk about sensitive issues like equity (see especially pages 33-34).

Source: *FrameWorks Institute*

Support Effective Implementation

Ensure efforts are implemented effectively and reach intended individuals/settings.

The power of your efforts – no matter how well designed – is entirely dependent on how well they are implemented.³³



No matter how well you anticipated and addressed implementation issues prior to launching your strategies, unknowable issues will almost always emerge. REMEMBER! Effective change agents gather rapid feedback on implementation and adapt to opportunities and barriers as they come.

Resources to help you support implementation

[Preparing for Implementation Cheat Sheet](#)

Questions to help plan for effective implementation of strategies, efforts, and programs

[Implementation Discussion Questions](#)

Questions to groups understand and address implementation barriers and successes.

[Implementation Scanning Tool](#)

Tool to help identify which system conditions are misaligned with implementing your strategies

[Preparing Strategies for Action Resource Guide](#)

Example approaches being used throughout the U.S. and internationally to prepare strategies for effective implementation

[Developing Strategy Activities](#)

Guide to develop activities stakeholders can pursue to carry out strategies.

[Assessing Program/Effort Reach Worksheet](#)

Questions to help assess the reach of local programs and efforts addressing your targeted problems.

Make Meetings about Problem Solving

Facilitate meetings to be about problem solving and action, not information sharing

Too often meetings are focused on sharing information than on problem solving. This not only leads to quite boring meetings, but it also misses the opportunity to engage people in meaningfully working together to solve problems affecting their lives and work.

To counter this tendency, create a norm to share information through email and instead use action learning questions to focus your meetings on problem solving.

Action Learning is an ongoing problem-solving cycle where people:

- **Define:** Reveal and understand problems or opportunities
- **Design:** Strategize solutions and prepare to take action to address the problem and leverage opportunities
- **Do:** Track implementation and trouble shoot while implementing strategies
- **Learn:** Assess the impact of your efforts and determine next steps



Resources to focus meetings on problem solving

[Change Agent Field Guide: Action Learning](#)

Step by step guide on how to use action learning processes to enhance your work (see p. 27).

[Action Learning Facilitation Cheat Sheet](#)

Simple facilitation questions to promote effective problem solving during meetings.

[Shared Agenda Template](#)

Template to align meeting agenda items around prioritized goals and outcomes.

[Identifying and Addressing Emerging Issues](#)

Simple agenda and facilitation questions to identify and address emerging issues related to your goals

[Weaving Feedback Tool](#)

Tool to help identify opportunities to share feedback and important information between teams, groups, and stakeholders to support problem solving.

Move to Action

Help individuals take action to carry out solutions and next steps

Big changes – like improving health equity – can feel overwhelming and make difficult for some people to move to action. To overcome this, engage diverse stakeholders (staff, leaders, community partners, residents) in taking small, fast actions to move the overall change process forward.^{13,14} These small actions are called *quick wins*.

Quick win actions:

- are accomplished within three months or less
- meet little resistance because they are easy to carry out
- help build momentum which can lead to larger wins and desired systems change.¹²
- can be used to carry out strategies **and** support the overall change effort (e.g., understand local problems, design strategies, carry out strategies, learn about progress and continuously improve).



Resources to help move to action

[Quick Wins Guide](#)

Guide for how to identify quick wins to support every stage of the change process.

[Facilitators' Cheat Sheet to Promote Quick Wins](#)

Tips for how to help individuals plan out quick win actions during collaborative meeting processes.

[Quick Win Coaching Tool](#)

Guide to provide behind the scenes support and coaching to stakeholders carrying out action.

[ABLE Meeting Minute Template](#) and [Example ABLe Meeting Minute](#)

Template and example to help design your meeting minutes to promote action

[Systems Change Action Record Template](#) and [Example Systems Change Action Record](#)

Template and example to help document actions and outcomes emerging from systems change strategies; use to promote shared accountability.

[100 Day Challenge Planning Guide](#)

Guide to carry out a 100 Day Challenge to engage stakeholders in initiating action to pursue shared goals.

[Quick Wins Tracking Database](#)

Database to help track and plot (using run charts) actions to pursue the Shared Vision.