



**THUNDER VALLEY  
COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT  
CORPORATION  
PORCUPINE SOUTH DAKOTA**

**2017 CASE STUDY**

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# A PLACE-BASED INITIATIVE

Over the past decade, there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of “place-based population change initiatives.” The goal of a place-based initiative is to bring overall change to a particular geographic area. Rather than implementing a particular stand-alone program or project, the focus has been on identifying particular neighborhoods, and taking a holistic/comprehensive approach to change.

For example, an organization may create an after school program, a food program, a gardening project, a lead paint abatement project, a tutoring program, or any number of individual stand-alone initiatives. And these projects may very well achieve their goals and provide measurable help to participants. But even in success, they do not necessarily change the underlying environment, or the social or service networks. However, in communities across the nation, there have been an increasing number of initiatives that look to developing a comprehensive approach and are investing in a defined place/neighborhood in order to fundamentally transform the entire neighborhood and its residents.

## POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY

In 2015, representatives from Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation were invited to participate in the Population Change Learning Community. This community of learners includes groups from areas across the US including the Brownsville Partnership – Brooklyn, NY; Brighter Futures – Hartford, CT; Community Studios – Sarasota and St. Petersburg, FL; Eastside Community - United Way of San Antonio, TX; Growing Together - Tulsa, OK; Magnolia Community Initiative -

Los Angeles, CA; the Amani Neighborhood – Milwaukee, WI; Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation – Pine Ridge Reservation, SD; Vital Village Network – Boston, MA; as well as Avenues of Change, Guildford West - Surrey, British Columbia, Canada.

Formed to create an exchange between practitioners, researchers, and funders, the Population Change Learning Community aims to assist site-based practitioners supporting place-based efforts. Members of the Learning Community also include the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities, the Wisdom Exchange, Boston Medical Center, University of Wisconsin Extension of Milwaukee County, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Working Cities Challenge, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Community Foundation of North Texas, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities provides coordination and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation provides the financial support for the Learning Community and provided funding for this case study.

It was through the Population Change Learning Community group exchanges, participating site based teams identified their common struggle to understand what roles and functions are

being used to support a community change process, assess how well they are actually performing these functions, and ultimately determine what of these functions are necessary to actually drive positive change. While much has been written about the need for support entities for multi-sector place based endeavors, whether called backbone organizations, integrators, intermediaries, or lead agencies, little has been captured as to how best to organize and deliver on this role.

# THE CASE STUDY PURPOSE

It was determined by the Learning Community that efforts to improve outcomes in place-based efforts would be greatly enhanced by sharing the progress and challenges of those who have assumed the support role for place-based endeavors. Site based members of the Learning Community self-selected into a case study design team and/or volunteered to administer the case study within their respective communities.

We recognize that the decision-making process in each place-based initiative is different; the demographics in each initiative are unique; and the range of the specific programs and projects for each initiative vary. However, the goal of this case study for each community is to better understand the practice of how best to respond to the on-going development and delivery of the support and services needed for multi-sector place based endeavors. And in each case, this study is informed by the collective experience of, and written by, those actually responsible for the place-based work in their community.

The case study was designed to better understand how, and what, the Learning Community members have determined to be the support roles and functions, and how each site has organized to accomplish their work. In order to best understand this, the Population Change Learning Community intended to answer these key questions:

- **What are the roles/functions necessary to support a multi-sector initiative trying to improve a place based population?**
- **What operating or management structures are the most promising for organizing and sustaining this work (delivering on the functions)?**
- **How do we know (assess) if we are effectively delivering on these functions?**
- **How do we effectively resource (human, financial, technical) this support?**

By relying on local stakeholders to share their experiences and perspectives, and make meaning of those insights, the aim was to strengthen our shared understanding of the elements of effectiveness for those supporting multi-sector place based endeavors.

Through our use of a guided exploration of what has happened and what has been learned from those responsible for supporting a place-based endeavor, the Population Change Learning

Community has now generated 9 site-specific case studies.

What follows is a case study of Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation's efforts on the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation. Representatives from the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation entered into this process with a commitment to ask questions and gather the perspectives of participating agencies, residents, and others, that would allow for a deeper level of understanding of the full range of functions and capacities of support entities for multi-sector place based efforts.

Significant effort was made to gather information from a diverse range of participants. Nevertheless, we acknowledge and recognize that it was not possible to speak with everyone, and as a result it is impossible to represent everyone's views and experiences in our local efforts. We recognize that there are many people within the Pine Ridge Reservation and throughout our community who contribute their time, effort, and resources to improve the Pine Ridge Reservation and the lives of Pine Ridge Reservation residents.

# THE THUNDER VALLEY STORY

Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation was started by a group of young people on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation who were returning to Lakota spirituality. Through this reconnection to spirituality, it became evident to us that in our ceremonies we were working to meet the creator half way. We knew that we only got out of ceremonies what we put into them. That it takes sacrifice and effort. However, we were not doing this when it came to our daily lives. We were sitting back and waiting for a hand out, asking about why things were the way they were, and complaining that they were not as they should be. One day after sitting around complaining, we were challenged by the ancestors who said, “When are you going to make a way for your people, are you not warriors? It’s time to stop talking and start doing”. That challenge launched us to create Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (Thunder Valley CDC) in 2007.

Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation has developed a comprehensive, innovative and grassroots approach to collaborating with, and empowering, Lakota youth and families on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation to improve the health, culture and environment of our community in a way that heals and strengthens our identity. Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation is an Oglala Lakota led 501c3 located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota. Our mission is “Empowering Lakota Youth and families to improve the health, culture, and environment of our communities, through the healing and strengthening of cultural identity”. We are working to create Regional Equity through systemic change by using an ecosystem of opportunity that we have created on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Young people, who were starting their own families, founded our organization. Since that beginning, youth have continued to be an essential component of our work. We began taking youth

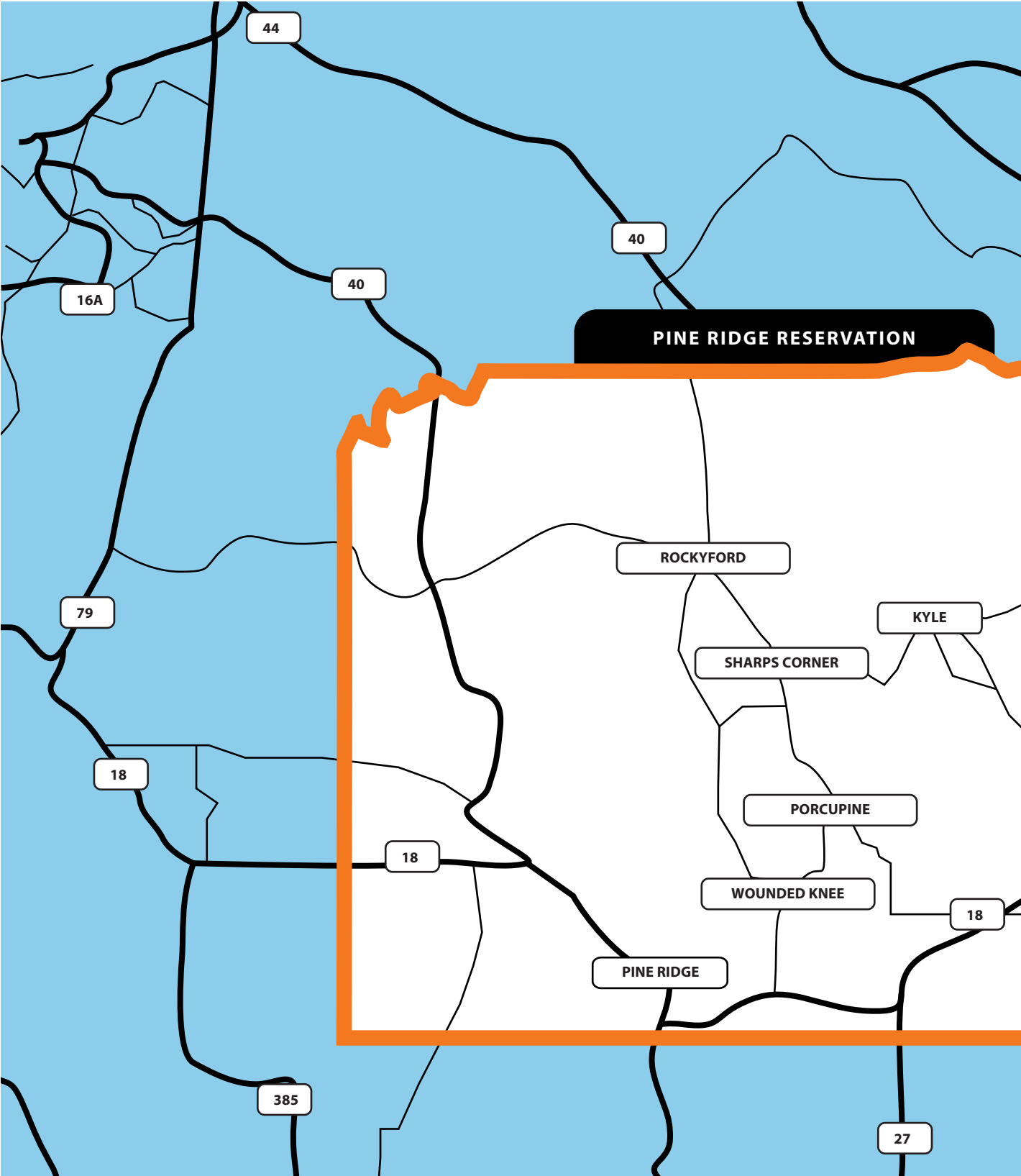
to Lakota sacred sites to learn more about their spirituality and Lakota culture. We engaged youth in activities such as the E Tanka Café in 2008-2010, teaching them to run their own business. We also thought it was important to show that it was possible for people to come together and create space for gathering. Therefore, we built a Community House from the ground up with a group of young people from the community. This space is still used today for prayer and community gatherings.

We recognized that while this work was important and meaningful, there was still something missing. When the youth went home they often were still dealing with immense challenges and extreme poverty rooted in historic injustice. The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation encompasses all of Oglala Lakota County (formerly Shannon County), and parts of Bennett and Jackson County in South Dakota. Oglala Lakota County has experienced persistent poverty, regularly landing in the top five poorest counties in the United States. On the Pine Ridge Reservation,

80% of people are unemployed and 50% are living below the federal poverty line. The per capita income is \$6,286. Life expectancy on the reservation is the lowest in the Western Hemisphere alongside Haiti. The infant mortality rate is five times the national average, and the rate of diabetes is 4 times the national average. There is a housing shortage on the reservation with a need for at least 4,000 more homes. The most jarring statistic is that youth here are at least five times more likely to commit suicide.

These realities exist due to historic injustice, and a severe lack of political, economic, physical and governmental infrastructure to increase the rate of development and change. Acknowledging these challenges and seeking a different reality for our community, we realized that it would take systemic change to bring an ecosystem of opportunity for the youth with whom we work and our community at large.

# THUNDER VALLEY COMMUNITY MAP



With the challenge of the ancestors “Don’t come from a place of fear, come from a place of hope”, we launched into hundreds of hours of community engagement. We were able to do this with support from a HUD Sustainable Communities Grant and from our partners, BNIM (a planning and design company). This process engaged youth, elders, parents, and political leaders, to come together to plan a vision for our future. We challenged our community to think about what was possible and not focus on the challenges that would get in the way. A story that always sticks out from our community engagement sessions is of one grandmother who said: That was the best meeting I have been to in my whole life”. When asked why, she responded:

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***“No one ever asked me what I wanted for my community or for my life. Things have been told to this community for a long time”.***

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That story is core to the work we continue to do today.

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**THE SOLUTIONS WE ARE CREATING COME FROM WITHIN THIS COMMUNITY ITSELF, THEY ARE NOT PRESCRIBED TO THIS COMMUNITY, AND THE WORK IS NOT LEAD BY OUTSIDE ENTITIES.**

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Providing an opportunity for people to come together as community members and create space to dream about what they wanted for the

future was an essential milestone to the creation of the organization. Another milestone was the collective effort to create a vision for our community through the process that led to our Regional Planning Document.

Through the listening and visioning sessions, we were able to create a regional sustainability plan for the Pine Ridge Reservation. The hope is that this document informs decision-making about economic development, youth programming, education, and other areas of development on the reservation. This document is called the Oyate Omniciye Regional Plan. “Oyate Omniciye” means circle meetings of the people, which is how this document came to be.

The initiatives included in this plan are:

1. **Regional Planning Office**
2. **Governance**
3. **Language**
4. **Youth and Young Ones**
5. **Model Community Development**
6. **Health and Wellness**
7. **Education, Training, and Outreach**
8. **Economy**
9. **Land Use**
10. **Environment and Ecosystems**
11. **Communication**
12. **Transportation**

The final document encompasses the aspirations of the whole community by capturing the words that residents spoke at community visioning meetings. Captured on a whiteboard for all to see, residents’ words were put together in one sentence to create our mission statement:

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**EMPOWERING LAKOTA YOUTH AND FAMILIES TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH, CULTURE, AND ENVIRONMENT OF OUR COMMUNITIES, THROUGH THE HEALING AND STRENGTHENING OF CULTURAL IDENTITY.**

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This mission continues to guide our work and our partnerships today.

In 2012, Thunder Valley CDC decided to focus on the fifth initiative, Model Community Development. Moving this forward through the development of a 34 acre Regenerative Community Development, this development (when in full build out) will include single family homes, multifamily homes, retail space, office space, playground, apartment building, community buildings, powwow grounds, artist live-work spaces, and a grocery store.

While this development is important in itself, our goal is to use it as “show me place” and a catalyst for regional change. Through this development, we have engaged the federal government, banks, and philanthropy in a way that has never happened before on Pine Ridge. We are developing a planned community, and creating examples of planned infrastructure, homeownership, and economic development.

Through this process, we are also creating an ecosystem of opportunity by using the 34 acres as a rallying point. We are intentionally disrupting the status quo by creating models of change that will overpower intergenerational poverty and build momentum towards regional equity. As an act of sovereignty, we are defining what regional equity looks like through a series of grassroots programs and initiatives which include: Workforce Devel-

opment, Homeownership and Housing, Regional Equity, Youth Leadership Development, Food Sovereignty, Lakota Language, and Social Enterprise. We continue to engage our community through these initiatives and through the planning of our Regenerative Community Development. These initiatives are for Thunder Valley CDC, separate from the initiatives of the Regional Plan, although many of the goals have similarity or overlap.

We decided to continue our Regional Equity Initiative work in 2015 by applying for the Promise Zone Designation. We were awarded the Promise Zone for the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and serve as the coordinating agency. We use this designation as a resource to leverage our Oyate Omniciye Regional plan. Our efforts are partnered with the Oglala Sioux Tribe, tribal programs, and other non-profit organizations throughout the reservation.

We have led the movement for creating equity on the Pine Ridge Reservation through our work engaging community members, non-profit leaders, political leaders, philanthropy, and federal partners. We know that change happens at the intersection of diverse sectors and disciplines and

our work encompasses that intersection as we facilitate a movement towards an equitable future. Together with our partners, we have created tangible change:

- **\$18.5 million dollars leveraged into the Pine Ridge Reservation**
- **18 Oglala Sioux Lakota Housing Authority Energy Efficient homes built, with support from the Rural Innovation Fund**
- **2 key reservation wide coalitions formed, focused on housing and food sovereignty**
- **400 kids impacted through summer programming supported by the Administration for Native Americans**
- **50 jobs created to date at Thunder Valley CDC**
- **Roads paved to increase connectivity between communities on the reservation**

Ultimately, Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation is building a regenerative community that goes beyond bricks and mortar—we are focused on creating our own pathway out

of poverty by building local skill and leadership capacity, exercising our sovereignty, and creating a space that empowers our community to realize its fullest potential.

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**ALL OUR WORK IS PLACE-BASED AND COMPREHENSIVE, CENTERED ON APPLYING INDIGENOUS INNOVATION IN A WAY THAT HONORS OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE AND IS ADAPTED FOR THE NEEDS AND VISION OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

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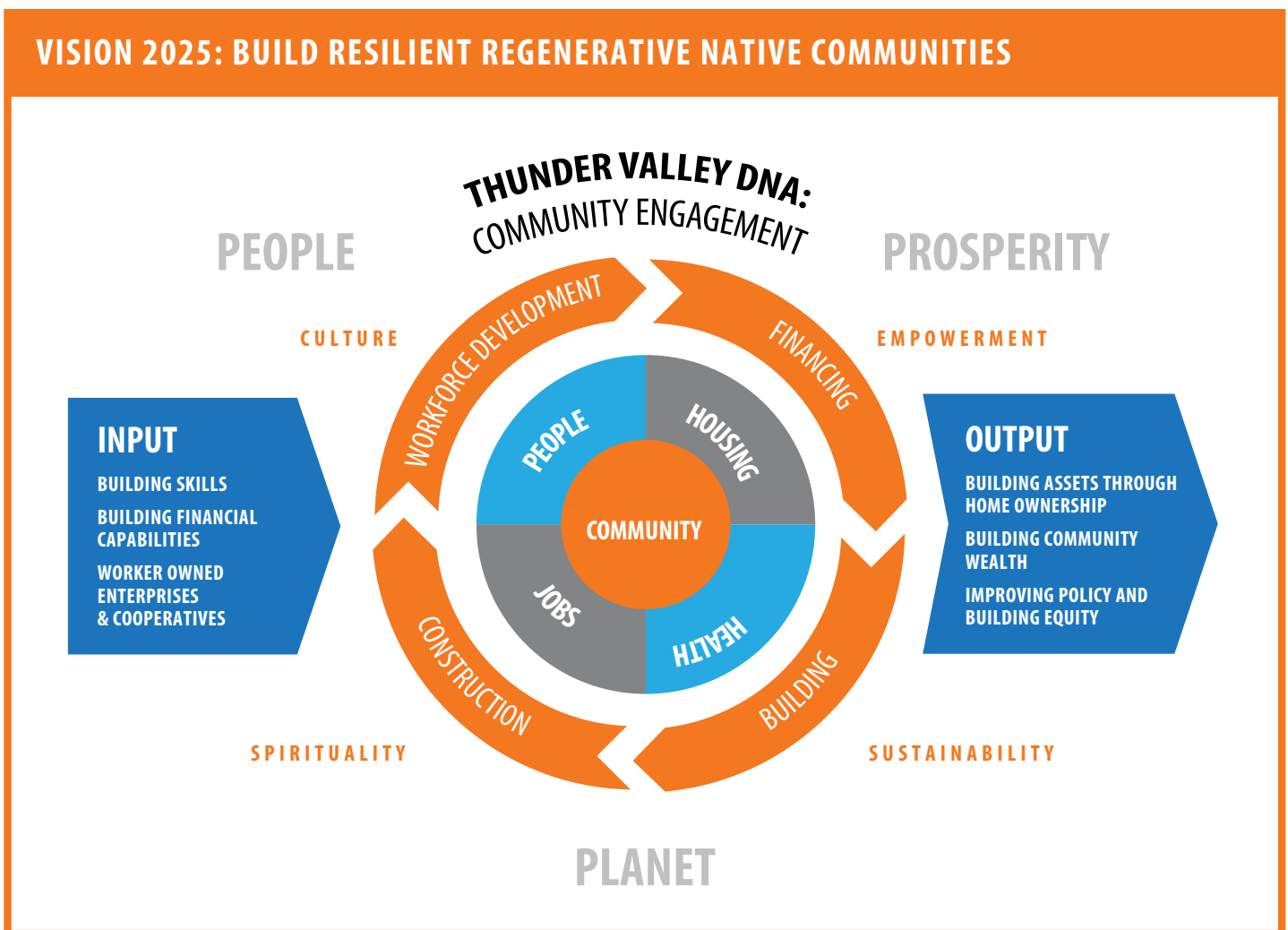
We also value evaluation and the ability to adapt to better serve our community. We evaluate our programs on their adherence to a sustainable, triple bottom line, which holds people, planet and prosperity in equal standing. We are producing repeatable, measurable models based on our values that can be utilized by other communities to inspire viral, transformative change.





# THEORY OF CHANGE

Thunder Valley CDC's theory of change is centered around creating systemic change to address root causes of poverty by creating an ecosystem of opportunity for our community. These solutions are community driven and lead to resilient and vibrant communities. Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation provides an ecosystem of opportunity that creates deliberate action and systemic solutions as large and comprehensive as the historic challenges facing our community. We are building our power to accomplish lasting change through dedicated grassroots practices, increasing the community's ability to flourish and setting an example for Native and rural communities everywhere.



# CASE STUDY EXPLORATION

## INCREASE THE ABILITY OF NETWORK PARTNERS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND PRACTICE A SHARED VISION

Thunder Valley CDC was started by a group of young men who wanted something different for their community. They were organizers, activists, and parents. They did not know how to do community development and were really unsure of what the future would bring. They did however have a shared vision for change. One community member that was involved in the early days stated:

“The first step [was] to really come together and say that some of these things aren’t acceptable to us. What could we do to not just complain, but to do something about it. Then, that pathway to action, to really understanding that we can’t do it alone, because it won’t be successful. We have to do a lot of these things together.”

Another element highlighted by those interviewed is funding that helped with creating partnerships. One of the partner organizations stated:

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*“Just like any relationship both parties have had to bring something to the table to benefit the other. Time and resources are very valuable to organizations and Thunder Valley CDC has helped elevate our work to new audiences and provide funding for us”.*

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Thunder Valley CDC has secured multiple grants which gave us the ability to re-grant funds to some partner organizations. This has helped strengthen partnership because it increases our partner’s ability to justify the time it takes to form partnerships. This is especially important in a rural area where the distance alone can add two hours of travel time for an in-person meeting. Our ability as an organization to leverage initiatives such as the Pine Ridge Promise Zone came up in partner interviews as well. One partner stated:

“Just helping create that process, many millions of new dollars have come to this community to build infrastructure, to build roads, to improve water and access to different opportunities like that wouldn’t have happened”.

While we have used the Promise Zone designation to create momentum for change and increased resources from the federal government, we need to continue to improve our ability to talk about it within the community. Some of our network partners highlighted that they don’t fully understand our work or what we are trying to do. Others also expressed confusion about, and did not have a clear understanding

of what, the Pine Ridge Promise Zone is or why we applied for it.

## MEASURE AND SHARE DATA TO GUIDE THE EFFORT

Thunder Valley CDC has worked to increase the amount of data about the community available on the reservation. To address the lack of data, we make an effort to collect reservation-wide data so that we can make data-driven decisions. We have this data available on our website and are working to make it more accessible to people in the community. We have done this over the past two years especially through key areas such as our Reservation Wide Survey, Oglala Lakota Local Food System Assessment, and a Housing Market Study. The Reservation Wide Survey was completed in 2016 with three main objectives: to understand Thunder Valley CDC’s impact on the reservation, to understand specific needs on the reservation, and to assess our programs in relation to the needs of people on the reservation. This survey will be conducted every five years to understand the evolution of our impact across the reservation on the systems that exist here. The survey was completed over a two-month period with Sweet Grass Consulting LLC, Thunder Valley employees, and Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation Evaluation Interns. The interns were local people that were hired and trained to conduct the surveys.

We conducted the Local Food System Assessment and Housing Market study in the same fashion.

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**IT IS IMPORTANT TO US TO BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY TO COLLECT DATA, THEREFORE A TRAINING ELEMENT FOR PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY IS PRESENT IN EACH OF THE ASSESSMENTS.**

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One theme that came up in discussions on data collection was balancing the importance of word of mouth conversations with data collection tools. Technology is a challenge for our community so using web-based data tools, such as Salesforce, has been a learning process with our partners. One of our community members stated that the best way to collect data in our community is by:

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*“Asking people directly through visiting sessions and community meetings. To ask people, What do you want? How are we doing’ and really evaluating ourselves and sharing that information back out there to be as transparent as we can”.*

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Transparency is another topic that came up often in the interviews. It is something that our partners and community members have stated time and time again as a value. A partner stated that:

*“A lot of that information is very useful to show need. You have to show that this is what my people want. There’s always got to be continuous input to that process of what our community said they wanted, why the need is there and proving that we need the resources. It also proves that work has been done and shows progress and lack of progress.”*

The community members talked about social media being a good resource for information. They also talked about wanting consistent updates:

*“It’s just good to know what’s happening. It doesn’t have to be all the time, but with the progress in regards to construction, are they hiring, when are they going to hire, what kind of projects are going on. Just being updated on different things. I know sometimes it’s hard to just stop and visit people, but being able to keep up on information through media, social media, email, webpages.”*

**INNOVATE AND IMPROVE THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHANGE EFFORT**

Thunder Valley CDC serves as convener for the Sustainable Homeownership Coalition, and Lakota Food Sovereignty Coalition and Promise Zone Working Groups. Throughout the interviews, Thunder Valley CDC’s role as a facilitator, the organization that actively brings groups together, was emphasized.



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***“[Thunder Valley CDC is] bringing people together, not dictating the process of the outcome, but really just the facilitator.” It hears some great voices that have bits and pieces of the puzzle and brings them to the table in a non-threatening environment, where people can share, where they do have a voice, and then really implement things together. It’s really powerful when we pull the trigger together. It has a lot more impact than just one organization doing something.” (Network partner)***

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Thunder Valley CDC is as an organization that is creating change and is actively leading the way as a change maker in the community. In reflecting on the reason for this, we realized that all of our interviews were with people who are from the community, whether they be a participant, staff at a network partner, or organization not within our network, and each spoke about a desire for change as the driving force in their work. One of the network partners stated:

“I grew up here. As I got a little bit older, I knew that I wanted to help my people. It’s just like a continuous thing of wanting to make change or help create change, and that’s why I’m here.”

The interviews revealed that Thunder Valley CDC is successful in bringing people together to act collectively on their long-held desire for change. One person stated:

“It was the first time living on the reservation that community people were asked what they wanted, and it wasn’t being dictated to them like ‘This is what we’re going to do and this is how we’re going to do it and you guys are going to fall in line!’ It was ‘What do YOU see? What do YOU want?’ It gave us a voice, so that our kids would benefit from it. I was really on board with it, because it would allow me to help create big changes that I wanted my sons to have that we didn’t have.”

One of the highlights in the conversations we had was about the importance of the youthful energy of the organization and the continued investment in the community’s youth. One community member stated:

“I saw the youth, the kids getting more involved and wanting to fix their community, or just kids having this positive change or this positive mind-frame of like how they want their communities to be, or how they want their lives to be, and it’s based off of them. Our youth are the ones who are going to be changing a lot of things in the future.”

The youth are continuously referred to as the ones who are the innovators of change. Thunder Valley CDC invests in the youth through youth leadership development and by hiring a relatively young staff. One network partner stated:

“There’s more activities in our community for the young people. Children, the young people, are being more involved in community discussions. No more are they the silent majority. I think that’s changed over the course of the last several years, because it’s the children’s voices that we’re seeking out, because they’re the ones who are going to inherit this, and we need to help them start building what they want.”

This statement reinforces the importance of people being asked what they want to see for the community and the importance of asking young



people to step up. Because this community has lacked investment and opportunities to be engaged to create its own change, the process of engaging the community, in itself, represents a crucial point of change.

## SUPPORT THE HUMAN ELEMENT OF CHANGE

Thunder Valley CDC has identified the mindset of community members and partners as the hardest element of change. One of our interviews with a community member sums up the situation:

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***“I think we need to focus on the strengths because in the media, everybody tells us what is wrong with us. We know what’s wrong with us, we know we’re one of the poorest counties in the nation. We know we have a high diabetes rate. We know we have a high alcoholism rate. We know we have a high suicide rate. We know these things are wrong with us, but a lot of times we don’t know what is right with us and what is good with us. I think we need to focus more on the strengths than anything else”.***

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This statement confirms the approach we have tried to take at Thunder Valley CDC, by coming from a place of power and opportunity instead of highlighting the tragedies in our community. Often, people frame the work that they do here based on deficits. Because we have chosen the opposite approach, many community members and other organizations are drawn to our work.

However, the opposite has also proven to be true, where other organizations are hesitant to work with us because we do operate in such a different framework. When asked about people that are not convinced there needs to be change, one community member stated:

“There’s always going to be naysayers in a community, certain people that tired something and it didn’t work, and maybe they’re a little bit jaded about different things, different strategies. I think that everybody has a passion for change, and of bringing opportunities to the community. There’s just always that human nature on different approaches and ways of doing things. Everybody has a different process. The more we realize that it’s okay to be different, that we can still get work done.”

One Thunder Valley CDC employee often states: “This is a show me place, people have to see it to believe”.



We learned that there were two key points that demonstrated to people across the board that change was happening. One was the growth in the number of Thunder Valley CDC staff. While the organization has experienced some periods of growth throughout the years, a constant period of growth began in 2014, resulting in close to 50 employees (starting from 4). This immense growth has increased the community's knowledge that change is happening and that the organization listened to the community.

Our Workforce Development Program is another key proof of change. Through this program, the community can see young adults who were not previously employed take part in a program to construct homes for families in the community.

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**THE VISUAL IMAGE OF DRIVING PAST A FIELD AND SEEING YOUNG PEOPLE WORKING ON HOMES THAT DID NOT PREVIOUSLY EXIST HAS BEEN VERY POWERFUL FOR OUR COMMUNITY TO SEE, INCREASING THE BELIEF THAT CHANGE IS HAPPENING.**

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## **USE NETWORKS TO SUSTAIN, SCALE, AND SPREAD**

We have been successful in the spread of our work, particularly with our partner organizations through our Sustainable Home Ownership Project (SHOP). These partners include Lakota Funds, Lakota Federal Credit Union, Oglala Sioux Lakota Housing Authority, Wild Horse Butte CDC, and Oglala Sioux Partnership for Housing. With these partners, we have worked successfully with several families who attended financial literacy courses, took out a credit builder loan, qualified for an Individual Development (savings) Account, and finally qualified for a mortgage over the course of one year. By bringing each of the organizations together for monthly meetings, we were able to promote the idea of homeownership and demonstrate how working together makes it possible to have shared impact on the opportunities for homeownership on the reservation. One of the SHOP participants is now building his home at Thunder Valley CDC's Regenerative Community Development.

We are also scaling and spreading our model through our work with organizations like South Segment Community Development Corporation and Standing Rock Community Development Corporation, both in North Dakota. In the future, we would like to use the case study framework to interview our partners at organizations in nearby communities to gain more insight into our ability to scale and share Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation's model for regenerative community development.

One of our partner organizations described a need for growing our effort, stating:

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***"Definitely there needs to be more stakeholders involved, like tribal government, and more intimate relationships to really help people get into new homes. Just in that arena itself, I've witnessed partners getting together, who at one point maybe didn't need to be together. For our people to see that allies can be created and help create some good services that has an effect on the overall perspective of our people. To not feel so much like a victim, but to feel like 'Hey, there's an opportunity there if I go after it'."***

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We recognize that Thunder Valley CDC needs to continue to reach out to partner organizations to grow the network. In order to be successful, we also need to increase our capacity and the capacity of the other organizations. As previously stated, time is the most valuable resource that we all lack. Using technology can improve this. As stated by one of our community members: "There's a lot of tools out there in the IT world that can help us close in the great distance that we have on Pine Ridge. A lot of meetings could be Skyped in, technology can be utilized to gather information about our community and use that information to make things better. We need our young people to show us older folks what these tools are, how you use them." Technology is a challenge in this community because people lack access to the tools and the knowledge of how to use what is available. Many organizations still operate with a fax machine and paper mail. This is a challenge when trying to spread information and engage new partners.

# CONCLUSION

Partnership is an important part of creating change on the reservation. Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation has helped leverage funding and resources for partner organizations and started to break down some silos that exist. We still have room to improve when it comes to data collection and communicating information regularly out to the community, areas that we have worked to improve in the past year.

Our organization believes in full transparency and we want to continue to be creative about ways to bring information back to our community. This feedback about the desire for more regular updates is helpful for us to think about ways that we can show and celebrate smaller victories in our work along the way. Additionally, it is important to note that these interviews were done before our Reservation Wide Survey process was completed. We plan to share back the information we learned from those surveys to the community as a starting point to get people engaged in getting data feedback.

The interviews also helped us to realize that our community sees our role as convener and our focus on doing deep community engagement as two of the most important strengths of our organization. Both of these were defined as important to our community, perhaps because there are no other organizations across the reservation playing that role so intentionally.

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***“What we’ve really done at Thunder Valley really provides an opportunity for people to be part of an action oriented solution process, but a person has to meet that half way. Putting a comfort level into what we do that the community feels like they can participate, feels like their voice is acknowledged, and that’s part of the Lakota value system, to acknowledge on another.”***  
***(Community member)***

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The role of the convener has been especially important in our role as Coordinating Agency for the Pine Ridge Promise Zone. Our organization has worked to facilitate the working groups that identify local priorities and needs as part of the Pine Ridge Promise Zone. While we are not always an active participating partner in the working groups, we do actively bring these groups together and help facilitate the connections with our federal partners.

Having the ability to take a step back and see the big picture of planning efforts across the reservation helps us to play a connector role to move Promise Zone goals forward. One example of how our work with Promise Zone played an important role in long term planning is the Oglala Sioux Tribes 7 Years for 7 Generations initiative for community water upgrades in communities across the reservation. The tribe was able to receive a grant for almost \$7 million for this project. They acknowledge that this funding wouldn’t have been received without the support of the Promise Zone work that has happened on the reservation.

The vision and momentum that Thunder Valley CDC has created has been an important movement on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

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**A KEY REASON FOR THUNDER VALLEY CDC'S SUCCESS TO THIS POINT IS BASED ON IT'S FOUNDING BY PEOPLE IN THIS COMMUNITY AND THE CONTINUED LEADERSHIP BY PEOPLE IN THIS COMMUNITY.**

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Thunder Valley CDC remains committed to building a regenerative community that goes beyond bricks and mortar—we are focused on creating our own pathway out of poverty by building local skill and leadership capacity, exercising our sovereignty, and creating a space that empowers our community to realize its fullest potential. We are steadfast in our focus on increasing our community's ability to flourish and setting an example for Native and rural communities everywhere.

Community engagement, specifically with youth, has been a crucial part of building power within the community to create change, and create a vision for the future. The importance of asking the community what they want to see cannot be understated. This has created space for people to be engaged in programming, be critical, and ask questions. Ultimately, this is what is driving the Ecosystem of Opportunity we are creating here, because we are building power from a grassroots level.





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We'd like to thank all of you who took the time to participate in these interviews so we can better evaluate and understand the impact of the work we do and the trends that made it possible. Thank you for your commitment to building a resilient community.



# METHODOLOGY

In total, 7 interviews were conducted in June-August 2016. Interviews were conducted with the following stakeholder groups: Partner Agency (2), Personally Affiliated as a community resident (3), Out of network partners (2). We recruited the interviewees through personal invitations or phone calls. Interviews were conducted at Thunder Valley CDC and generally lasted one hour. The interviewer used the questionnaires developed by the Population Change Learning Community. One member of the Thunder Valley CDC staff analyzed the interviews based on key words, phrases, and trends and five domain areas adopted by the Population Change Learning Community.

# POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY

## Purpose

- Create a learning environment that accelerates learning and progress, and builds camaraderie and shared purpose, across various sites and communities working to improve population outcomes within their respective geographies.
- Connect Community/Initiative Teams with researchers, innovators and problem solvers (from various sectors) to further inform the learning process, overcome barriers and improve local actions.
- Identify and improve the necessary capacities to be successful in this work - including the organizing strategies, operational structures and measurement system needed to achieve population level success.

## Learning Areas

- How did we create the conditions that lead to positive change?
- Are we getting better results?

## Case Study Design Process and Approach

The goal of the case study is to better understand the practice of how best to respond to the on-going development and delivery of the support needed for multi-sector place based endeavors, informed by the collective experience of those actually responsible for the place based work. Local teams entered into this process with a commitment to ask questions and gather the perspectives of participating agencies, residents and others, that would allow for a deeper level of understanding of the full range of functions

and capacities of support entities for multi-sector place based efforts.

While what was learned through the sharing of our experience in this role, and from the stories of those involved with us, is intended to benefit each local effort, we believe the case studies can also contribute to other's collective efforts on behalf of children, youth, families and communities. To that end, the Population Change Learning Community has adopted a two-phase approach for the case study process.

In phase one, we sought to document the collective experience of those actually responsible for and involved in the local place-based work. Each case study is intended to be a feedback source for those sites participating in the Population Change Learning Community. The process provided the opportunity for those involved to reflect on and make sense of their individual and collective action. The findings from each locale allow us to articulate the on-the-ground experiences of the support entity, or entities, that provides one or more support functions. By relying on local stakeholders to share their experiences and perspectives, and make meaning of those insights, the aim is to strengthen our shared understanding of the elements of effectiveness for those supporting multi-sector place based endeavors. Through our use of a guided exploration of what has happened and what has been learned from those responsible for supporting a place-based endeavor, the Population Change Learning Community has now generated 9 site-specific case studies.

In phase two, these 9 site-specific case studies serve as source documents with which to collec-

tively analyze place based work. Sites within the Population Change Learning Community participate in other well recognized place based efforts such as Promise Neighborhoods, StriveTogether, Working Cities Challenge, IHI SCALE initiative, Purpose Built Neighborhoods, United Way, Avenues of Change in British Columbia, Mobilizing Action for Resilient Communities (MARC), among others. Each of these endeavors have been informed or influenced by at least one, if not many more, theories or frameworks on how to change at a neighborhood or community level. By applying some of these different theories or frameworks on how to drive community or systems change, this subsequent analysis of the collective work of the 9 sites will provide new perspectives for the sites within the Population Change Learning Community to deepen their learning, as well as provide information and insight on the support role to the larger field of population based community initiatives.

For more information regarding this Case Study or the Population Change Learning Community, please contact Alexis Moreno, Case Study Coordinator at [alexisgeemoreno@gmail.com](mailto:alexisgeemoreno@gmail.com) or Patricia Bowie, Population Change Learning Community Project Lead at [patriciabowie@me.com](mailto:patriciabowie@me.com).

# DOMAINS EXPLORED WITHIN THE CASE STUDY

## INCREASE THE ABILITY OF NETWORK PARTNERS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND PRACTICE A SHARED VISION

### Information was gathered about:

- Impetus for working together
- Initial goals
- Membership criteria and member roles/responsibilities
- Network coordination
- Development of a shared vision and guiding principles
- Necessary knowledge and skill sets
- Decision making processes

## MEASURE AND SHARE DATA TO GUIDE THE EFFORT

### Information was gathered about:

- Local insights generated through data
- Motivations for using data
- Data sharing processes
- Use of data
- Additional data needed
- Resident involvement in data-related efforts

## INNOVATE AND IMPROVE THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHANGE EFFORT

### Information was gathered about:

Information was sought about how and what changes, improvements and innovations happened throughout the effort:

- Major phases and developments
- Most significant changes
- Detecting a need for change
- Taking initiative to make a change
- Moving through a change process
- Roles of partners and missing partners
- Results of change efforts
- Inventions and innovations
- Enablers and inhibitors of change

## SUPPORT THE HUMAN ELEMENT OF CHANGE

### Information was gathered about:

Information was asked about the different aspects of working collectively and the various resources and tools used to support the effort:

- Relationships
- Diversity
- Asset vs. problem orientation
- Conflict Resolution
- Managing emotions

- Leadership
- Funding
- Technology

## USE NETWORKS TO SUSTAIN, SCALE, AND SPREAD

### Information was gathered about:

Information was sought about the ways the effort has been sustained and the ideas or actions scaled or spread throughout the network and the community:

- Spreading the vision
- Scaling the efforts
- Spreading the efforts
- Sustaining or perpetuating the efforts
- Specific role of the support/operating entity in scaling, spreading, and sustaining
- Functioning as a Learning Community
- Networking beyond the local community