

ABLE Change Process

Tools and resources for community systems change



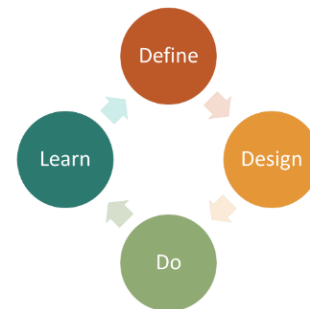
The ABLe Change Framework is a model designed by Drs. Pennie Foster-Fishman and Erin Watson to help communities more effectively address complex social problems and achieve transformative community change.

The ABLe Change approach engages communities in the following 8-step community problem-solving process. This guide includes tools and resources to support communities in pursuing each of these 8 steps.

Communities launching new change efforts may find it most useful to start with step 1 in this process. Other communities that have already initiated their efforts may find it more useful to start with a step later in the process.

Remember the 8 steps are part of an ongoing action learning cycle (define, design, do, learn). When communities reach step 8 of the process, they will revisit step 1 to clarify and “redefine” local problems and opportunities as the world changes (e.g., a global pandemic emerges). This helps ensure problem-solving and action efforts remain responsive and relevant to local needs.

| ABLE Process | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Define | 1 Define a Shared Vision |
| | 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 Support Effective Implementation |
| Learn | 8 Learn for Continuous Improvement |



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Step I: Define a Shared Vision

The first step in the ABLe Process is to define a Shared Vision of the changes the community wants to bring about for itself.

A Shared Vision describes population-level outcomes (e.g., obesity rates, homelessness), community conditions (e.g., access to affordable housing, livable wage jobs, transit, etc.), and related local inequities community members have prioritized for change.

A Shared Vision/Targeted Problem can help your community...

| | |
|--|---|
| Raise Critical Consciousness | A Shared Visioning process can increase people’s critical consciousness about the community system conditions getting in the way of improving local outcomes and inequities, and help them become more motivated to change these conditions. ⁴ |
| Develop Shared Outcomes | A Shared Vision can help communities develop shared outcomes and a shared measurement to guide local change efforts and promote mutually accountability for the collective work. |
| Design and Align Diverse Strategies | A Shared Vision can help communities design and align a diverse range of strategies (across ecological layers) to address the root causes of local problems/inequities. |
| Promote Action | A Shared Vision can reduce ambiguity around what to take action on and clarify what roles people can take to support the change. ⁵ |

The Shared Vision informs all other steps in the ABLe process and will ultimately guide strategy design and action.

[ABLe Video Series: What is a Shared Vision?](#)

Brief video describing the purpose and benefits of creating a Shared Vision.

[Example Shared Vision Visual](#)

Example Shared Vision visual illustrating different vision elements related to health equity.



Facilitate a Shared Visioning Process

Shared visioning is a process that starts with gathering the voices and perspectives of diverse stakeholders across the community - including local residents – about the changes they want to bring about, and continues developing over time with the additional perspectives, data, and emerging goals.

There are many ways to facilitate a shared visioning process. The process you design should fit your needs and draw upon the types of group processes that typically work the best in the community.

[ABLE Video Series: How to Develop a Shared Vision](#)

Brief video describing ideas for how to develop a Shared Vision in your community.



[Example Shared Visioning Process](#)

Example facilitation guide for engaging stakeholders in a shared visioning process.

[Example Shared Vision Talking Points](#)

Example talking points you can use to tell people about the Shared Vision, and how they can get involved in supporting local efforts to pursue the vision.

Use disaggregated data to prioritize inequities for change

Engage your community in defining outcomes related to their Shared Vision and using disaggregated data to identify relevant inequities to target for change. Note: you will explore why these inequities are happening in step 3 of the ABLe process, as this is important to inform strategy and action.

[Defining Targeted Outcomes and Inequities](#)

Planning guide to help define specific outcomes related to your shared vision and gather local data on inequities related to these outcomes.

[Finding Data on Local Inequities](#)

Planning guide to help locate disaggregated data on your targeted outcomes.

[Inequity Synthesis Template](#)

Template to summarize data on local inequities so it is easy for stakeholders to understand and use within a shared visioning process.

Additional Resources and Links:

[Counting a Diverse Nation: Disaggregating Data on Race and Ethnicity to Advance a Culture of Health](#)

Recommendations for how to find, use, and promote disaggregated data. Source: Policy Link

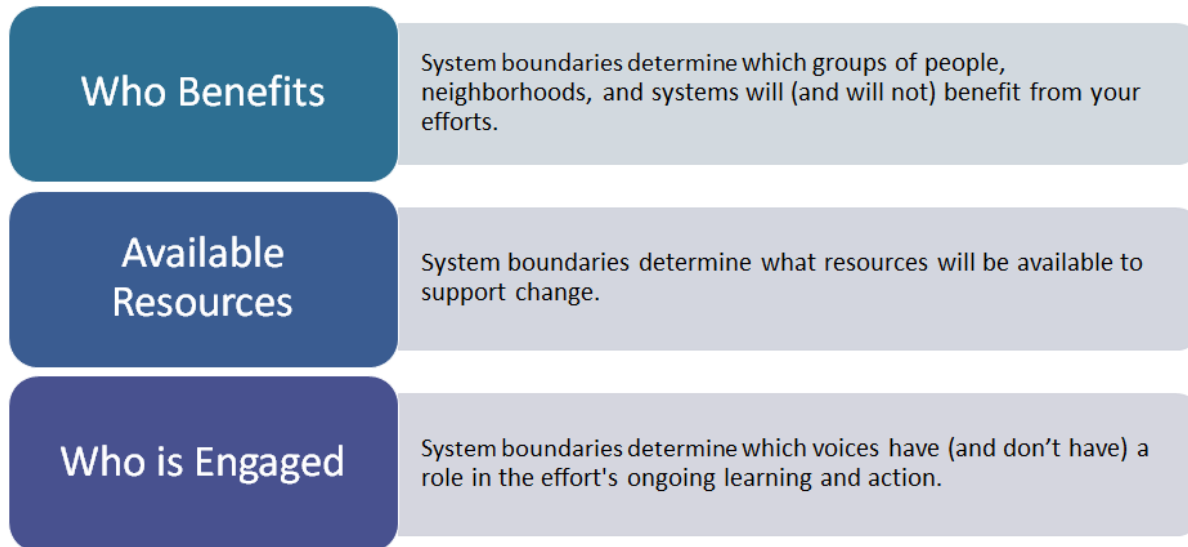
[By the Numbers: A Race for Results](#)

Case study on why the collection, analysis and use of race and ethnicity data should be an integral part of any strategy, initiative or legislative agenda affecting children, families and communities. Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation

Step 2: Determine System Boundaries

Once your community has defined its Shared Vision, 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 can be one of the most transformative processes within a change effort because these boundaries determine:^{6,7}



While most efforts define system boundaries at the beginning of their initiative, it is important to continually revisit these boundaries over time to decide if you need to expand them given what you are learning about your Shared Vision goals and what is going on in your community.

Identify relevant perspectives

Engage a range of diverse stakeholder perspectives (see visual on right) to help understand and address your Shared Vision goals, as this can lead to a better understanding of local needs and more effective solutions.

Make sure to engage local residents directly experiencing inequities related to the Shared Vision!

[Identifying Relevant Perspectives Tool](#)
Tool to help identify which stakeholders still need to be engaged to pursue your Shared Vision.



Determine engagement approach

Stakeholders can play a variety of roles in your change efforts including providing input (e.g., on community conditions, strategy ideas, etc.), influencing decision-making within the collaborative (e.g., set priorities), and taking action to pursue the Shared Vision goals.

Consider what roles stakeholders should play in your efforts, then select which engagement methods will work best given these roles, your local community context, and your capacity (e.g., staff, community partnerships, time, resources, etc.).

[ABLE Example Resident Engagement Approaches](#)

Summary of example engagement approaches for gathering resident input, engaging residents as partners in decision-making, and supporting residents in taking action.

[ABLE Photovoice Guide](#)

Bring Photovoice to your community engagement effort using this easy to use guide.

[Recruiting for a Resident Action Team](#)

How to develop and recruit for a resident action team to help pursue your Shared Vision.

[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.



Additional Resources and Links:

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

Tips and resources for how to meaningfully engage community residents directly experiencing targeted problems or inequities. *Source: Community Tool Box*

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

Resources to support the engagement of residents from diverse cultural backgrounds. *Source: Community Tool Box*

Step 3: Understand the Community System

Once your community has defined a Shared Vision and who to engage within their efforts, engage diverse stakeholders in understanding the community system conditions or root causes affecting your Shared Vision goals.

The following are 6 common community systemic root causes that can either support or get in the way of your Shared Vision goals.

[ABLE Video Series: Enhancing Community Problem Solving with Root Cause Analysis](#)

Brief video describing how to understand the systemic root causes affecting your goals.

[Root Cause Analysis Template](#)

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



Scan the system

A system scan is a process to systematically gather information from diverse stakeholders about the community system conditions affecting your Shared Vision goals, and possible solutions. A system scan can be used to identify systemic root causes to target for change, assets to use within your efforts, and ways to support implementation.

A system scan can draw on a variety of different methods and approaches to collect information. Use the following resources to help carry out your system scan.

[System Scan Design Guide](#)

Step by step guide for designing a system scan process in your community.

[System Scan Question Menu](#)

Example questions you can use as part of a system scan to understand system root causes affecting your goals and outcomes.

[System Scan Methods Decision Matrix](#)

How to determine which system scanning methods are right for your efforts based on local needs, resources, and capacities.

[Equity Impact Assessment](#)

A process to help assess the equity impacts of your efforts during any phase of the change process. See pages 2 and 6-12 for questions about understanding community system conditions.

No matter what methods you choose, help stakeholders gather detailed information about the system. Detailed information is more actionable and can better guide strategy design, implementation, and continuous improvement efforts.

[Cheat Sheet for Getting Actionable Information](#)

Use this cheat sheet to help gather detailed information during conversations to guide strategy design.

[System Scan Group Facilitation Tips](#) and [Facilitation Cheat Sheet](#)

Use these tools to help facilitate small group conversations in your system scan.

[System Scan Note-Taking Tips for Scribes](#)

Note takers can use this tip sheet to help capture detailed notes during system scan conversations.

Make sense of system information

Once stakeholders have collected SOME system scan data, engage diverse stakeholders in making sense of it. The very process of making sense of system scan data can be transformative for some stakeholders! It promotes stakeholder buy-in and motivation to take action, helps the collaborative interpret data, and raises people's consciousness about issues within the system.

[ABLE Sense-Making Guide](#)

Step by step process to organize and make sense out of your system scan data to prepare for strategy design.

[System Scan Data Organizing Tool](#)

Tool to organize and prepare data on root causes for the sense-making process.

[Summary of System Scan Priorities](#)

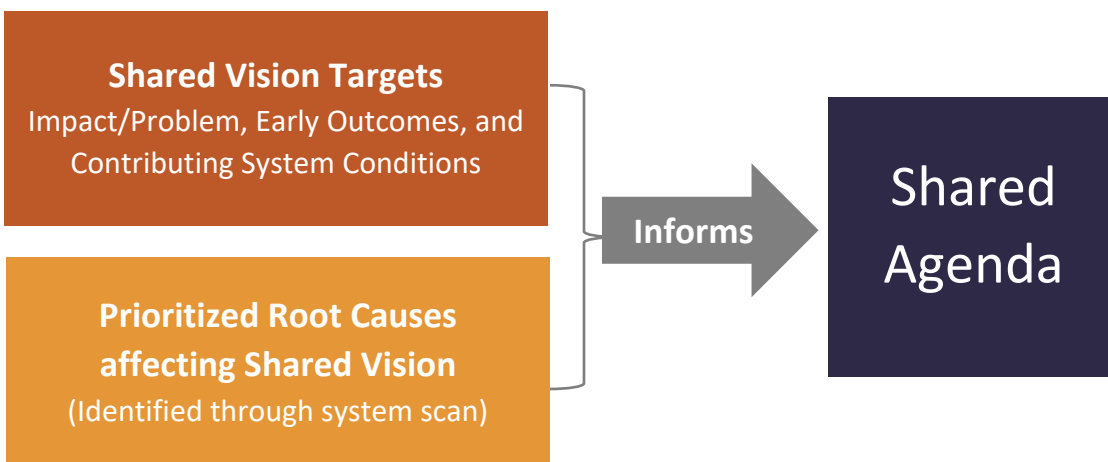
A template to help summarize the prioritized root causes emerging out of the System Scanning process.

Step 4: Adopt a shared agenda

Once you have engaged diverse partners in understanding the community system related to your Shared Vision goals, turn prioritized root causes into a Shared Agenda. A Shared Agenda helps stakeholders align their efforts around a prioritized set of change targets and can be used to guide strategy design.⁸

A Shared Agenda is powerful because it:

- brings together stakeholder groups to target the same community changes (e.g., access, coordination, health environments, etc.) but allows these groups to pursue unique actions from their particular role or system perspective.
- creates a common language to guide the work.
- provides the same agenda and similar meeting format across stakeholder groups, facilitating movement between and across groups.



Shared Agendas are living documents that are constantly revised given what is being learned and the changes happening in the community.

[Shared Agenda Template](#)

Summarizes prioritized change targets to help align action and promote accountability.

[Example Shared Agenda and Facilitator Notes](#)

An example of how to use a Shared Agenda to help facilitate meetings.

Step 5: Design powerful strategies

Powerful strategies shift the status quo and bring about a community's Shared Vision. They are designed to change community system conditions like policies, roles, connections, narratives, power dynamics, and purpose in ways that promote local health equity and wellbeing.^{1,8}



Engage stakeholders in designing powerful strategies

Engage diverse stakeholders across the community in designing powerful strategies to tackle root causes, address multiple outcomes, disrupt the status quo, promote equity, and permeate ecological layers.

[Strategy Design Template](#)

A template to capture ideas that will help your community better address prioritized root causes when designing strategies.

[Strategy Design Check List](#) and [Equity Strategy Design Checklist](#)

Check lists of key strategy approaches to help improve the power of your strategies.

[Example Strategy Resource](#)

List of example systems change strategies addressing powerful system leverage points

[Equity Impact Assessment](#)

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

Anticipate and address implementation needs

Ask questions during planning meetings to help your collaborative design ways to address implementation needs *before launching their strategies*, and add these ideas right into their strategy package.

[Implementation Cheat Sheet](#)

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

[Preparing Strategies for Action Resource Guide](#)

Examples of how to build conditions to support the implementation of your strategies.

[Equity Impact Assessment](#)

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

Identify strategy outcomes

Another way to support effective implementation is to identify outcomes you hope to achieve as a result of your strategies so you can track whether you are bringing about these changes over time. This information will help guide decision-making about whether to continue, adapt, or scale up your efforts

[Defining and Tracking Outcomes](#)

Tips and recommendations for defining and tracking outcomes related to your strategies.

Step 6. Promote Quick Wins

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.^{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



Help stakeholders initiate quick wins

Stakeholders can initiate quick win actions to both carry out their strategies **and** support the overall change effort. For example, quick wins can occur at any project phase:

- **DEFINE:** Quick wins focus on revealing and understanding local problems and inequities (e.g., gathering data on root causes, creating data summaries, etc.)
- **DESIGN:** Quick wins focus on designing strategies, programs, or other efforts (e.g., finding example strategies, gathering input on strategy ideas, developing strategy materials like protocols or new policies)
- **DO:** Quick wins focus on carrying out strategies (e.g., put new policy in place) and supporting implementation (e.g., building buy in, training staff in how to use new practices, etc.)
- **LEARN:** Quick wins focus on assessing the progress made (e.g., gathering rapid feedback to see if strategies are making a difference) and identifying next steps

[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.

[Overcoming Common barriers to Action](#)

Tips and recommendations for how groups can overcome common barriers to initiating action.

Create actionable meeting minutes

Another way to support quick win actions is to clearly identify action items in your meeting minutes, and include enough detail so stakeholders know exactly how to carry out their actions.

[ABLE Meeting Minute Template](#)

Example of how to organize meeting minutes to align with Shared Agenda and support action.

[ABLE Meeting Minute Example](#)

Example filled in meeting minutes.

Provide behind the scenes support

Stakeholders who volunteer to initiate quick wins often need support behind the scenes to actually carry out these actions. Providing support between meetings can help ensure quick wins are carried out and momentum continues to build to move the change effort forward.⁹

[Quick Win Coaching Tool](#)

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

Track action

Tracking quick win actions over time can help the collaborative make decisions about where to focus their energy. 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 and inform decision-making.³⁴

[Systems Change Action Record Template](#)

Tool to document actions and outcomes emerging from initiated systems change strategies; use to promote shared accountability.

[Example Systems Change Action Record](#)

Sample action record tool with example actions and outcomes emerging from initiated systems change strategies.

[Quick Wins Tracking Database](#)

Database to help track and plot (using run charts) actions to pursue the Shared Vision; use to illuminate gaps in action around particular change targets, promote shared accountability, and document progress.

Consider a 100 Day Challenge

Some communities promote quick win actions by launching a 100-Day Challenge, a process that brings together diverse community members to focus on achieving ambitious and concrete results within 100 days or less.

[100 Day Challenge Planning Guide](#)

Guide to plan and implement a 100 Day Challenge effort to engage stakeholders in initiating action to pursue shared goals.

Step 7: Promote effective 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.^{10, 11}



No matter how well you anticipate and address implementation barriers prior to launching your strategies, unknowable implementation issues will always emerge. For example, critical partners may not learn about your strategies or implement them effectively, or efforts may not reach and benefit targeted people or settings.

Gather rapid feedback on implementation progress

Effective change efforts gather rapid feedback on whether their strategies are being implemented effectively. When implementation issues emerge, understand why they are happening and design ways to overcome them.

[Plan to Gather Implementation Feedback](#)

Guide to gather feedback on the implementation of local strategies. This information can help you rapidly identify and address emerging barriers to keep your implementation efforts on track.

[Implementation Scanning Tool](#)

Simple tool to help identify emerging system barriers to your efforts.

[Assessing Program/Effort Reach Worksheet](#)

Questions to help assess to what extent local programs and efforts are reaching priority populations.

Step 8: Learn for continuous improvement

The final step of the ABLe process is to embed an action learning process and infrastructure to promote continuous learning and improvement.

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

- DEFINE local problems and why they are happening
- DESIGN innovative strategies to address those problems
- DO or carry out action
- LEARN about whether actions are starting to make 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. This process can be used to improve the success of current strategies *and* to identify and address emerging needs and opportunities.

Action learning is also iterative, meaning you will go through each step over and over again as you problem-solve issues in your community.



Use action learning to improve the success of current strategies

Effective change efforts gather rapid feedback on whether their strategies are *starting* to make a difference in outcomes.

If you LEARN that your efforts are not making a difference – or are unintentionally disadvantaging certain groups or making the situation worse – immediately DEFINE why this is happening so you can DESIGN real-time adjustments to improve your success. If you LEARN that your efforts *are* starting to make a difference, again DEFINE why they are working so you can DESIGN ways to sustain and scale up the successful changes.

[Gathering Rapid Feedback on Outcomes](#)

Tips and recommendation for how to rapidly gather feedback on whether strategies and efforts are starting to make a difference in your outcomes.

[Equity Impact Assessment](#)

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

Use action learning to identify and address new issues and opportunities

No matter how successful your efforts are at shifting outcomes, new community problems (e.g., new housing shortage) and opportunities (e.g., new community assets) will always emerge over time.

Engage stakeholders in an action learning process to identify and problem-solve these emerging issues and opportunities. This will ensure your efforts are responsive to

[Identifying and Addressing Emerging Issues](#)

Simple questions you can ask during meetings to identify and address emerging issues related to your Shared Vision.

[Action Learning Cheat Sheet](#)

Simple facilitation questions you can use to promote action learning for continuous improvement process.

[Example Shared Agenda Items & Facilitation Questions](#)

Example shared agenda items & facilitation questions to help use an action learning process with your group.

Adopt a Systemic Action Learning Infrastructure

To enhance learning and action, many communities are adopting Systemic Action Learning infrastructures that engage “parallel and interacting” affinity teams.¹⁰

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.

| 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 |

[Designing a Systemic Action Learning Infrastructure Guide](#)

Key processes for designing an initiative or meeting infrastructure to promote action learning and active engagement across diverse stakeholders.

The insights and actions emerging across affinity teams and other community groups can be woven together into a cohesive change effort. Weaving creates information feedback loops that help improve decision-making and system responsiveness,¹⁵ and aligns action and learning to maximize impact and avoid interference.

[Weaving Cheat Sheet](#)

Facilitation tool to help integrate information and learning across groups both within and outside your initiative to promote a more cohesive change effort.

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