

CLACKAMAS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Policy Session Worksheet

Presentation Date: Aug. 10, 2021 **Approx. Start Time:** 3:00 **Approx. Length:** 30 min.
Presentation Title: Community Prosperity Initiative Final Report
Department: County Administration
Presenters: Cindy Becker, County Administration
Other Invitees: Bridget Dazey, Clackamas Workforce Partnership

WHAT ACTION ARE YOU REQUESTING FROM THE BOARD?

No action. This is an information update.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Overview

The Board of County Commissioners identified poverty and access to healthy food as one of their priorities in 2019. In doing so, they established Equity Pilot Areas - known as the Community Prosperity Collaboratives - where the county could work with communities to reduce poverty and food insecurity.

The project was designed to engage residents, businesses, social service providers, civic organizations and government agencies to work together to come up with real, actionable plans to help community members move from poverty to financial stability. It was also based on a strong equity foundation to ensure many voices were heard in developing solutions.

The three selected pilot areas – called Design Labs - were Estacada, Canby and Milwaukie.

In addition to the labs, a Community Resource Team (CRT) was established to provide input and support to the project. Members included county departments, the community college, Clackamas Workforce Partnership, and cities.

Along with the contractor, Athena Group, it's important to note that the Clackamas Workforce Partnership, Ant Farm and Todos Juntos had key coordinating roles with the local labs over the last year of the project.

Following is a brief summary of each community's issue areas:

- Canby focused on developing a more welcoming atmosphere for Hispanic and Latinx community members among community providers. They created a checklist and customer survey for agencies to use.
- Estacada focused on internet access and training to use online tools, particularly among Hispanic and Latinx communities. They also worked on community building and emergency response because of the significant impact of the wildfires and unique community concerns.

- Milwaukie focused on access to childcare and developed a roadmap tool for employer-sponsored childcare.

Challenges

- Timing (The best laid plans...) All of the disasters – pandemic, fires, ice storm – coupled with the events surrounding George Floyd’s death, made it extremely difficult to meet, even remotely. Since so many people were directly or indirectly affected, it was also hard for some people to focus due to trauma and fatigue.
- County Role: The County was a convener and a partner rather than a director and driver which is different than its typical role. As such it was challenging at times to figure out how to best support the Design Labs.
- Broad Topics: Trying to address poverty and food access was too complex and overwhelming for the labs. As such, it took quite a while to narrow the focus and ensure ongoing participant engagement.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- Simplify the process and the focus
- Continue building relationships and local trust
- Identify opportunities for shared leadership
- Clearly define County roles
- Connect the projects with County work, especially with the Office of Equity and Inclusion
- Utilize the tool kit for future community engagement

Reports

The contractor’s report is attached. In addition, they developed a community engagement toolkit for use by the County.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (current year and ongoing): N/A

Is this item in your current budget?	YES	NO
What is the cost? \$	What is the funding source?	

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

How does this item align with your Department’s Strategic Business Plan goals?
 This initiative was one of the Board’s 2020 Strategic Initiatives in the Grow a Vibrant Economy priority area

How does this item align with the County’s Performance Clackamas goals?

This initiative engages staff from several departments who are working to help people move out of poverty.

LEGAL/POLICY REQUIREMENTS:

N/A

PUBLIC/GOVERNMENTAL PARTICIPATION:

This initiative was locally-driven and included representatives from local governments, businesses, education, and people with lived experience from the three selected communities.

OPTIONS:

N/A

RECOMMENDATION:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

Final Report

SUBMITTED BY:

Division Director/Head Approval _____

Department Director/Head Approval _____

County Administrator Approval _____

For information on this issue or copies of attachments, please contact Cindy Becker @ 503-930-6894

CLACKAMAS

COMMUNITY PROSPERITY
COLLABORATIVES

FINAL REPORT

June 2021

Prepared for:



Clackamas County, Project Sponsor



Prepared by:

Meagan Picard, Partner and Principal Consultant, The Athena Group

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: LESSONS TO REMEMBER AND RECOMMENDATIONS	3
DESIGN LAB PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS.....	4
DESIGN LAB PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS	5
SYSTEM SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS.....	5
GRATITUDE, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND NEXT STEPS.....	6
CHAPTER 1: ABOUT THE PROJECT	7
CLACKAMAS PROSPERITY COLLABORATIVES’ DESIGN LAB APPROACH.....	7
EARLY ACTIVITIES.....	8
EMERGING CHALLENGES LED TO PROJECT ADJUSTMENTS.....	10
CHAPTER 2: THE DESIGN LAB EXPERIENCE – PROCESS AND PROJECTS	12
CANBY DESIGN LAB.....	13
ESTACADA DESIGN LAB	15
MILWAUKIE DESIGN LAB	20
SUMMARY OF DESIGN LAB EXPERIENCES	25
CHAPTER 3: PROCESS AND SYSTEM INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	26
COUNTY RESOURCE TEAM – CONNECTING SYSTEM LEADERS AND LABS	26
PROJECT EVALUATION.....	26
INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	27
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS	33
LESSONS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSFORMATION	33

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: LESSONS TO REMEMBER AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clackamas Community Prosperity Collaboratives began with an observation and an idea:

- *The observation:* Significant economic disparities exist across the county, from community to community and within communities.
- *The idea:* The county should take steps to find a way to address economic disparities and food insecurity across the county.

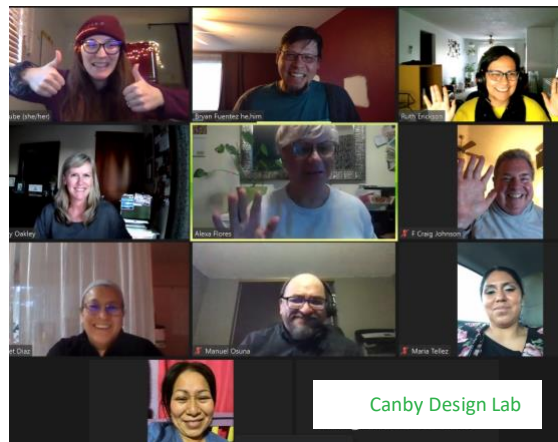
Clackamas County tried a new approach in response: a community-driven, human-centered Design Lab approach with support from system leaders to help make change in three communities, Canby, Estacada, and a combined city-county segment of greater Milwaukie. The Design Lab process took longer than expected, spanning 19 months instead of 12. The extended timeframe was largely the product of multiple external forces that disrupted teams, challenged engagement, and required several adjustments along the way. Openness of the design also proved to be a challenge, especially amid the other pressures.

All three Design Labs produced and tried solutions to their redefined problem situations, and all three of those solutions are recommended to bring to scale in some way. Perhaps even more important than these products though, the Labs built new relationships and developed deeper understanding across differences, especially in Canby. Together, these results offer the County an important set of lessons to remember and recommendations for continued improvement.

In crisis and beyond, Lab members were drawn together, in support of their communities



To overcome shared challenges and those faced by some more than others



BECAUSE THEY CARE.



DESIGN LAB PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

Canby Project Recommendations

The Canby Design Lab created a checklist and customer survey specifically oriented to developing a more welcoming atmosphere for Hispanic and Latinx community members among community service providers. The following next steps are recommended:

- Make improvements to the tools, based on their design tests and aligned with learning from the Communication Survey that the County conducted in October 2020.
- Share improvements with the Canby Design Lab to see if they recommend any additional changes.
- Once satisfactorily revised, integrate the tools (with adaptation as needed) in all direct services provided to county residents and make it available/promote its use to all other service providers that want to make their initial customer experiences more welcoming and inclusive.
- Provide additional support to Canby Design Lab members to help them promote its use among Canby service providers. This would be an excellent capstone to their leadership on this issue, and it would put them in the driver's seat to make the change they want to see in their community.

Estacada Project Recommendations

The Estacada Design Lab actually worked through two problem situations: lack of internet access and training to use it, particularly among Hispanic and Latinx community members, and ideological divides in the community. It is recommended that Estacada Cares and Estacada Community Watch continue developing their partnership to jointly lead the community in efforts to address broad community needs. Support from a strong facilitator, such as AntFarm (recipient of a county grant related to the Lab work), is recommended, along with added support for their work from the \$1,500 pilot project funds that were not used and possibly additional funding. As part of this work, it is recommended that they implement the internet training they developed in preparation for implementation of plans to increase internet availability in Estacada and surrounding areas.

Milwaukie Project Recommendations

The Milwaukie Design Lab developed a roadmap for employer-sponsored childcare. Recommended next steps include reviewing the Milwaukie City Code, engaging businesses/employers, cultivating relationships with potential employer-sponsored childcare providers/sponsors, elevating and supporting the profession, and enhancing system coordination. Together, the Early Learning Hub of Clackamas County and Clackamas Workforce Partnership (CWP) are best positioned to lead next steps, applying learning from this process and supporting the Lab members in steps that they are well-positioned to carry out. It is also recommended that the County redeploy the unused pilot project funds to support these action steps – in part to support CWP staff liaison work with the group and in part to provide resources for scale-up, like professional printing of the roadmap and hosting employer events/training

on employer-supported childcare. These efforts could be refined based on Milwaukie experiences and replicated throughout the county.

DESIGN LAB PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Two key lessons were learned in relation to the recommendations for improving on the Design Lab process in Clackamas County. First, both the topic and the process need to be more manageable, with clear steps organized around a much narrower focus on a challenge that people are motivated to address creatively. Second, strong relationships are needed to achieve the kind of transformation required to achieve prosperity for all – between individual human beings, within and between groups, within and between systems. From these relationships, shared learning and shared understanding becomes possible.

Following are the recommendations for improvements to the Design Lab process:

1. **Simplify process with narrow focus.** Lab members and leaders agreed that it would've been better to start with small idea, one that is still generated from the community but not through a deliberative process.
2. **Clarify the process.** Participants got overwhelmed by uncertainty as well as by the complexity described in the previous recommendation. This recommendation includes two components: 1) simplify the language used to describe the process to participants and the broader community and 2) describe the process as a series of clear steps rather than broad phases.
3. **Build relationships, trust, sense of belonging.** Lab participants said working with other people who care about the topic and their communities was a rewarding part of the experience for them, and steps taken to assure that all felt welcome helped to build a sense of belonging. Such efforts should continue and be prioritized in future efforts as they were in this pilot effort.

SYSTEM SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The lesson on relationships applies to the broader system development as well as to the Design Lab process. At the systems level, these relationships are the pathways through which this diverse country will be able to imagine new possibilities.

Additionally, system support is needed to develop truly innovative solutions to persistent community problems. Innovation requires a different kind of leadership than has been the tradition in U.S. systems. Needed skills include (but are not limited to) working together across differences, listening deeply, creating containers that are truly inclusive, redefining success, facilitating emerging voices, and creative problem-solving with the ability to set aside “can’t” and think beyond what has been to what could be. These skills need to be learned, developed, and leveraged throughout a connected, better coordinated system.

Specific system recommendations are:

1. **Expand efforts to build capacity for shared leadership.** Two strategies for building capacity were built into this process: equity trainings and in-process learning on different engagement strategies. It would be valuable to enhance and expand capacity-building efforts related to both topics and more.
2. **Continue coordinated system supports with diverse leadership/change-makers at table.** Authentic, meaningful human connection at and across all system levels can produce profound results. In this pilot project, such connectivity was strong within individual Labs, particularly in Canby where the most inclusive practices were engaged. Improvement is needed at a much larger scale, within city and county systems, within and between communities, and across all systems that serve and impact those communities. While the County Resource Team (CRT) was a good start, it could be even more effective when organized as a continuously coordinating body with a broad mission of system coordination and driven by diverse change-makers among its membership.

GRATITUDE, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND NEXT STEPS

Many people worked together to produce impactful results throughout this process, including strengthened relationships. The Athena Group extends deep gratitude to all and acknowledges each individual in Appendix A in the supplemental document of key exhibits referenced in this report.

What's next? Following up on scaling recommendations for each Lab project should be relatively straightforward, and the Director of the County Equity and Inclusion Office has gotten to work on this already, reaching out to Lab participants to maintain connections and clarify specific next steps in each community. Following up on the remaining recommendations could be done in a variety of ways – here are two:

1. Take small, individual steps in county departments and beyond to:
 - Improve connectivity and relationships within and across systems
 - Develop more authentic, inclusive engagement practices
 - Use the refined Design Lab model to tackle various specific challenges related to poverty (and other persistent community challenges) and to seek shared prosperity in Clackamas communities
 - Build capacity for shared leadership and innovative thinking through continuing equity and other training
2. Plan and begin a comprehensive approach that more quickly and effectively fosters healthy transformation of systems for the benefit of the communities they serve, working with communities and across systems to develop a collective impact-type collaborative that is equipped to build capacity, foster relationships, host Design Labs, and facilitate change.

Pathways to healthy transformation have been opened through this project should Clackamas County and partners wish to continue this journey. The specific next steps are for the county and partners to define and begin.

CHAPTER 1: ABOUT THE PROJECT

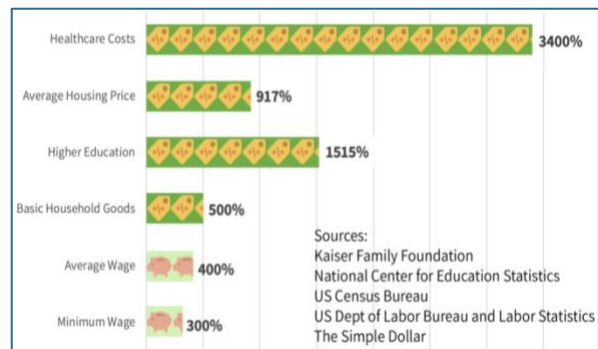
Clackamas Community Prosperity Collaboratives started with an observation and an idea:

- The observation: Significant economic disparities exist across the county, from community to community and within communities.
- The idea: The county should take steps to find a way to address economic disparities and food insecurity across the county.

Such disparities are not unique to Clackamas County; they are part of a complex economic and political system that has increased the economic divide in the United States substantially over the past 50 years.

A look at average income growth versus average growth in key expense categories offers clues to major drivers of this disparity. As shown in Figure 1-1, the ability to care for one's health and housing needs has become increasingly difficult for households with incomes at or below average, and access to higher education has grown farther out of reach for the people who are most in need. It is no small challenge to address. Because of this, near-term impacts of this project are found in relationships, attention to equity, system connectivity – important system changes that are needed to make real change toward building prosperity for all.

Figure 1-1: Income-Expense Growth



What is unique about this project is the county's willingness to step into unknown territory, take risks to try something new, and commit to working through challenges as they emerged. The new thing they tried: a community-driven Design Lab approach with support from system leaders to help make change.

CLACKAMAS PROSPERITY COLLABORATIVES' DESIGN LAB APPROACH

The original goal of Clackamas Community Prosperity Collaboratives was to create new pathways out of poverty, innovating based on specific challenges and assets that exist in each local community, and facilitation of community-driven Design Labs was the approach selected for making progress toward that goal. This approach was rooted in a few essential human-centered design principles: focus on people, find the right problem, and test solutions. Additionally, community and systems connectivity, relationship-building, and equity features were built into the approach to strengthen community resilience and capacity to create and manage desired change.

Design Labs, as developed for this project, were small groups of community members with direct experience in poverty, lived and/or as service providers, brought together to work through four phases of a modified human centered design process. To begin, they would connect with each other, build relationships and trust in each other, and learn about challenges being faced in their community. At the end of that phase, they would define the aspect of the problem they wanted to address. In the second phase, they would look to the future and envision and define the solution they wanted to realize. In the third phase, they would design a specific project, and they would test the concept in a small, safe to fail way in the fourth phase. The evaluation of the test(s) would then be used to inform whether or not to scale up the solution for full implementation and if any changes should be included in the scaled version or in subsequent testing.

As Design Lab work progressed, a team of formal leaders in various systems, known as the County Resource Team, was assembled to remove barriers and identify resources as needed to support successful action. Project facilitators were also in place to work with all involved to build capacity for shared leadership, emphasizing equity, in the process and beyond. Figure 1-2 provides a brief snapshot of this approach.

Figure 1-2: Clackamas Prosperity Design Labs
 Work with community members who struggle with \$\$ & organizations that serve them to:

1. **CONNECT** – Build strong social fabric while developing shared understanding of community needs & assets
2. **DREAM** – Envision future in which everyone in community has opportunity to prosper on own terms
3. **DESIGN** – Develop project concepts that build on strengths & address key needs
4. **TRY-CHECK-SCALE** – Test small scale pilot project(s) with \$\$ id'd & make scaling decisions based on evaluation criteria



EARLY ACTIVITIES

Prior to contracting with The Athena Group to develop and lead this project, Clackamas County identified 17 areas with below-average Area Median income and selected three to be the project focus: City of Canby, City of Estacada, and a portion of the City of Milwaukie (which was eventually changed and included an unincorporated area adjacent to it). These areas were referred to as Equity Pilot Areas at the time.

Once the sites were selected, with agreement from each city, the county conducted a competitive RFP process and awarded the contract to The Athena Group in September 2018, though the start date was delayed in order to provide time for the county’s health equity efforts to get to a point that would allow the two projects to coordinate if/when useful.

The project’s Prep Phase kicked off at the end of February 2019, with an initial County Resource Team meeting and meetings with municipal and other leaders in each Equity Pilot Area. The purpose of the Prep Phase was to introduce the human-centered design framework (shown in Figure 1-2) that would be used in each community, learn about community dynamics and hopes and concerns about the project, refine project plans with that input, and establish founding members for each community’s Design Lab, expecting that the Lab would grow as its members connected with others and focused on a specific problem and vision for its future.

The Prep Phase continued through August 2019. Activities during that time included:

- Naming project and refining its scope with County Resource Team, which included a decision to implement this work in all three communities simultaneously and to focus on community wealth-building strategies¹, like those exhibited in Appendix B;
- Conducting Community Equity Walks to learn about the character and assets in each location;
- Analyzing community networks to get a better understanding of the groups in each community, trusted group communicators or “connectors”, and best communication and engagement approaches;
- Facilitating and presenting at various community meetings to recruit a founding group of lab members, with plans to expand as they worked to define the problems they wanted to address and the future they wanted to help create (Phases 1-2);
- Researching and preparing community wealth-building examples to inspire initial lab work; and
- Hosting an Economic Development Commission bus tour of one of the communities to spark their interest and seek their support later in the project as community wealth-building projects were to be designed and tested (Phases 3-4).

Phase 1 launched in September 2019 at a joint event for all three communities. Lab and CRT members at the event heard about the vision for the project, learned a little about community wealth-building strategies to pique their interest, joined in an introductory equity training, and made plans for next steps. From there, each Lab group, with the help of a facilitator or “Lab Leader”, paved its own way forward within the human-centered design framework.



¹ According to Democracy Collaborative (community-wealth.org), community wealth-building strategies include a wide variety of efforts aimed at improving the ability of communities and community members to increase asset ownership, anchor jobs locally by broadening ownership over capital, expand the provision of public services, and ensure local economic stability.

EMERGING CHALLENGES LED TO PROJECT ADJUSTMENTS

Early Challenges -- Adjustments to Project Plans

Early challenges resulted in relatively minor adjustments to the project design and timing. These included:

- The project delay prompted a change in the Athena team in the middle of the prep phase, since new obligations had emerged in the shadow of this project's uncertainty and made it too difficult for them to continue as originally planned. This, combined with learning from Community Equity Walks (CEWs), led to a focus on equity learning for Design Lab and CRT members to enable more equitable relationship-building and project design features and staffing changes, including recruitment of local Lab Leaders to build capacity among local talent to design and lead similar efforts in the future, rather than providing broader community skill-building trainings.
- Adjustment to project plans, including the above staffing changes, consideration of a different approach in Canby, and a recommended shift from one area in Milwaukie to another as the designated Equity Pilot Area, all required county approval before proceeding. Several communications challenges, especially around county budget time, prevented receiving approval in a timely manner, creating significant delays in the prep phase.
- Additional project management challenges emerged shortly after phase 1 launched, when the Assistant County Administrator position was eliminated. The person in this role had been the original project sponsor, had carried the vision for the work, and had previously maintained responsibility for building and enlivening that vision with the County Resource Team.

Phase 1 Learning -- Shift in Focus

One important lesson was learned through the Lab experiences in Phases 1-2: the broad invitation to explore and the different experiences of poverty in their communities was overwhelming and extremely challenging for participants. This challenge will be discussed more in Chapters 2 and 3. It is also mentioned here because it resulted in a shift in focus: from a vision of developing community wealth-building strategies to focusing on removing barriers to prosperity. Essentially, it represented a shift to fixing problems in the way of existing opportunities and resources that help to meet needs instead of creating new opportunities that would've been designed to overcome the defined problems in different ways. (See companion guide, *Innovate with Community Wisdom – a Toolkit for Inclusive Community Design Labs*, for resources that may be used in the future to support continued barrier removal and/or new opportunity development.)

External Disruptions -- Shifts to Local Leadership, More Local Investment

The remaining set of shifts started just as Labs were about to transition to project design (Phase 3). The first Phase 3 meetings for most² communities were scheduled in March 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic began to seriously disrupt communities. All Lab meetings were put on hiatus to allow space and time for everyone to handle the disruptions in their personal lives. During that time, several organization-based Lab members were redeployed to emergent needs (particularly in Milwaukie, which was focusing on childcare), and the existing Lab Leaders experienced significant impacts that required them to step out of their roles.

This major project disruption threatened to halt the project altogether, given finite resources and need to find and prepare new facilitators to lead the Labs. Existing Lab Leaders helped to keep communication channels with Lab members open, address Lab member insecurities around online engagement, and continue relationship-building efforts while new leadership was identified and secured.

A big win came from this event: even stronger shift to local investment in the project. Overall project leadership was shifted to the Clackamas Workforce Partnership (CWP), along with two CWP staff members stepping in as Lab Leaders in Milwaukie and Canby. The former Canby Lab Leader, who was already local community member brought on for local capacity-building purposes, took over communications services, learning new skills and building on an already strong foundation in community engagement. AntFarm Youth Services (based in Sandy and opening new community center in Estacada) and Todos Juntos (trusted service provider for Hispanic and Latinx community members) partnered to co-lead the Estacada Design Lab. This arrangement was in direct response to local leaders' request for Lab leadership that was local and connected with Hispanic and Latinx community members.

Lab activities were back on track by mid-Summer, only to be disrupted again by wildfires that began in August and caused evacuations from Canby and Estacada and other effects that continued into October in Estacada. Finally, major COVID spikes in late November through early January, followed by a devastating ice storm in February, made it nearly miraculous that the Lab groups were able to complete all four phases of the process and share their insights on their experiences and learning by early/mid-March. Summaries of project results and lessons learned from this process follow in the next two chapters.

² Estacada had begun exploring project options before March but hadn't gotten further than having a few promising ideas on the table.

CHAPTER 2: THE DESIGN LAB EXPERIENCE – PROCESS AND PROJECTS

This chapter provides an overview of how each Design Lab was originally set-up, describes the problem and desired future states they identified, and shares the projects they designed and the results of their project tests.

The Design Lab approach that was used in this project was described in the previous chapter, and the snapshot of that approach is shared again here, now as Figure 2-1. Please note that there are other ways to configure a Design Lab. For instance, if focused very narrowly and tests internally, they can be designed to be completed within a day or two. In this case though, several factors indicated need for a more involved, longer process. These factors included:

- Goal of building relationships across groups in communities, between systems, and between systems and the communities they serve.
- Goal of building awareness about the project in the broader community and potentially finding funding partners for scale-up efforts.
- Desire to make this process truly community-driven, with broader community input into the problem that gets addressed in the process and the solution designed to address it.

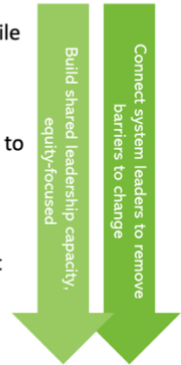
A larger scale process was designed initially with these factors in mind and was refined further during the Prep Phase of the project. During the Prep Phase, Athena team members explored each community and met with diverse community representatives to:

- Determine if original Equity Pilot Area boundaries were workable;
- Consider potential initial Lab focus, given expressed community interests (with specific consideration for topics identified for action in health equity project) and existing efforts (to avoid duplication);
- Recruit founding Lab members, guided by a Community Network Analysis; and
- Shape the kick-off meeting(s).

The results of these efforts in each community are summarized at the beginning of each Lab description below. Under direction of the county sponsor and with approval from the County Resource Team, the overall project was aimed at developing community wealth-building strategies, though it was agreed that some communities may choose to develop projects that would remove barriers to wealth-building if they found that they were not ready to take on projects like that. As a result, it was determined that all Labs would start by broadly looking at poverty in their communities and narrow the topic as they got

Figure 2-1: Clackamas Prosperity Design Labs
Work with community members who struggle with \$\$ & organizations that serve them to:

1. **CONNECT** – Build strong social fabric while developing shared understanding of community needs & assets
2. **DREAM** – Envision future in which everyone in community has opportunity to prosper on own terms
3. **DESIGN** – Develop project concepts that build on strengths & address key needs
4. **TRY-CHECK-SCALE** – Test small scale pilot project(s) with \$\$ id'd & make scaling decisions based on evaluation criteria



to know each other and the concerns in each of their communities and which issues could be ripe to address with community wealth-building strategies, if any.

CANBY DESIGN LAB

Lab Development

A variety of focus options were explored in Canby, and many community contacts were interested in developing this Lab as part of the newly developing Canby Youth Coalition. That idea was eventually rejected because the primary topics of interest were not related closely enough to community wealth-building. However, the strong bicultural nature of the community (18% Hispanic-Latinx, according to the 2019 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau) that was discovered in the process drove this Lab's emphasis on recruiting bicultural, bilingual Lab membership and to focus on understanding the experiences, hopes, and concerns of Hispanic and Latinx community members.

Lab Participation

This was the largest Lab with 20 members, 12 of whom identified as Hispanic or Latino/a and several of whom were most comfortable communicating in Spanish. Nine members were Canby residents that were participating on their personal time – not affiliated with an organization. Organizations that were represented included Clackamas County, the City of Canby, Clackamas Workforce Partnership, Second Home, Metro Alliance for Common Good, Canby High School, Bridging Cultures, and a local Kiwanis club.

A big driver of success in building a diverse Lab group was its first Lab Leader, Joy Strube. She built on the work that the original Athena team member had done to generate interest, and she made a focused effort to recruit missing voices. The group continued to evolve as relationships grew in the Lab, and members helped to raise awareness about the project and generate new members. The final member was added in January 2021, helping to refine the project design and reflect on testing results.

Overall, the Lab was designed with an emphasis on creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for Hispanic and Latinx members. In-person meetings included food from local Mexican restaurants and headsets for all participants to use, so interpreters could do two-way language interpretation, making participation more equitable. All written communications were done in both English and Spanish, and Lab Leaders, along with the translators/interpreters with whom they had established relationships, worked hard to send out notices in both languages simultaneously *and* in a timely manner, rather than sending notices in English first and later in Spanish when translations were complete. When meetings had to go virtual, the Lab Leader worked with a trusted advocate in the community to connect with Hispanic and Latinx members via phone and text messages to stay informed of changes and build trust in communicating in the online environment.

They also took time to get to know one another and to integrate new members as they joined, rather than just barreling ahead and hoping that new members would catch up. This and the language justice practices slowed the process and made it undesirable for some people to continue. However, these practices created a safe and inclusive environment that enriched learning and relationships for those

who continued through to the end. Unexpected relationships were developed because the Canby Design Lab made it possible for community members that were ready to listen, able to hear each other for the first time. As a result, several expressed hope for it being only the beginning – for their project and the way community leadership, engagement/collaboration, and services are approached in Canby.

Designing Prosperity in Canby

The Canby Design Lab arrived at their design focus (problem statement, desired future/solution statement, and project design) through monthly Lab meetings where they considered both community data and personal experiences shared in the meetings, and they used problem and solution trees to think through what they were learning. They also reached out to external groups to check their thinking, including a pivotal meeting with a largely Hispanic/Latinx group in the community that also resulted in significant expansion and diversification of the group.

They struggled to pick a focus. There appeared to be a shared understanding that housing affordability was an important topic to address, but it was determined to be too daunting to take on in this first Design Lab process. Other individuals had other specific interests, including some interest in trying out different wealth-building strategies to overcome financial difficulties in general. Ultimately, they agreed that there were many services and organizations available to help Canby community members meet their needs and reach their goals but that many Hispanic/Latinx community members did not feel welcome to use those services. To address this problem and to make progress toward realizing their desired future, they developed a checklist for use by organizations serving their community that wish to create more welcoming and inclusive customer experience and a companion survey to check how they are doing (see Appendix C for copies of these tools). The checklist was developed as a baseline standard for program interactions with customers, from initial contact through the intake interview or other initial one-on-one meeting.

Design Testing and Results

They asked twenty local service providers to review the checklist and survey and provide feedback via an online survey. Five responded. The majority said they already have customer experience standards developed, but only worked with their participants to develop the standards. All of them said they are evaluating and updating processes and procedures in real time, as they change. While this indicates that the tools could be duplicative, they determined that the tools can be helpful for new providers in the community, providing a good flow with detailed guidance along that flow. As one provider said, “I think that the

There is a lack of access to opportunities to connect, practice their potential, and have access to secure housing, health, education, economy, work. This leaves community members feeling there is a lack of safe and equitable support to help make them feel welcome.

Canby Design Lab Problem Statement

Service providers collaborate to ensure resources and opportunities reach everyone by intentionally breaking down existing language and cultural barriers with consistency, clarity, and respect.

Canby Design Lab Solution Statement (Desired Future)

tools of checklist and questions provided by this group is a very good model to adopt and standardize.” In Lab Leader team meetings, it was suggested that this tool could be useful countywide, not just in Canby.

Some improvements may be needed before scaling up. One provider suggested expanding the tools to address “additional accommodations not just language (verbal/auditory) but also for sight, and comfort or feeling of safety as in needing a quiet safe place to interview besides a busy workstation or cubicle area.” Other improvements may also be needed, and insights can be gained by reviewing other tools that Lab members also found appealing.

Athena Recommendations

Given the above input from testing, The Athena Group’s project leadership recommends that the County engage in next steps with this body of work:

- Make the change recommended above and other improvements to the tool, considering what worked well in the Communication Survey that the County conducted in October 2020.
- Share it with the Canby Design Lab to see if they recommend any additional changes.
- Once satisfactorily revised, integrate it (with adaptation as needed) in all direct services provided to county residents and make it available/promote its use to all other service providers that want to make their initial customer experiences more welcoming and inclusive.
- Provide additional support to Canby Design Lab members to help them promote its use in Canby. This would be an excellent capstone to their leadership on this issue, and it would put them in the driver’s seat to make the change they want to see in their community.

ESTACADA DESIGN LAB

Lab Development

The first visit to Estacada revealed a well-connected network of community service providers, primarily facilitated through Estacada Connects – a regular community gathering open to all civic and educational institutions, social service providers, businesses, and residents. It appeared to be working very well, especially given support from their strong, regular facilitator, so it was determined to be an excellent place for community check-ins as the Lab work progressed. Additionally, the Estacada Area Food Bank was found to be a trusted connector for and good central point of contact with community members that were struggling financially.

The food bank’s executive director was also part of a small subgroup of Estacada Connects that had been organized to work together to address community challenges. This group, known as Estacada Cares, had been dormant and without plans for next steps. It was recommended that they form the core of the Estacada Design Lab. People experiencing poverty in their own lives were also recruited to join the group. This was done through an event held at the food bank as well as in direct outreach through local churches and other service providers. Additionally, the community network analysis revealed a disconnect between Hispanic/Latinx community members and the rest of the community. Individuals

who were trusted connectors were identified through connections made at the Estacada Public Library and two strong, informal, Hispanic/Latinx community leaders were recruited to join the Lab. Finally, Estacada Cares members expressed interest in bringing one or two business community members into the Lab group. An Athena team member reached out to a few high priority contacts, finding that the focus of the Lab would drive business participation and tabling that recruiting effort until focus was identified.

Housing was identified as a major issue in Estacada early on. Many different community members talked about people moving in from more expensive urban areas, the new development of more expensive homes, and growing homelessness, and the mayor was exploring a tiny homes project that could be ready for action soon. Transportation and several other barriers to accessing meaningful, living wage employment beyond this small, rural community were also surfaced in the Prep Phase. Food access, however, was not elevated as an issue for them, as there seemed to be a variety of ways to access healthy food across income levels. This array of input suggested to project leadership that the Lab group should be given agency to decide what they would focus on, with input from others in the community, during Phase 1.

Lab Participation

As described in the development section above, this Lab started with a small but mighty (well-rounded and well-connected) group of members. They were ready to get started months in advance of the other two communities. If the project leadership team didn't need to be adjusted (as discussed in chapter 1), it might've been possible to start work with them when ready. They would've been working with an outside but highly skilled facilitator (initially planned to be Meagan Picard before she needed to step fully into the overall project management role), and they very likely could've finished their work before COVID and the rest of the disruptions hit.

All of the disruptions – pandemic emergence, wildfires, pandemic spike, and ice storm – appeared to hit Estacada hardest. They also faced a unique challenge that threatened to divide this otherwise well-connected community: a group, armed with guns, had taken action in town during the wildfire evacuation in response to (later debunked) claims that left-wing radicals were setting fires around the state and then stealing people's possessions once they evacuated. Nunpa, Estacada Lab Co-leader, reached out in an effort to bring both groups together for greater support of the community – though with masks on and guns down.

The challenges that emerged as the Estacada Lab work unfolded may have presented important opportunities that likely would've been missed:

- For one, the Lab Leaders that were deployed in each half of the Estacada project helped to create and strengthen Hispanic/Latinx connections with the rest of the community in ways that the original plans could not have accomplished so well. Casey, Lab Leader for Phases 1-2, knew the community well from her outreach work at a local health clinic, and she was bicultural (Mexican-American) and bilingual (Spanish-English). This aspect of her leadership was so well-received that when she needed to step down due to COVID impacts on her life, the group

requested another Lab Leader that could continue that development. Todos Juntos, with trusted staff working in the community already, agreed to co-lead the Lab for the remainder of the county-sponsored project term, primarily responsible for supporting community connections with Hispanic and Latinx community members.

- Lab members, including Casey, weren't thrilled with the fact that Casey lived two hours away from the community. Responsiveness was challenging when everything was happening in-person. As they were considering their solution/desired future statement just before the pandemic began to shut down in-person activities, they were also thinking ahead to the design phase and exploring different opportunities and strengths to build on in the area. Ant Farm Youth Services was one of those. Their home base was in the nearby community of Sandy, and they were exploring the possibility of starting a community center in Estacada. They offered a variety of programs that some in the Lab group were excited to explore for Estacada as part of the next phases of their work, so it seemed a wonderful opportunity to bring them into Lab leadership. Their executive director, Nunpa, agreed to co-lead it, taking on the lead facilitator role.
- Some members of the Lab were connected to more conservative networks in the community, though most were more connected to the social service sector and held more liberal-leaning views. This is not uncommon. In any community, some community members may be reluctant to get involved with projects like the Prosperity Design Labs because these efforts may be seen as liberal, social justice efforts. This appeared to be true in Estacada, and without the wildfire emergency that evacuated town and without thoughtful and bridge-building leadership of their new Lab Leader, community members holding these different sociopolitical viewpoints might not have had the opportunity to come together.
- Standing in the middle of divided groups, as Nunpa did, is never an easy task. The stakes are even higher with even greater tension when guns are involved, and the work is even more difficult when nerves are already worn thin from months of living in a pandemic. Though not everyone in the Lab – and possibly elsewhere in the community – agreed that the Lab and Community Watch groups should join forces, they did come together as a unified community response team, and they were able to adapt and leverage the Lab process and communication system they had established to meet the shared community needs as people returned home after the 21-day evacuation.
- Estacada reached a desirable end to an undesirable situation – they are even stronger and more resilient because they came together across differences to meet their shared human needs. It is always a difficult and messy path to get there, and understandably has left question marks around some participants' assessment of this Lab, but Athena leadership believes that it has positioned them well for the future if they continue to nurture these new connections.

Designing Prosperity in Estacada

The Estacada Design Lab effectively produced two projects: one based on their original exploration of local challenges, assets, and hopes for the future, and one in response to the traumatic community disruption from wildfires. Both will be addressed here.

Problem and solution statements are shown in the blue box on the right for the first one, the one developed from the beginning and the one they tried hard to test in the end. The group struggled to get to a decision, which seems apparent in their multidimensional problem definition. The one topic that everyone could agree on was housing – the decrease in affordable options in the face of gentrification. As mentioned previously, this was already top of various community leaders’ minds, and it was also the top issue identified by community members that participated in a survey distributed to food bank customers.

The multidimensional statement was discussed at the County Resource Team meeting held at the time of transition to Phase 2 of the process. County-based CRT members that were aware of Estacada’s housing challenges advocated for taking on the latter part of the statement, considering it simpler to address than housing. Estacada members agreed but maintained that they wanted to ensure that the housing challenge was not forgotten. One CRT member followed-up with the Lab member that served as the city government connector to discuss affordable housing plans for the area. Results of that effort are not known at this time to author of this report.

A bit more focus took shape during the solutions phase of the process, largely in response to Lab exploration of community assets and building energy about opportunities through AntFarm. At the time that the Solution/Desired Future Statement was originally developed, just before COVID hit, a project design idea had begun to take shape around an intergenerational program that would provide education about and access to healthy foods and related career opportunities. The shifts that took place over the next few months, as described in Chapter 1 of this report, left the Lab idle until late June/early July. After getting oriented to the modified human-centered design process, local progress in it, and available resources to support Lab facilitation, Nunpa from AntFarm and Ashley from Todos Juntos prioritized community-building to ensure that the group really owned and directed the outcomes that they would produce. They met with group members individually first then pulled the group together to get

The Estacada community’s housing stock is aging, restrictive (property regulations forbidding children from playing outside), as well as inaccessible (too expensive, insufficient quantity). Current zoning is prohibitive in regards to multigenerational living as well. Furthermore, our community is limited in regards to enrichment and advancement opportunities for youth as well as adults.

Estacada Design Lab Original Problem Statement

Our community has a variety of opportunities for people to advance and improve their quality of life.

Estacada Design Lab Original Solution Statement
(Desired Future)

restarted. Just as they were back on track, wildfires and the evacuation set them off-track again. The Lab re-grouped during this time, pivoting to a rapid response effort developed through regular and coordinated Zoom meetings that they described in the Lab framework – see sidebar for details.

After things settled as much as they could in October, the Lab re-energized their previous thinking that they would lean into the remote gathering imperatives created by the pandemic, which could also help to create more opportunity for people whose options are limited by lack of adequate transportation options. They were interested in expanding internet access in the community until they learned that the county was already seeking a solution to this issue. They then learned about a gap in understanding among a significant portion of Hispanic and Latinx community members about how to use online tools like Zoom and the school district’s online system. They developed a training to pilot in three sites (Harmony Bakery, City Hall, and Old Mill), including at least two with food to continue community-building while breaking bread together as well as for skill-building. They had plans to pilot it in December-January, but COVID spikes closed up the community again, and it didn’t make sense to train people to use online platforms via an online platform. At least one Lab member’s entire family contracted COVID at the time as well.

Design Testing and Results

By early January, this group had had as many challenges as they could take. They decided to forego testing and moved to project evaluation instead. Major themes from their evaluations are addressed in the next chapter.

Athena Recommendations

1. Clackamas County: Support Scale-up of Coordinated Response Approach

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROJECT

1. Problem: Full evacuation of all community members due to the Riverside Fire, which burned close to 140,000 acres and destroyed many homes

2. Solution/Vision: “Let’s utilize the Lab and our Zoom meetings to connect ALL people and organizations that can help.” Eight (8) Zoom meetings gathered more and more community members and Clackamas County employees supporting clear communication and response.

3. Design: Original Lab members ultimately joined forces with Estacada School District, Clackamas County, churches, businesses, unaffiliated community members, and Estacada Community Watch at the Cazadero Restaurant to design a re-entry plan. This work took place September 17-24.

4. Try: This group activated the re-entry plan, joining in coordinated operations to support community members as they came back after evacuation orders were lifted (lifted for whole county on September 29). They achieved great things together:

- a) Warm, loving, welcome homecoming
- b) Over 3,000 households served
- c) Over 300,000 food, clothes, gas cards, meals, pet supplies, and household items
- d) Items valued over \$1,000,000
- e) Triage majority of local people who lost homes prior to FEMA arrival

5. Plan to Scale: Building on the success of ECW Re-entry and supporting community members in search of other projects, they determined that they would like to use this model for greater success addressing

If Estacada Cares and Estacada Community Watch could share leadership in implementing the expressed interest in scaling up their emergency response effort – likely with others as well – they have the potential to build a strong, sustainable structure that facilitates community resilience and prosperity in ways that separated ideological groups could never accomplish. From this author’s viewpoint, as a community engagement and planning professional with experience doing this kind of work for over 20 years in urban and rural communities in a dozen states, they could accomplish things beyond most communities’ wildest dreams.

Following the re-entry project, they took an additional opportunity to help the community even more, since they recognized that they had extra resources that should be distributed. The problem they would address: people were still in need. Estacada Design Lab, Estacada School District, churches, businesses, and community members affiliated with Estacada Community Watch coordinated again to provide a giveaway to community members, which was referred to as a “Free Community Garage Sale”. They had big impact again: warm loving ongoing support; hundreds of families served; thousands of pounds of clothes, pet supplies, and household items given away; and networking for those with other needs. This demonstrates strong potential for on-going success, though Estacada Community Watch was not officially a partner in this effort.

A strong facilitator is recommended to support continued growth, potentially from AntFarm *if a foundation of trust with a significant portion of both groups has been established and is able to grow from this experience*. AntFarm is the recipient of a county grant related to the Lab work. The Athena Group’s project leadership recommends this approach, with AntFarm facilitation and added support for their work from the \$1,500 pilot project funds that were not used and possibly additional funds, depending on any needs for an amended scope of work based on experience in this emergent Lab project. It is work that requires high skill, time, patience, ability to build trust, and attention to relationships – all of which AntFarm leadership brings to the table – and it is work that should be supported with an appropriate level of funds.

2. Estacada Cares: If Training Considered Valuable, Pursue When Ready

If the training that the Lab group was planning is still considered to be beneficial for the community as they strive to help people reach their own definition of prosperity for themselves without systematic barriers in the way, it is desirable to see it take place – when ready. Burnout is understandable and doesn’t need to be pushed. After a period of rest, Athena leadership suggests that they consider activating this project as an early, “low hanging fruit” project administered jointly by Estacada Cares and Estacada Community Watch to get more practice working together and to support continued community-building across divides.

MILWAUKIE DESIGN LAB

Lab Development

The first visit to Milwaukie showed a great deal of potential in the designated Equity Pilot Area, the Ardenwald neighborhood. Many exciting things were happening there – from re-development of a

public housing site to innovative activities at a major anchor institution, Providence Hospital. That area also included a major food desert as its only grocery store had vacated the area; the building sat empty just up the hill from the public housing development. However, as the Athena team met with various community leaders, the same message kept coming up: *Please don't do this here*. They were not opposed to the project, but the area was inundated with projects. Organizations in the community had no capacity to get involved in another project, and they all worried that community members would be spread too thin across engagement opportunities.

Conversations with local leaders turned to other possible locations where need existed, but that wasn't over-saturated with community development projects. Lewelling and Lot-Whitcomb Elementary catchment areas were eventually selected due to reports of active community involvement history, significant pockets of poverty and food/housing insecurity, and opportunity to work in adjacent city and unincorporated areas.

Other excited Milwaukie assets were noted for possible integration into Milwaukie's project, depending on what problem they decided to tackle and the solution/desired future they wanted to pursue. The two most notable assets were the City of Milwaukie's plans to develop "neighborhood hubs," as originally imagined in the City's 2017 Community Vision and Action Plan process. As described on the city's website:

Neighborhood Hubs are intended to provide neighborhood gathering places and locations where residents have access to a variety of services or goods within walking or biking distance of their homes. Hubs are envisioned to vary in size and intensity. They could be as small as a mobile neighborhood tool library (tool sharing) or as large as a cluster of mixed use buildings with housing above shops and services.

Additionally, a central and important community asset was identified to center in this Lab's work: the Wichita Center for Family and community, whose mission is to create a safe, healthy, and strong community by providing services and programs for each child and their family; help eliminate barriers by creating an environment of equity and inclusiveness for each child to strive in their formal education; and educate and reinforce that it takes a whole community to raise a healthy child. It was also located across the street from lower income housing and one of the designated neighborhood hub sites.

With that groundwork set, recruiting focused on organizations at first and leveraged their help to grow participation among residents. The evolution of the Lab and Lab membership is described in the next section.

Lab Participation

A diverse and large lab group was recruited from the start. Though the city was unable to dedicate a staff person to participate, Wilda Parks, city councilmember for most of the project term, was a stalwart participant from beginning to end. Other members included several school district representatives (including their outreach coordinator for unhoused students and families and a school health center staff person), a Wichita Center staff person, a business owner from the hub across the street from the

Wichita Center, a high school student, housing agency staff members, county staff, a community organizer affiliated with a local faith community, a connector for the Llewelling Neighborhood Association, and Hispanic/Latinx and Russian community members.

A few of these original members, in addition to Wilda parks, stuck with the process through to the end, including the Llewelling Neighborhood Association connector and a staff person from Clackamas Workforce partnership who was also a Milwaukie resident. Participation changed as the group decided to focus on childcare, recruiting additional individuals who provided childcare services and losing some members that were less invested in that issue.

When the pandemic effects began, this Lab also went on hiatus. It lost about half of its members to COVID response – school district and county representatives were re-deployed and childcare providers were no longer able to participate as they had to focus all of their time on providing childcare for “essential workers”. Once they were able to get back on track, they were a much smaller, mostly agency-representative group, with additional supports deployed from the county to help them tackle the major, persistent, countywide, even statewide childcare desert.

Designing Prosperity in Milwaukie

The Milwaukie Design Lab decided on their initial focus a bit more easily than the other Labs. Based on community surveys; discussions with parents, educators, employers, and childcare providers; and local data (poverty level and childcare availability versus need), it was clear to the members that the lack of access to childcare was a major barrier to many local families’ pursuit of prosperity. It was also seen as a potential opportunity for growing prosperity for childcare providers if the hurdles to licensing could be addressed and the earning potential could be increased.

Many creative solutions were worthy of exploration, such as establishing a childcare co-op run by neighborhood parents at each neighborhood hub, expanding childcare services with greater pay for providers at the Wichita Center, building out a shared childcare center in the empty building next to the community college with talent generated from the community college and possibly co-sponsored by local businesses. However, this Lab was repeatedly limited by “why not”. New ideas were frequently met with reasons Lab members could see that current regulations and realities in the system would make them unsuccessful.

More affordable, accessible childcare options for the City of Milwaukie; employer-provided childcare supports for working families.

Milwaukie Design Lab Original Problem Statement

The City of Milwaukie has enough affordable, accessible childcare options that meet the needs of working families and enable people to participate in the workforce or pursue educational goals; the local business community supports this vision by acting as advocates and providing resources and assistance to employees with children.

Milwaukie Design Lab Original Solution Statement (Desired Future)

This lab could've been the perfect place for the County Resource Team to engage its primary purpose: to remove barriers to the desired solutions. However, needed change, such as state-level policy, was determined to be beyond what CRT members could impact directly.

All of this made the Design phase particularly challenging for this group, though they eventually decided to focus on employer-sponsored childcare because it had less regulatory red tape and could be more easily explored in a contained, city-specific way. With that focus in mind, they created an impressively extensive yet approachable guide for local employers to consider how they could support expansion of childcare in the area. A tool was designed to help employers better understand:

- Local need;
- Impacts of childcare on families, employers, and the broader workforce;
- Importance of childcare for families, employers, and the broader workforce;
- Breakdown of the type of childcare options employers could provide;
- Cost, investment, and implementation considerations for each employer-supported childcare model; and
- Resources for further exploration.

Design Testing and Results

Eight employers – Willamette View; Cutting Edge Credit Union; Providence Milwaukie Hospital; Exceed Enterprises; Columbia Rubber Mills; City of Milwaukie; Zoom+ Care; Fortis Construction, Inc. – were asked to review the roadmap and provide feedback via a Google survey. Primarily, they wanted an assessment of its usefulness as an information-sharing tool and potential for them to implement one or more employer-supported childcare model options identified in it.

They learned:

- Six currently offer Flexible/Dependent Care Spending Accounts that can be used for childcare expenses.
- Five currently offer flexible scheduling and/or remote work options to help with employees' childcare-related needs.
- Most were unsure of their workers' childcare needs, but half said some/most of their employees would take advantage or benefit from childcare services.
- Three were unsure of impacts or the benefit of childcare supports for their employees.

They found positive responses about the roadmap, generally; responses to each question were "neutral or above" (Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral):

- Logical structure and flow
- Clarity of purpose
- Easy to understand
- Clearly outlined need for accessible childcare and impacts of childcare desert
- Clear and relevant information, examples, and images

- Clearly differentiated between types of childcare support options
- Provided clear pathways for employers to learn more about each option
- Quality content and information

Due to their simplicity, ease (less resource- and time-intensive), lower investment level (have limited funds to put towards childcare, small recipient pool (not enough employees in need to justify other options), and company priorities, the most appealing options for these employers were:

- Dependent Care/Flex Spending Accounts
- Tuition coverage, reimbursement, or subsidies
- Partnerships with existing providers for slot reservations, wait list priority, etc.

Lab members shared key learning from this process: The lack of affordable, accessible childcare keeps many talented workers – especially women – out of the workforce and creates talent-vacuum and financial burdens for employers. It is a complex issue with no easy solution, given industry regulations, low pay/lack of benefits, high turnover among childcare workers, and costly training/licensure requirements. Solutions need to be innovative, dynamic, and sustainable, and attitudes about childcare generally must change to get there. Investment in childcare is and needs to be seen as investment in social infrastructure and stability, a vital feature of community prosperity. Finally, the business community can be a pivotal part of the solution.

Next steps Lab members recommend:

- Review Milwaukie City Code
- Engage businesses/employers
- Cultivate relationships
- Elevate and support the profession
- Enhance system coordination

Athena Recommendations

Together, the Early Learning Hub of Clackamas County and Clackamas Workforce Partnership (CWP) are best positioned to lead next steps, applying this learning, and supporting the Lab members in steps that they are well-positioned to carry out. It would be ideal for CWP and the Early Learning Hub, already leaders on this issue in the region, to continue cultivating relationships among system players, to build awareness and support for the profession, and to lead system coordination efforts. Continuing Lab members could be aligned with the work of these organizations as an action-oriented task force to carry out the rest of the tasks, reviewing the city code, expanding outreach to businesses and other employers in the Equity Pilot Area first and then throughout the city, cultivating local relationships with all involved, and participating in system coordination efforts.

It is recommended that the County redeploy the unused pilot project funds to support these action steps – in part to support CWP staff liaison work with the group and in part to provide resources for scale-up, like professional printing of the roadmap and hosting employer events/training on employer-

supported childcare. These efforts could be refined based on Milwaukie experiences and replicated throughout the county.

SUMMARY OF DESIGN LAB EXPERIENCES

There were very different experiences in each community, though they all shared:

- Positive experiences connecting with people (in existing and new relationships) and learning about their communities and
- Challenges with the broadness of the process design, especially given the external events that disrupted the process repeatedly and the resulting team changes and shifts to engaging through technology.

They made it to the finish line in one way or another, and the valiant efforts in all three communities should be celebrated. While they had varying degrees of success with project design and testing, there seemed to be an underlying drive to have developed more impactful, innovative projects – and real intention to make an impact from what they started.

There is much to be learned from these efforts – the projects themselves, the process used to develop them, and the system container, players, and approaches meant to enable innovation. Key themes from the overall project evaluation are discussed in the next chapter of this report.

Figure 2-2: Highlights from Design Lab Experiences



CHAPTER 3: PROCESS AND SYSTEM INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the report offers a brief review of the system created to enable innovative project development, a brief overview of the evaluation process, and insights learned through that process related to project development, the Design Lab process, and system needs.

COUNTY RESOURCE TEAM – CONNECTING SYSTEM LEADERS AND LABS

A team of system leaders, known as the County Resource Team (CRT), was established to support Design Labs by helping to remove barriers to implementing solutions developed in the Labs and identify and acquire additional resources when/if needed. The team included leaders from a wide range of county departments, representatives from each of the participating cities, and other community leaders, including the Clackamas Community College, Clackamas Workforce Partnership, and Cutting Edge Credit Union.

The CRT was convened when transitioning from one phase of the project to the next and at other times when deemed important. In the first two phases, they reviewed and gave feedback to Labs on the problem and solution statements, and they helped to identify additional service providers and contacts in each of the communities that could help with Lab work. Individual CRT members were then recruited to provide direct support to each of the Labs, joining them in their meetings to help with project design and testing. CRT members were also engaged at the end of the project to contribute to project evaluation, review results of other evaluation efforts, and give input on desired next steps.

PROJECT EVALUATION

Key learning summarized below comes from all participants in this system – Lab members, Lab leaders, CRT members, and project leadership. These insights were gathered through Lab member and leader surveys, a CRT member survey, city interviews, and discussions at capstone gatherings (CRT meeting and Lab participant celebration). All surveys were administered online.

There was limited participation by Lab members in the final evaluation process, likely due to general fatigue discussed in previous chapters, but key themes were reinforced through separate surveys with all six Lab leaders. Just over half of CRT members participated in the final survey and capstone discussion.

INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key insights to build and improve upon (shown briefly in Figure 3-1) are organized below by major learning about project development, the Design Lab process, and system needed to support it. Some aspects were positive and are identified to continue and build on. Others were identified for improvement in the future, helping to improve the overall experience with the process and to enable the impact that motivated people, Lab members in particular, to get involved in the first place.

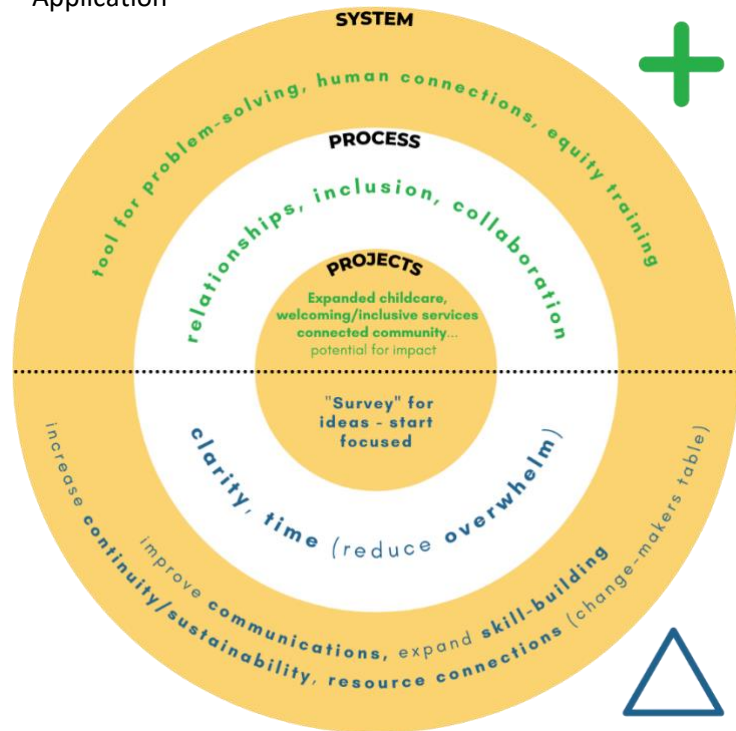
Projects: Get Focused

Insights about the specific projects that each Lab worked on are discussed in the previous chapter, and the recommendations for following up and scaling where possible to implement their efforts on a larger scale should not be forgotten. In this section of this chapter, one major takeaway from their experiences is highlighted: the challenge of selecting the problem that they would address.

Chapter 1 describes how the Labs were given carte blanche to decide what poverty-related challenge they would tackle; they were told to explore how poverty shows up in the community and determine what they wanted to work on from there. This was intended to give communities agency to select a topic of significant importance to them. However, starting with such a broad invitation proved to be a fundamental error in the process as it was extremely time-consuming to get there. They struggled with the complexity of broad topics of poverty and prosperity, and it took a lot of time to narrow to the problems they selected, which still ended up being fairly broad, making it subsequently difficult to define the future solution/vision they wanted to reach as well as the specific project design. Lab members reported need for a lot of patience while working with each other through these challenges.

Design Lab Process Recommendation 1: Simplify Process with Narrow Focus – Lab members and leaders agreed that it would've been better to start with small idea, one that is still generated from the community but not through a deliberative process. There are various ways to get there. Lab members participating in the celebration event suggested surveying the community to identify a prioritized list of challenges from which to choose. This would occur before recruiting Lab members, which will make it possible to recruit Lab members with more direct experience with the specific challenge that is selected.

Figure 3-1: Summary of Project Insights for Future Application



Variations on the advance survey idea include:

- Invite local organizations to identify a question they want help answering or a challenge they have been facing and see as being in need of innovation.
- Host Community Equity Walks (see Toolkit for more information on this problem and assets identification tool) and follow with discussion to identify and prioritize design challenge suggestions.
- Similar to above, host a Community Data Walk (see Toolkit for more information on this problem identification or redefinition tool) and follow with discussion to identify and prioritize design challenge suggestions as well as to recruit initial Lab participants.



Some specific topics of interest were suggested by Lab members at the celebration event. These included:

- Housing (hot topic in all three communities)
- Mental health
- Loneliness
- Foster togetherness
- Inequities
- Inclusive community services
- Information-sharing and engagement systems

As stated, each of these topics still could be too broad. Getting the scale of the initial question or design challenge right is important for success because it helps with giving participants clarity about what they are working on and may actually result in more accurate problem redefinition and greater creativity in problem-solving. For example, a good starting question on housing could be, “How can we increase home ownership among Latinx community members?” In the first phase of the Lab, members would learn more about the issue and could come back with two important problems that need to be tackled in separate Lab processes: 1) discriminatory banking practices and 2) lack of savings to cover down payment requirements. Selecting one of just two specific challenges is a much more doable challenge than selecting from a long list of poverty or even general housing-related issues. See Toolkit for more information on **scaling initial Lab questions and problem redefinition**.



Additional Design Lab Process Recommendations: Be Clear, Be Inclusive, Build Relationships

Several aspects of the Design Lab process were successful and should be continued in some way, and some additional aspects could be adjusted for greater impact and a more positive experience overall. Major recommendations follow.

Design Lab Process Recommendation 2: Clarify the Process – Participants got overwhelmed by uncertainty as well as by the complexity described in the previous recommendation. Project leaders described the process with language that was hard to understand (and translate) and explained steps and new ways of doing things along the way rather than giving an advance overview and skill-building training. This recommendation includes two components that can help to clarify the process and reduce overwhelm, in addition to greater focus in recommendation 1.

First, simplify the language used to describe the process to participants and the broader community. Don't talk about "human-centered design" or "community wealth-building". People just need to know that they are being invited to the table to work with others that have experience in the topic at hand to understand the issues more deeply and create and try out innovative solutions. Consider including a training session in which Lab members work together to create an "elevator speech" about their Lab at the end of an introductory training (discussed more in System Recommendation 1 below). This will help them to reach out to the broader community for input when needed, and it will assure that the group has a shared understanding of what they are doing in the Lab process.

Second, **describe the process as a series of clear steps rather than** phases. This will allow participants to have a stronger sense of where they are in the process, so they don't get lost in wondering where they are headed. To make these steps even easier to understand over time, consider ending each step with a process check-in, encouraging them to state in their own words what they did and what it was like for them. This can be done in a way that builds community within the group and/or strengthens their ability to be leaders in the community when needed to gather input on design and/or to advocate for resources to bring successful designs to scale or to do more Labs in the future. See Toolkit for more information on **step-by-step process reflections that promote clarity, community, and leadership**.



Design Lab Process Recommendation 3: Build Relationships, Trust, Sense of Belonging – Lab participants said working with other people who care about the topic and their communities was a rewarding part of the experience for them, and steps taken to assure that all felt welcome helped to build a sense of belonging. Overall, Lab participants said building relationships was the most valued part of this project, and inclusive practices, which were reinforced with shared learning about racial equity, helped to bring new and different perspectives together, expanding understanding of and connectivity within community. These successes should not be taken lightly. Together, they form a foundation that can lead to much greater community resilience, including greater capacity innovative problem-solving.

These results start with being inclusive when developing the group of people that will work together throughout the Lab process. In addition to encouraging people to volunteer in one of the approaches suggested above to narrow the Lab focus, be thoughtful about who you select and any additional recruiting you may need to do in order to bring the right mix of people, experiences, and perspectives to the table. Use a community network analysis to identify all who may be interested and pay special attention to inviting people who are known to have had the most negative experiences with the selected problem. See Toolkit for information on **conducting a community network analysis** and **inviting the right mix of members**.



Make sure you have fully used the CNA to understand how people prefer to communicate and be engaged. Select where and how you meet and how you will work together during and outside of Lab meetings according to what you learn in the CNA. This includes using language justice practices when working with a multilingual group. See Toolkit for information on using a **language justice practices** and **other inclusive engagement practices**. (Please note that these practices can be applied to all civic engagement efforts – not just Design Labs. Consider evolving traditional practices at on-going local government Board and Commission meetings and in other one-time or occasional engagements.)



Once the Lab group is assembled, spend some time enabling authentic human connections among the group and building trusting working relationships at the beginning and throughout the process. Allow for plenty of time needed to build authentic, effective relationships—don't rush into Lab work before the group is ready. The capacity-building step recommended below is an excellent opportunity for integrating relationship-building efforts and getting people used to working together in a different way than they may be used to. Remember that people in the group may or may not know each other already, and it is likely that many will not have been through a Design Lab process before, as was the case in this pilot effort. Relationships and capacity to engage in the process can be developed at the same time.

System Recommendations: Build Capacity and Connectivity

This section focuses on two key features that appear to be important for supporting a satisfying and impactful Design Lab process.

System Recommendation 1: Expand Efforts to Build Capacity for Shared Leadership – Two strategies for building capacity were built into this process: equity trainings and in-process learning on different engagement strategies. It would be valuable to enhance and expand capacity-building efforts related to both of these topics.

Training on equity oriented to the individual, community, and systems was integrated throughout the process, starting with an introductory training at the launch event with Lab members, Lab Leaders, CRT members, and Clackamas County officials present. Another set of equity training was made available to the same group mid-way through the project, and a final set was delivered online toward the end of the project, with expanded invitations to others in each participating community in response to popular

demand. These trainings received high marks in the evaluations and reached several people who had never attended any kind of diversity, equity, or inclusion (DEI) training.

DEI training is an important step toward improving public systems and for enabling people to work together well across differences. It is strongly recommended that the county and partners continue to train on a wide variety of equity issues and practices and that a foundational equity training be provided to Lab participants, including established system leaders, before starting the Lab process and while building relationships.

In addition to equity training, an advance training on Design Lab steps (described in Design Lab Process Recommendation 2), a workshop that strengthens their ability to work together, and sessions that build skills in thinking creatively and advocating effectively would set up the next iteration of this work for more innovative problem-solving and greater impact. This could be done as a one- or two-day, in-person retreat or leadership academy model, or it could be done in shorter online sessions over a fairly condensed period of time. However it is done, it should include plenty of time and attention to building relationships in addition to knowledge and skills. See Toolkit for information about **relevant Athena trainings** and **examples of community leadership programs**. Many other options exist locally and nationwide. Research online or request proposals, and find the right ones for you, combining to enable community members to participate more fully and system leaders to engage community participants more effectively.



System Recommendation 2: Continue Coordinated System Supports with Diverse Leadership/Change-Makers at Table – Authentic, meaningful human connection at and across all system levels can produce profound results. In this pilot project, such connectivity was strong within individual Labs, particularly in Canby where the most inclusive practices were engaged. Improvement is needed at a much larger scale, within city and county systems, within and between communities, and across all systems that serve and impact those communities. While the County Resource Team (CRT) was a good start, it could be even more effective when organized as a continuously coordinating body, not tied only to a finite project like the Prosperity Collaboratives, that is driven by diverse change-makers in its membership.

If the county or one of its partners, like the Clackamas Workforce Partnership, agrees to establish and serve as the backbone organization for a CRT 2.0, the following features are recommended:

- Develop it broadly as a group with the primary purpose of achieving “collective impact” on challenges created by or that have not been able to be solved within existing systems, programs, and/or policies. (See Appendix D for list of community organizations for identifying possible member organizations.)
- Recruit membership made up primarily by diverse community leaders that have time and ability to lean into challenges and think creatively about overcoming barriers to change on common concerns and interests.
- Regularly engage decision-makers who don’t have the time to spend directly involved in regular CRT activities; ensure they are prepared to listen and act when needed.

- Incorporate capacity-building work, like hosting a community leadership academy, as part of the group’s charge and ensure that all members and other established community leaders participate as well.

See Toolkit for information about **collective impact** and a model from Athena’s home base.



CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Prosperity Collaboratives project occurred at a time when leaders in communities around the country found their worlds turned upside down due to two driving forces, one following shortly after the other:

- 1) The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, shutting down most in-person contact outside the home, causing businesses to close and a massive wave of unemployment, and uncertainty and raw nerves everywhere.
- 2) The murder of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer while others stood idly by, prompting protests and violence between law enforcement and protesters around the country.

Other events – community evacuations due to wildfires, militia-type emergence in response to politically fueled rumors, a major COVID spike, an insurrection in lieu of this country’s tradition of peaceful transfer of power, and a devastating ice storm – also contributed to the turmoil of this time. Through all of this, there has emerged a strong recognition among many leaders across the United States as well as in Clackamas County, OR, that the white European traditions that created the public and economic systems through which we live and work today, are in dire need of transformation.

Also emerging are strong voices from communities of color and people struggling to survive in these economic conditions – always present but rarely heard by large public audiences until recently. There is anger about past and present conditions, yet also a thread of hope and possibility for a future in which all may truly see that we belong in this country’s communities and may be able to realize a new American dream in which all have the opportunity to thrive.

The experiences in this project amid all this turmoil offer some important lessons that can foster healthy transformation into this new future. Clackamas County has the opportunity to be a leader in this transformation should they choose to embrace these lessons and take action on them.

LESSONS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSFORMATION

There are three important lessons to remember that can help open pathways to a more inclusive, thriving future in Clackamas communities:

1. **There is great value in connection; relationships form the foundation for shared prosperity.** This lesson cannot be overstated and should not be undervalued. Strong relationships are needed to achieve the kind of system transformation required to achieve prosperity for all – between individual human beings, within and between groups, within and between systems. From these relationships, shared learning and shared understanding becomes possible, which then helps to find new, more promising ways to address communities’ most persistent and complex challenges. At the systems level, these relationships are the pathways through which this diverse country will be able to imagine new possibilities.
2. **Systemic support is critical for innovation, transformation.** Innovation requires a different kind of leadership, driven by a diverse group of people connected to all parts of local communities

and prepared to lead and to think differently. Needed skills include (but are not limited to) working together across differences, listening deeply, creating containers that are truly inclusive, redefining success, facilitating emerging voices, and creative problem-solving, setting aside “can’t” and thinking beyond what has been. These skills need to be learned and developed among formal leaders and ordinary community members alike. Furthermore, these skills must be leveraged throughout a connected, better coordinated system. At the systems level, this connectivity is the vehicle by which this diverse country will be able to be more responsive and take more effective action.

3. **Simplify and clarify engagement, so all can participate more effectively.** Design Labs can be powerful containers for cultivating relationships, capacity, and innovation. Both the topic and the process need to be more manageable. Starting with a broad look at poverty was too complex and overwhelming. In the future, Labs should be organized around a much narrower focus on a challenge that people are motivated to address creatively. Steps should be explained as simply and clearly as possible, and time should be given first to build relationships and capacity to engage in this innovation-oriented process.

The previous two chapters describe recommendations for specific actions that will help to realize the impact Lab members sought in this process and to support transformation of local systems. Following up on scaling recommendations for each Lab project should be relatively straightforward, and the Director of the County Equity and Inclusion Office has gotten to work on this already, reaching out to Lab participants to maintain connections and clarify specific next steps in each community. Following up on the remaining recommendations could be done in a variety of ways – here are two:

1. Take small, individual steps in county departments and beyond to:
 - Improve connectivity and relationships within and across systems
 - Develop more authentic, inclusive engagement practices (as described in prior chapter and in accompanying Toolkit)
 - Use the refined Design Lab model to tackle various specific challenges related to poverty (and other persistent community challenges) and to seek shared prosperity in Clackamas communities
 - Build capacity for shared leadership and innovative thinking through continuing equity and other training
2. Plan and begin a comprehensive approach that more quickly and effectively fosters healthy transformation of systems for the benefit of the communities they serve: collaborate with communities and across systems to develop a collective impact-type collaborative that is equipped to build capacity, foster relationships, host Design Labs, and facilitate change.

Pathways to such healthy transformation have been opened through this project should Clackamas County and partners wish to continue this journey. The specific next steps are for the county and partners to define and begin.