SHARED IMPLEMENTATION *for* EQUITABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

THRIVES

PREVENTION INSTITUTE

liif capital for healthy families & communities

SHARED IMPLEMENTATION:
BUILDING A NEW APPROACH *to* ACHIEVING SOCIAL EQUITY *through* PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Los Angeles County region is leading the nation as it enters into a new era of infrastructure development that will have lasting impacts for local neighborhoods and communities. In the past decade, Los Angeles County voters approved a series of ballot initiatives that over time will generate billions of dollars for addressing transportation (Measure R and Measure M), parks (Measure A), stormwater (Measure W), and homelessness (Measure H).

Local and regional governments have worked with the non-profit and private sector to generate support from the electorate to secure these new public revenues. Recognizing a critical opportunity to advance regional equity, advocates and foundations have galvanized to improve the processes, procedures, and implementation policies associated with these measures to increase the likelihood that all Angelenos, particularly low-income communities and households of color, benefit from these investments in the built environment. Equity-oriented concerns are increasingly urgent in the face of growing housing unaffordability and renter displacement around the region, as well as persistent disparities in park and greenspace access, mobility options, health outcomes and health-supporting environmental conditions.

These equity efforts represent innovations in the field and have translated into significant new public initiatives and policies:

- A Park Needs Assessment engaged community stakeholders to define park need, which helped to drive and define Measure A

- The Measure A Grant Administration Manual called for a minimum of 30% of competitive grant funds targeted for projects in high park need areas, anti-displacement provisions, and a unified Countywide Parks Needs Assessment rather than separate assessments for urban parks and regional open space

- Following the passage of Measure M, LA Metro created an Equity Platform and a new Transit Oriented Communities policy, and has expressed an intention to create a new Equity Officer leadership position.

Reflecting upon these accomplishments, remaining challenges, and the opportunities ahead, there is an emerging realization that dramatic departures from how the non-profit, public and private sectors implement infrastructure projects are needed to truly realize equitable outcomes. In other words, despite the "wins" more advocacy is needed, both within and outside implementing agencies, to drive these massive public outlays toward eliminating persistent inequities and accomplishing the social benefits that could be possible with an assertive, proactive stance that prioritizes equity.

Through a series of three small group discussions with thought leaders in the region we learned that key elements of this stance include the following:

- Equitable Infrastructure outcomes will require a paradigm shift from traditional infrastructure development and delivery to what we are calling "Shared Implementation"

- This shift will require the public sector to move from engineering-oriented technocratic leadership and territorial politics to an adaptive leadership culture that embraces shared implementation and inclusive decision-making

- This shift will also require the growth of the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector to participate in infrastructure development and delivery beyond their current limited role, and will require philanthropic grants and governmental contracts to non-profits

Three near-term Enabling Actions emerged through our conversations that could help accelerate the growth of the field.

1. LA County Supervisors can initiate countywide action that directs county agencies to develop a shared definition of equity that serves as a foundation for departments and governments to develop agency-specific definitions and processes. This might include appointing an "Equity Czar" and/or an "Equity Council" to coordinate and advise county agencies toward shared norms and policies, and should start from definitions already developed by the Public Health Department's Center for Health Equity, articulated in the County Sustainability Office's Sustainability Plan or put forth by the USC PERE report, Measures Matter.

2. Public agencies within a single jurisdiction, such as a county or a city, can standardize procurement practices that facilitate contracts with community based organizations to provide community engagement services, including adopting multi-agency master Request for Service Qualifications (RFSQ) procedures to establish a universal consulting bench, and empowering community-based organizations and local residents to exert decision-making at key decision-points, such as in development of scopes of work or selection of construction and consultant firms.

3. Philanthropy should support the identification of best practices for community engagement, and best practices for non-profit organizations to maintain ethical and professional standards for balancing contracting relationships with their right to conduct independent advocacy. Ultimately, this approach may also require a commitment to "field building" to deepen the bench of organizations capable of engaging on infrastructure and built environment policy advocacy.

LA THRIVES along with steering committee members Prevention Institute and Resources Legacy Fund came together following the release of 2018's Measures Matter, published by USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, to independently build upon the report's findings and recommendations for equitable implementation. Based upon research and interviews with practitioners working on the infrastructure measures, USC PERE's research team synthesized a definition for equity

and put forth a set of recommendations for philanthropy and local government to advance equitable outcomes from recent infrastructure investment. Our efforts informed the Measures Matter report and continued beyond the release of the report. In partnership, we continued or explore and synthesize learnings during the implementation phases of Measures M and A and to investigate progress of practitioners with reference to PERE's suggested roadmap, uncover roadblocks, and test how these recommendations might be playing out in the field.

The conclusions drawn in this document are based upon a series of convenings held between summer 2018 through Spring 2019. These meetings included an LA THRIVES Big Table Convening in August 2018 as well as three focus group conversations with influencers and thought leaders in the region--two sessions with non-profit and academic participants and one session with public sector participants. The Big Table convening served as a public marker of progress toward equitable implementation at that point in time, with dialogue among leadership from LA Metro, the Regional Parks and Open Space District, Investing in Place and Prevention Institute.

The focus group conversations were designed as safe spaces to discuss strategic opportunities and challenges, identify larger systems dynamics, and brainstorm possible future interventions. What was unique and critical about these discussions was the emphasis on sharing and learning across topics, issues and measures to identify and synthesize

USC PERE *defines* **EQUITABLE IMPLEMENTATION** *as having* **THREE DIMENSIONS:**

PAST: Equitable implementation prioritizes investments that close historic racialized gaps, especially by wealth, environmental burden, and existing amenities in a way that will improve work and economic and health opportunities for underinvested communities.

PRESENT: Equitable implementation involves authentic partnership throughout the process that centers the perspectives of vulnerable communities, supports community-based participation and power, and results in shared decision making, while also strengthening the health and well-being of the entire region.

FUTURE: Equitable implementation mitigates disparities likely to emerge in the future by leveraging funding for long-term community health and organizational capacity, anticipating and addressing future harm that may result from new investments in a place, and incorporates metrics and evaluation to promote adaptable and effective implementation.

"Measures Matter" (USC PERE, 2018)

"cross-cutting" learnings. Each focus group discussion was approximately 2 hours in length with approximately ten participants per session. The meetings were opened with brief framing remarks delivered by LA THRIVES initiative officer and Prevention Institute executive staff. Participants were then invited to contribute their experiences and perspectives in a fairly unstructured conversation guided by minimal facilitation to probe on specific topics of interest, including but not limited to topics such as: collaboration between agency staff and non-profit organizations, analysis of political and power landscape, organizational skills and capacity, agency staff skill and capacity, issues around data, evaluation, metrics and oversight.

The following provides a high-level summary of the areas of discussion, omitting details that could be used to identify specific organizations or agencies.

WHAT'S WORKING

The region has demonstrated clear steps toward implementation of infrastructure investments that point in the direction of equitable outcomes.

With the passage of Measure A based upon a framework of investment priorities outlined by the Parks Needs Assessment, RPOSD and LA County Supervisors set up the Measure A Steering Committee which ultimately worked with County staff to develop the **Measure A Grant Administration Manual**. The manual, approved by the County Board of Supervisors based upon extensive community recommendations and several late amendments secured through highly strategic advocacy and organizing, calls for a minimum of 30% of competitive grant funds targeted for projects in high park need areas, anti-displacement provisions, and a unified Countywide Parks Needs Assessment rather than separate assessments for urban parks and regional open space.

In contrast to Measure A, the enabling legislation for Metro's Measure M did not provide for assessment or identification of needs in the transportation system. Metro staff created a **Policy Advisory Council**, consisting of representatives from Consumers, Providers, and Jurisdictions to help create the Measure M Guidelines. As stakeholders and advocates called out the lack of definition of equity and the emerging term of "Transit Oriented Communities", Metro staff and board developed and adopted a **Metro Equity Platform** and a **Transit Oriented Communities policy**.

At the same time, local governments around the County have increasingly self-identified a need to grow internal capacity to address racial and social equity. Jurisdictions around the country have turned to Race Forward/Center for Social Inclusion and the **Government Alliance for Racial Equity (GARE)** for capacity building and support. By 2019, the list of participating public agencies in GARE from the Los Angeles region has grown to seven, including LA Metro, several Los Angeles County departments, and numerous local cities. For focus group participants, the growing recognition that government agencies have a responsibility to rectify historic inequities and eliminate current day practices that reproduce

inequities is helpful in itself, but that recognition has not yet been sufficient to achieve institutional culture change at a scale necessary for impact.

WHY DOES THE ROAD TO EQUITABLE IMPLEMENTATION FEEL SO HARD?

Despite these successes, partners across the spectrum shared common frustrations about the slow pace and scale of changes needed. We heard a recognition that the field may have underestimated the sheer scale of systems and culture change needed on multiple levels to shift from a traditional model of infrastructure development and delivery to one where equity is defined, measured, and delivered. Traditional infrastructure delivery is centrally driven, in terms of politics and bureaucracy, and our correspondents identified numerous characteristics of this legacy system working against equity despite good intentions and progressive rhetoric from some elected and staff leadership.

Technocratic bureaucracy - Public infrastructure, whether roads, transit lines, parks, etc. are largely technical projects driven by construction firms, engineers and project managers following constraints of scope, schedule, budget and quantitative outcomes. As social equity concerns have arisen, these tend to be handled indirectly through advisory committees and processes and/or outsourced to professional consultants. On occasions when equity may be included in formative or guiding directives, participants lamented that these instructions have typically remained unfunded or underfunded in terms of resources and staff. Agreed upon definitions of need, clear demographic data, and systemwide / countywide impact metrics have been largely non-existent in this legacy system. Participants tended to agree that success is often measured by resources allocated and projects completed without commensurate attention to the distribution, spread and population-level impact of allocations and project delivery across the county.

> **"While I'm happy that we're going through GARE training and seeing desire amongst our colleagues to do more on racial equity, I worry about whether we're going off a cliff. There aren't resources to necessarily follow through."**
>
> **- Focus Group Participant**

Political resource allocation - Historically, public funding measures and infrastructure resources have reflected the political realities and whims of controlling elected officials. Public dialogue and decision-making have confused and/or conflated equality with equity - in other words, focus group participants emphasized that: dividing resources equally among districts (e.g., divide by 5 Supervisory Districts or 15 Council Districts) is a common political reality. There was acknowledgement that there are signs of more needs based approaches emerging as evidenced in Measure H, which used homeless count data as the basis for resource allocation. Participants sensed longstanding patterns of directing resources toward affluent communities over low-income communities of color, or for vanity

projects over substantive investments and systems changes that close gaps and eliminate disparities. Advocates indicated that at times they experience being shut out or marginalized in decisions.

> **"It's always divide by five, or divide by fifteen - that's the mentality we're up against."**
>
> **- Focus Group Participant**

Limited role for non-governmental organizations - In this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whether philanthropy, grassroots movement organizations, or other non-profits, have struggled to define a clear role in development and delivery of infrastructure. (The traditional infrastructure system has long utilized contracts with design, engineering, communications and other for-profit businesses, but has largely been separate from the non-profit sector, with a few limited exceptions. In this discussion we are considering non-profit NGOs, and not the business community.) Across the board, organizations report insufficient and inconsistent philanthropic support to maintain a through line of equity from creation of public resources through implementation and monitoring. Community based organizations have lacked bandwidth to link infrastructure projects with impacts in their neighborhoods back to regional power-building to engage institutions and decision makers. Organizations with expertise and capacity to address issues/sectors may be effective advocates, but may not have capacity to monitor implementation, particularly given the fact that the time horizons in infrastructure policy work through to implementation are years and even decades long.

> **"The community engagement model of a CBO bench for Measure A and the Parks Needs Assessment paved the way for Measure W engagement, and was a game changer for getting previously uninvolved groups into these issues."**
>
> **- Focus Group Participant**

> **"Where does community organizing and advocacy interact with implementation? Where are the funds to support the work?"**
>
> **- Focus Group Participant**

> **"The community engagement in the Blue Line First/Last Mile Plan was important, not perfect, sure, and it's led to Metro working on an agency community engagement strategy with community-based experts. The key is having a system in place to grow from this and keep doing it in future projects."**
>
> **- Focus Group Participant**

A NEW PRACTICE OF SHARED IMPLEMENTATION

We are seeing the emergence of a new system, what we are calling **Shared Implementation**, from the collective insights and recommendations from our public and NGO partners. This would be a dramatic departure from the traditional infrastructure implementation process described above, elevating adaptive leadership over technical leadership, that brings more stakeholders and more jurisdictions around the region into decision-making, project implementation, and ongoing monitoring.

This concept of Shared Implementation incorporates the recommendations and principles from USC PERE's Measures Matter. Participants specifically noted the critical importance of creating **shared definitions of need and equity** to allow for transparent, data-driven decision making. Participants also called for investing in **community engagement** throughout the process of implementation, and investing in **capacity and technical assistance** to smaller and less-resourced jurisdictions to deliver infrastructure.

Participants reflected on recommendations and actions needed, discussing both ideas previously developed in Measures Matter as well as new emerging proposals. These ideas clearly amounted to a need for changing culture and systems in the public and non-governmental sectors that require a multi-faceted set of actions over time.

PUBLIC SECTOR CULTURE OF ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

Shared implementation and equitable outcomes will require adaptive leadership that facilitates new and non-traditional actors in public infrastructure investments, particularly those stakeholders in parts of the county traditionally left out of decision-making and implementation of parks, transportation and other built environment improvements. *Building this new culture will not come automatically but will require careful attention to the staffing and leadership within agencies, turning intention and commitment into policy directives and administrative procedures, investing in data and metrics, and sharing and coordinating resources and knowledge.*

As public agencies adopt intentional approaches to reducing racial and social inequities, public sector employees will benefit from trainings like GARE but agencies need to *continuously invest resources* to allow staff to follow-through and sustain their racial equity training into decision making and operations. Participants saw this need at leadership positions, who lead budgetary and operational decisions, but also down the line of personnel. There was also notable emphasis on hiring people who have lived experiences of the inequities that these systems have created. One critical observation was that there are many bright spots that signal practical examples of practice change, but an overwhelming experience that too often these successes don't become institutionalized as best practices across these massive public agencies but rather remain as pilots with limited impact.

Prioritization and decisions about resource allocations will require *more data throughout the implementation process.* Stakeholders and communities can more effectively participate in implementation through tools like the Parks Needs Assessment, and through ongoing metrics to monitor improvements in communities over time.

Shared implementation will require shared knowledge and coordination within and between agencies. Participants proposed a county level "equity czar" to coordinate agencies toward shared norms, practices and goals. Participants also proposed continuing cross-sector working groups and spaces for sharing experiences and ideas at a peer level and welcomed both government-only and mixed settings alongside non-profit, philanthropic, business and community partners.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP:

Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive. Characteristics of adaptive culture include willingness to name tough challenges, share responsibility, rely on independent judgement, cultivate leadership, and embrace continuous learning.

Adapted from Ron Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky's The Practice of Adaptive Leadership

One of the issues that surfaced across the focus groups was the notion of philanthropy "giving grants" to government agencies to fund staff positions that can promote innovation. There were a handful of examples of such an approach, including the City of Long Beach Department of Public Health's Office of Equity and the State of California's Health in All Policy team, both supported by philanthropic dollars. However, there was mixed sentiment about this approach – including strong feelings that government agencies with their significant resources ought to demonstrate their commitment by moving their own resources. Participants pointed to LA Metro moving towards hiring an "Equity Officer" as a good example, but reflected that more resources and staff would be needed to truly move real institutional change.

GROWING THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Shared implementation will require a far greater role for a spectrum of non-governmental organizations to participate in implementation and delivery of infrastructure. Participants across the board shared frustrations that the current system vastly underestimates the value and roles that their organizations can play in infrastructure implementation. Whether a community based organizations serving specific neighborhoods or advocacy organizations working at a regional level, these groups are not reporting sufficient philanthropic support to maintain consistency and depth of engagement, nor sufficient compensation from government contracts, if such contracts are even in place.

Participants outlined the characteristics of a robust ecosystem of non-governmental participation in implementation, including:

- Organizations that can sustain both intense policy work and grassroots organizing

- "Middle organizations" and "grassroots organizations" in an ecosystem with funders and public agencies

- Organizations with influence/relationships across multiple jurisdictions and agencies

- Philanthropic support for all levels and types of engagement, including base-building organizing, policy advocacy, collaboration, and community engagement

- Standardizing way/norms for agencies to procure contracts with CBOs, including perhaps a master County community engagement bench across county departments

- Best practices for balancing advocacy/organizing with implementation

Participants in all three focus groups acknowledged the importance of supporting both organizations that engaged in grassroots/powerbuilding and organizations engaging in "inside" advocacy within the agencies. Participants noted that because these processes are inherently protracted and technically complex, an ecosystem of complementary partnerships are needed. One important implication of this is that funders have a responsibility to support and reinforce collaboration rather than reinforce "either/or" models that preference one "type" of non-profit organization over another. It is the combination of tools and skills that is required to move large, slow-moving systems. *For more, see "California Health and Justice for All Power-Building Landscape: A Preliminary Assessment" (USC PERE, 2018).*

ENABLING ACTIONS TO BUILD SHARED IMPLEMENTATION

Building a new field of shared implementation is sure to be a long process of evolving practices in government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Changing the culture of public agencies, growing the capacities and skills of NGOs and local jurisdictions will need time to develop. While the goal of this brief was not intended to offer an exhaustive set of recommendations, a few near-term actions emerged through our conversations that could help accelerate the growth of the field. These "enabling actions" are listed below.

1. LA County Supervisors can initiate countywide action that directs county agencies to develop a shared definition of equity that serves as a foundation for departments and governments to develop agency-specific definitions and processes. This might include appointing an "Equity Czar" and/or an "Equity Council" to coordinate and advise county agencies toward shared norms and policies, and should start from definitions already

developed by the Public Health Department's Center for Health Equity, articulated in the County Sustainability Office's Sustainability Plan or put forth by the USC PERE report, Measures Matter.

2.   Public agencies within a single jurisdiction, such as a county or a city, can standardize procurement practices that facilitate contracts with community based organizations to provide community engagement services, including adopting multi-agency master Request for Service Qualifications (RFSQ) procedures to establish a universal consulting bench, and empowering community-based organizations and local residents to exert decision-making at key decision-points, such as in development of scopes of work or selection of construction and consultant firms.

3.   Philanthropy should support the identification of best practices for community engagement, and best practices for non-profit organizations to maintain ethical and professional standards for balancing contracting relationships with their right to conduct independent advocacy. Ultimately, this approach may also require a commitment to "field building" to deepen the bench of organizations capable of engaging on infrastructure and built environment policy advocacy.