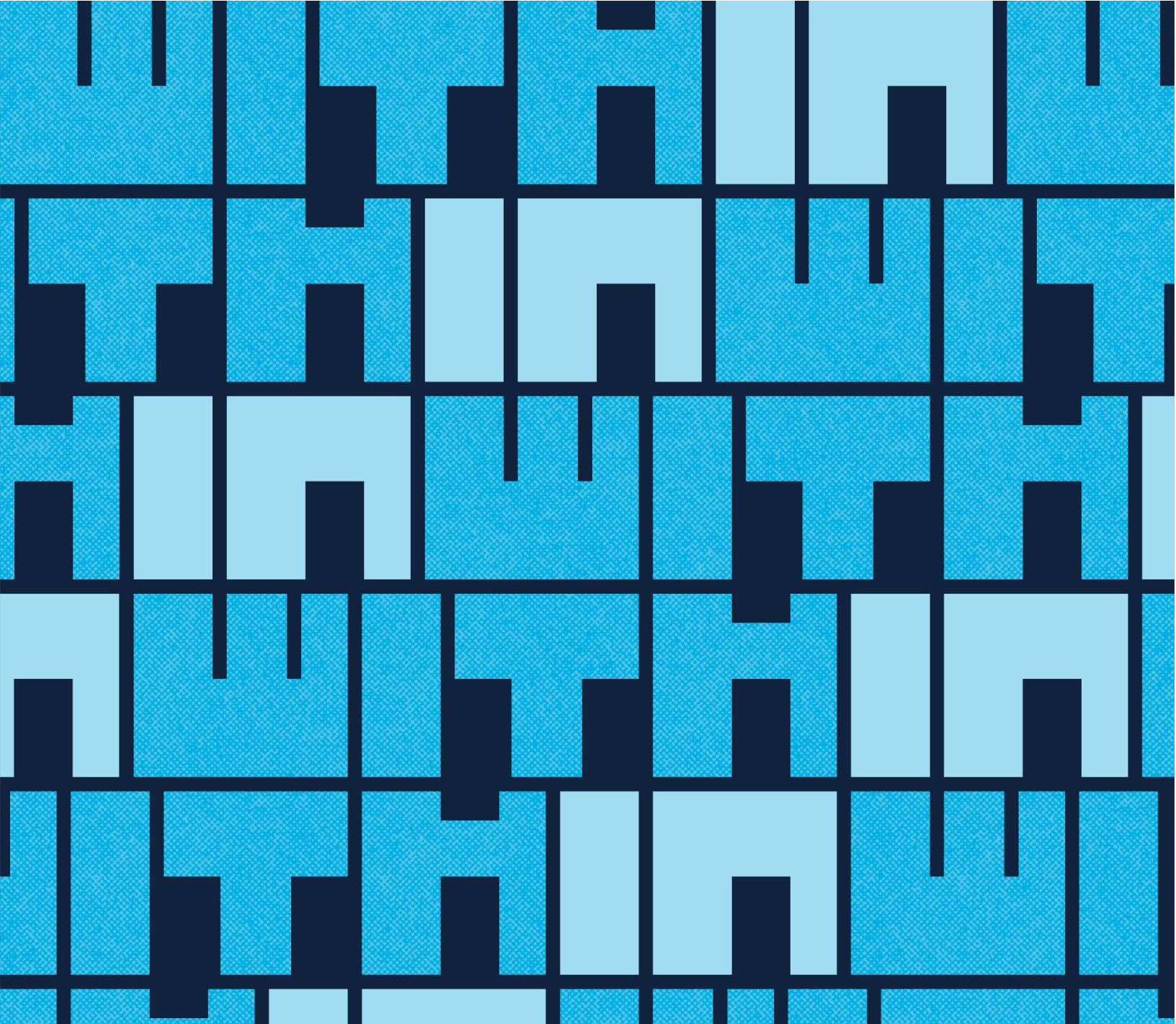


# **NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT PLANNING GUIDEBOOK**



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# An Introduction

## Why Neighborhood Planning?

***Imagine a world where residents have the power to transform their own neighborhoods.***

At LISC, we believe that community members closest to the issues are also closest to the solutions. We believe that community building works only when it's the result of a neighborhood working hard to implement its own vision—not a vision imposed from the outside. We believe that community members should have an opportunity to stay there if they choose to.

Embarking on an inclusive and holistic process may take longer than traditional planning, yet an inclusive and comprehensive process ensures trust is built, capacity is developed, and policy, subject matter, and financial partners are engaged to help a neighborhood achieve its goals.

When residents are given the opportunity to become architects of their own neighborhoods, they can affect positive change that benefits their quality of life, while benefitting future generations to come.

## What is Neighborhood Planning?

Neighborhood investment planning, quality of life planning, community planning - or whatever you choose to call it - simplifies the community development process, and ensures development is driven by resident leaders.

Recently, LISC WNY launched a neighborhood planning program called, [WITHIN WNY](#), starting with partners on the East Side of Buffalo. It is grounded in building deep relationships with community partners who work closely with neighborhood residents. These partners include neighborhood-based nonprofits, block clubs, faith-based partners, small business leaders, health equity partners, and small-scale local developers to name a few. As an open, inclusive, community-driven initiative, we bring together neighborhood voices, trusted partners, and supportive funders to better the wellbeing of residents using their own visions.

The strategies that emerge out of the planning process form a roadmap for physical development, programmatic partnership, and investment led from within. Not only are the physical elements addressed, but relationships are built through community consensus, and the development of a shared agenda.

The process involves these parts, but it's never a straight line, and each community has their own contexts and nuances to consider. We'll get into those twists and turns.



***Though the image above looks linear, there is no prescription for this work.*** In fact, we discourage you from making assumptions from one neighborhood to another. Each process is going to look and feel different, depending on the readiness of your partners and community.

The WITHIN WNY program launched during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020. We are entering into the implementation work together with our partners who have also been directly and personally impacted by the racially motivated domestic terrorism that occurred on May 14, 2022, and stacks upon decades of disinvestment and racism impacting health and wealth in these communities. The journey is challenging, and we have learned a lot from our partners and the process. We created this guidebook to share some of this information with you.

## How to Use This Guidebook

### What's it for?

The tools, resources, and ideas in this guidebook are intended to reverse the narrative that neighborhood planning is a complex and confusing process. It provides resources for you and your community as you set goals, visions, and action steps for your future.

Planning is one of the most important steps a neighborhood can take to become healthier, safer, and economically stronger. The process is iterative. Even if you have



done it before, it could be time to revisit. The global pandemic has had significant and lasting impacts. Partners, environments, technologies, and visions change. Building an open table and a cyclical, flexible planning framework can help you keep up and stay relevant.

Neighborhood planning takes a fair amount of effort requiring meetings, strategy sessions, and reaching out to neighborhood residents, churches, schools, business leaders, and other stakeholders to make sure it is a plan your entire neighborhood will embrace. Before getting into the grind, it's important to start by identifying what's great about your neighborhood first. Celebrate the work already accomplished by community and/or elders before you.

When arriving at the planning process, you have to consider all sorts of factors, from land use to education to public safety to the quality of housing to health care and beyond. It can take months to bring a plan together. You can use this book like a menu, take what you like and what works for you and your neighbors.

There is no perfect recipe for the planning process. ***The special sauce lies in the recognition that process itself is as important as the plan.*** The process requires significant time and investment. Leadership in this process is the ability to listen and weave together diverse community visions to build consensus and collective support for a shared agenda.

### Who is it for?

Anyone involved in a neighborhood planning process can use this guidebook. Residents, neighborhood clubs, community organizations, municipal partners, philanthropies, businesses, churches, or school partners may all play various roles throughout the process and find different pieces useful.

We do recommend that the process is convened by a strong lead agency (usually a neighborhood nonprofit or community development corporation) that has the capacity and capital (social and financial) to steward the planning process and implement the strategies identified through the process. This is important to be able to centralize documentation, communications, fundraising, and sustain the efforts long-term.

### When to use it?

The planning process aims to create a shared roadmap for resilient, inclusive and economically vibrant communities, and to develop the social and institutional infrastructure of a neighborhood to act on this roadmap. It's supposed to be more than a document and a set of strategies: the process is designed to build partnerships and drive commitments around this common agenda. In this sense, it's kind of like a set of agreements by actors across sectors to pursue a common set of goals together.

It can be helpful to orient the planning process around key funding cycles (e.g., LIHTC rounds, City capital planning, annual budgeting for foundations, etc.) to

increase the probability that proposed projects receive funding and establish process timelines. This means funders, municipal and other government partners can have your agenda to help inform their budgeting and investment plans. It's also helpful if the philanthropic and private funding environments are robust enough that a neighborhood plan can attract resources from a variety of sectors, including public, private and social. There should also be sufficient interest and momentum in the targeted geographic area to ensure that implementation partners are willing and able to prioritize the neighborhood or site undergoing the planning. Related, and perhaps most important, communities can use this tool and process to mitigate displacement risks that arise through community development. Building local capacity and having a shared agenda can position neighborhoods to have more power and influence when important development decisions are being made in their communities.

It may also be a good time to conduct a neighborhood planning process if other community assessments are being done, such as community health assessments. A neighborhood plan can draw from the data collected through these assessments, incorporating them into the market analysis component of the planning process. A neighborhood plan can also serve to integrate the needs and strategies identified across different assessments into a common framework bringing together different organizational priorities under a single umbrella, breaking down organizational silos and driving toward collective impact.

### **Partnering with LISC**

A local LISC office, together with the LISC national parent company, can be significant and strong investors and supports throughout the planning process. Neighborhood-led planning processes are in alignment with LISC's capacity building strategies. For example, LISC may use HUD Section 4 funds to support a convening agency in undertaking a neighborhood planning process as a strategic way to build local capacity and support a neighborhood planning effort.

As an intermediary organization, LISC can also be a helpful partner for convening organizations and leaders, attracting fundraising and investment opportunities, sharing innovative and current successful planning and implementation strategies, and/or investing in capital projects to bring the plans to life.

LISC invests in people and organizations working to make their neighborhoods healthier places to live. As a community development financial institution (CDFI), we offer a wide range of programs, services, and grant opportunities that help communities thrive. Our LISC NY team works together to create partnerships in urban, suburban and rural communities throughout the state.

We would love to learn more about your neighborhood and goals.

For more information, please visit [www.lisc.org/wny](http://www.lisc.org/wny).

# A Foundation & Frameworks

The core foundation from which the New York LISC team works includes the following pillars:

**1. Radical Healing:** Examining and addressing underlying assumptions that perpetuate bias and bigotry through legislative and public policy advocacy and engagement with cultural institutions (for example, through community arts and placemaking efforts).

**2. Inclusive Economic Transformation:** Prioritizing targeted investments in public infrastructure, human talent, innovation, diverse small businesses, and impactful community organizations.

**3. Sustainable Wealth Generation:** Exploring and implementing programs that support entrepreneurship, ownership, career ladders, and financial mobility and wealth building in communities of color.

Further, we believe that all neighborhood planning should strive for the following:

- [Equity & inclusion](#): planning is done *with* the community rather than *to* it, incorporating a diverse range of voices
- [Collaboration](#): the process works across sectors and brings together different constituencies, encouraging synergies between people, efforts and ideas
- [Asset-based approach](#): build on the assets and strengths of a neighborhood rather than starting with weaknesses and gaps
- [Data driven](#): data informs planning, measures progress, and supports modification to strategies if needed
- [Orientation towards action](#): results are evident before the plan has been completed due to early action projects and prototyping
- [Fun & enjoyment](#): the process is challenging and comprehensive, and elicits joy and pride from within the community

A multitude of [frameworks and models](#) for how to pursue neighborhoods planning exist. The planning process will range in time and structure depending on the strength of existing relationships, the circumstances around the effort, and the scope of the planning area and work. Major components could include:



**Despite the way that some graphic models look, we can assure you that the process won't be linear.** There will be lots of twists and turns, bumps, diversions, distractions, delays or propellers that keep the process interesting. This is where the skills of a strong convening agency come in to keep the process moving through the curves, participants engaged and represented, and open to the fluidity.

Possible planning journey outline with twists and turns from LISC Indianapolis:

- **Step 1:** Create steering team
- **Meeting 1:** What's up? What's working in the neighborhood? What's not working? Where does community want to be. State results you want to see realized.
  - Do others/greater community agree. Check-In.
- **Meeting 2:** Create committees & share the workload, build an open table for growth and fluctuation
- **ROADBLOCK:** Get outside help. Technical experts can bring info needed to move forward.
- **Meeting 3:** Develop your vision and create strategies to make it happen
- **DISAGREEMENT:** Keep talking. Help the group find common ground.
- **GET FEEDBACK:** Engage with residents on the basics of the plan early and often!
- **EARLY ACTION:** Don't wait! Launch achievable projects right away!
- **Meeting 4:** Fine tuning – adjust strategies and pick projects
- **LOOKING GOOD:** Progress results help build momentum and keep bringing people into the process
- **Meeting 5:** Draft Your Plan – put all the pieces together
- **BUILD OWNERSHIP & GET MORE FEEDBACK:** Steering team local leaders sell the plan inside the neighborhood, need more champions!
- **Meeting 6:** Make commitments – who does what by when? Who else is needed to make things happen?
- **PUBLISH:** Make the plan final (even though it's never final!) put something on people for additional investors and interests to learn more
- **GET BUSY:** Turn those visions into reality!
- **REVISIT:** Don't forget to make time to revisit and assess the efforts. Take time to celebrate wins, share success stories, and navigate challenges when necessary. Quarterly check-ins are a great way to sustain accountability.

You can also view [LISC Indianapolis' Neighborhood Investment Planning Framework](#) that addresses the social determinants of health.



# Neighborhood Planning Tools

## Bringing People Together

Define the [geographic boundaries of the planning area for focus](#). The boundaries should make sense to local residents and business owners. The needs of the area should be relatively consistent throughout, and if needed, a larger area can have subdivisions for multiple planning efforts. Be prepared to explain to participants and potential funders why you chose the area(s) you did and who exactly lives there.

[Identify key participants and cast a wide net](#). These individuals should represent a broad array of groups, ages, roles, and influence that play an active role in the neighborhood. Their input and expertise will be required to build consensus and ownership around action items resulting from the planning process. You may want to map the groups that residents already belong to in your community and/or consider a list like this one when brainstorming invitations for participation:

- Neighborhood Groups
- Block Clubs
- Local Development Corporations
- Various Income Groups
- Various Ethnic Groups
- Health Service Providers
- Human Service Providers
- Recreations Providers
- Apartment Complex Owners
- Homeowners
- Renters
- Youth & Older Adult Groups
- Schools – all levels
- Faith-Based Groups
- Libraries
- Lenders
- Foundations
- Local Government
- Police/Fire Department
- Cultural Groups
- Service Groups
- Business Owners
- Commercial Property Owners
- Transportation/Mobility Groups
- Leadership Groups
- Others unique to your neighborhood

Your initial scan will include “the usual suspects”: all those neighborhood leaders you know are interested in helping see your community grow and improve. But you should also take this opportunity to reach out to people and groups who may not have been included in the past. (Many times, they haven’t been included simply because they haven’t been asked.) Their perspectives and their energy will be crucial in both setting the vision and in implementing your plan.

***The goal at this stage is not just to have all these diverse stakeholders involved in planning, but for them to take ownership and responsibility for parts of the plan.*** As you will see, no action item or goal will make it into your quality-of-life plan if you don’t have a group that will be responsible for it. No one group has the capacity to take on all the important items that need to be in the plan, so it’s essential that as many groups as possible are involved. Also, if you haven’t already

done so, now would be a good time to start to form some sort of steering committee to help oversee the planning process.

[Select a convening agency](#). This should be a strong lead partner able to lead, organize, and steward most of the planning efforts, produce the final product, and coordinate implementation of the strategies. This agency might be a community development corporation (CDC), a direct service organization, or even an anchor institution. Regardless of the type, most important is that this agency has knowledge of the development process and is a trusted organization.

- **Community trust:** a trusted community institution with buy-in from key community leaders and history of executing community programs
- **Convening power:** strong network of relationships – or ability to cultivate relationships – with key institutional stakeholders (e.g., elected officials, city agencies, anchors, developers); ability to convene diverse groups of stakeholders
- **Operational excellence:** capacity and bandwidth to guide implementation of community strategies, including a strong balance sheet, policies and procedures in place to be eligible for government funds (e.g. Section 4), and ability to responsibly manage finances, staff, or even AmeriCorps members

The convening agency can [partner with LISC](#) on the planning effort for technical assistance and capacity building support. Use this [readiness meeting toolkit](#) and [Stages of Neighborhood Development and Readiness](#) from LISC Houston to get a feel for your own readiness.

When working together, the convening agency and LISC NY may hire coordinators, planners, facilitators, and/or community workers as needed to ensure the planning and implementation processes are successful. Neighborhood-led efforts may want to utilize consultant support for facilitation, market analyses, and/or other technical expertise as required. University partnerships may also be helpful in expanding bandwidth for market analyses, utilizing interns and service organizations. Municipal-led efforts may want to consider being a support agency for neighborhood leaders, and equip them with consultant support for facilitation, market analyses, etc.

LISC can also work with the convening agency and steering teams on trainings and development to prepare for community organizing and planning together, like LISC Chicago did with [Austin Coming Together](#).

[Create a governance & leadership structure](#). A strong advisory committee is a key sounding board for the planning process, and should embody the interests of the community, be able to provide direction, identify issues, and surface prospective strategies. The group is not intended to make decisions autonomously or tell the community what it should do.

Empowered leaders can engage and educate the rest of the community about your plans in a way that promotes neighborhood ownership and involvement in the plan, right from the start.

[Set up regular meeting schedules with various engagement groups](#). Convene participants at a regular interval and at a time and place that is most convenient and inclusive for as many people as possible. If space allows for inclusive technology, hybrid [virtual](#)/in person engagements and/or multiple meeting time opportunities are also helpful to increase participation. Consider the physical accessibility of the environment, language translation and ASL interpretation services, childcare needs, work schedules (day and/or night), dietary inclusion, germ reduction, public transportation access, parking, etc.

In Buffalo, the [WITHIN East Side](#) process began during the height of COVID-19. Our initial engagements were all done virtually using tools like [Google Jamboard](#), [Mural](#), and [Zoom](#). We were not able to convene groups, and large virtual engagements can be difficult to get full participation. Therefore, we did a mashup of virtual group meetings, one on one meetings, and made a strong effort to join our partners' meetings rather than scheduling separate ones solely focused on the neighborhood planning agenda. Our initial shared agendas, steering teams, focus groups, interviews, and scenario planning materials were all hosted virtually. You can find all the [community engagement](#) documents here.

## Identifying Needs & Taking a Data-Informed Approach

As you begin getting to know the shared goals, experiences, and challenges of your community, data needs will likely float to the top. One of the first steps in the actual creation of a neighborhood plan is gathering and sharing information with people in your neighborhood, so they can ground truth their lived experience with the data. This is the biggest difference between data-driven (using quantitative data only) vs. data-informed approaches that merge quantitative data with lived experiences.

You can review recent (and past!) reports as a part of your background research. Statistical information about the physical, social, and economic characteristics of your neighborhood provides a good basis for recommendations about the future of your neighborhood. A demographic profile of your neighborhood—who lives here and what are they like? — will help you understand the neighborhood's needs, too.

For additional consideration here are some helpful conversation starters and consideration for data collection and mapping:

- Are there special areas within the neighborhood with their own culture or boundaries?
- Physical barriers such as railroad tracks, industrial zones, highways within or around neighborhood?
- Connectors such as public transit routes, bicycle paths, parks, etc? Future plans?

- Anchors of activity such as commercial districts, universities, hospitals, major employers? Major investment corridors or initiatives?
- Underutilized parcels that could be developed for more intentional use or provide land for such use for schools, health center, parks, etc?
- Vacant lots or abandoned buildings that represent a current problem but may have future uses and opportunities?
- Local, municipal, county, and/or state strategic plans or documents to consult?
- Historic preservation sites and/or goals for preservation?
- Arts and cultural institutions and anchors? Redevelopment plans or cultural corridor improvements?
- Major infrastructure needs or capacity issues? Planned infrastructure investment from city, state, federal efforts?
- What does access to nutritious foods, large grocers, and/or other food systems and productions assets look like?
- Employment opportunities within and/or near the neighborhood? Common commuting behaviors?
- Reports and/or assessments on environmental history, cultural, and demographic histories of the community

[Map current initiatives and assets to find opportunities for collaboration.](#) This is important to see what's already underway and where there are opportunities to piggyback on existing momentum. This may look like a physical or virtual map that can be generated by existing data sets.

Information should be available to all participants in the planning process and presented early and often throughout the process. In addition, it is important to make time to reflect on the quantitative data, statistical reports, and maps and ground truth it with lived experience and qualitative data, ensuring there are ways for participants to provide input.

This [interactive ArcGIS Hub map](#) was created as part of the Buffalo East Side Investment Plan. Participants report that access to this data in an easy, public manner has not only been helpful for this neighborhood planning purpose, but also a useful tool for grant writing, building an evidence base for other strategic planning, and demonstrating visually the relationships between different sectors and silos of data.

Identify opportunities to drive towards creating strategies and real outcomes. Adopting an 'agile' or 'iterative' approach to the process can help drive towards concrete proposals within the planning timeframe. Consider the following strategies to ensure that the planning process leads to concrete project proposals.

- Leverage existing assessments (e.g., Community Health Needs Assessments, etc) during data gathering phase
- Prioritize spending more time on the strategy & scenario development phases

- Consider narrowing lanes of focus or priority issues early on for a more focused strategy development process (e.g. focus on 2-3 community-selected priority topics like housing, transportation, and food access)
- For key parcels of land or redevelopment opportunities, consider holding project & scenario development charrettes concurrently with strategy working groups

It's likely that your partner organizations have already done needs assessments and/or surveyed community members as part of recent efforts. Be sure to ask and aggregate that information in order to minimize the time and resources spent of new data collection and avoid over-surveying and/or repeating previous efforts.

For additional stakeholder engagements, use a [multitude of approaches and tools](#) for building relationships and gathering information. Ensure your neighborhood partners leading these engagement efforts are budgeted to do so.

## Developing Strategies

Okay, you are working with an amazing group of people, you know so much about the past and present conditions in your community, now it's time for "The Big Question" - ***What do we want our neighborhood to become?***

- How can we improve our neighborhood's physical environment?
- What could expand economic opportunities for neighborhood residents?
- How can we encourage investment in our neighborhood?
- How can we extend access to health care and social services?
- What would make our neighborhood safer and more pleasant?
- Which buildings and land could be used better?
- How can we improve transportation in and through our neighborhood?
- How can we build connections with other parts of the city?
- Do we have enough places for recreation?
- How can we improve our schools?
- How can we encourage neighborhood residents to own and invest in properties or businesses?
- What needs do we have that aren't being met?

You may notice that many of these topics are [social determinants of health](#), or the conditions of the environments where we are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age. There is an [inextricable link between our health and our neighborhood environments](#), perhaps the most important reason for significant investment in this work. Your teams may decide to hone in on one or several focus areas for strategy development and investment. A subcommittee structure may be helpful to engage subject matter experts, community organizations in relevant fields, and/or government and fund partners in strategy development workshops, visioning, strategy, and scenario planning sessions with the community.

Each committee should identify actionable strategies for neighborhood improvements in terms of real proposed projects and programs. The committees



should also recommend individuals, organizations, or agencies that might carry out the projects and programs they propose—not to mention the timing and funding for the improvements they envision.

You'll want to make sure that your committees' recommendations are specific enough to be measurable. For example, "Improve the health of neighborhood residents" is not measurable. "Implement a quarterly health screening program at the community center" is. It's also helpful for each of the committees to create a summary document of their work.

These committee reports may be reviewed by the planning leadership group or steering committee, which can begin to assemble all the elements into one cohesive plan. Note that you'll probably encounter some overlap in subject matter among your committees. You'll need to remove duplicate strategies and possibly discuss plan recommendations with other stakeholders to identify or confirm specific ownership, or potential partnership, for each strategy.

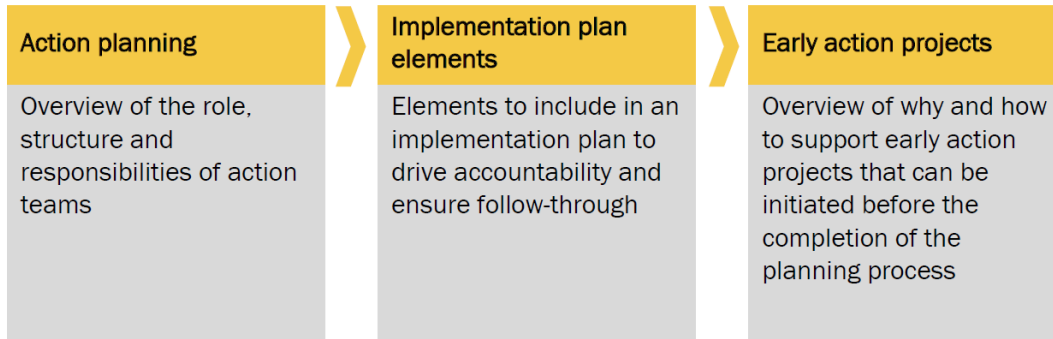
Once your planning leadership group or steering committee is finished reviewing and modifying the work of the committees, the plan has to be written. It might be a good idea to identify strong writers in your neighborhood who can help shape your plan into a powerful written document. You might also consider providing planning information in other formats, such as on a web site or in a video, which can help your plan reach a wider audience.

- Be specific. Exactly what needs to be done? Who will do it? How? When?
- Be inclusive. Allow all viewpoints to be aired and help find agreement.
- Don't get bogged down. Use workshops, committees, and experts to get past barriers.
- Keep people coming back. Make your meetings interesting and productive—and FUN!
- Be an advocate. Take every opportunity to talk up and promote your plan.

Use an [Investment Plan Worksheet](#) in each subcommittee to organize and prioritize your strategies, lead implementation partners, and how the projects relate.

## Early Action & Measuring Progress

**Take early action.** You've done a lot up to this point, and your partners need motivation to stay committed and invested in the process. In addition, some of your strategies may be able to be implemented right away with fewer resources. That's why it makes sense to identify low- and no cost "early action" projects you can undertake while the planning process is still underway. These projects should be meaningful, inexpensive tasks that make a visible difference in your neighborhood. Chances are some of the recommendations from a prior visioning workshop will be perfect early projects.



Whose responsibility is it to complete these projects? While your steering committee should ultimately track all projects, this is a great chance to get individual committees and other community stakeholders involved. Collaborating organizations such as schools, churches, and community centers might even be the beneficiaries of such projects. By taking early action, you show the neighborhood that big plans are underway, and the momentum is building.

In Buffalo, partners on the East Side collaborated on an early action program called “Pride in Place Buffalo” through [AARP’s Community Challenge](#) grant opportunity. This early action project, spearheaded during the height of the Covid-19 lockdown, highlighted Covid-safe build-your-own-walking tours, arts and cultural outdoor and virtual events, and food access locations and demonstrations. It also incorporated 20 outdoor artist-created Idea Boxes, for residents to provide feedback on their neighborhood’s future.

**Measuring your progress.** Consider these elements to measure along the way to ensure your plan will be most effective:

- Vision is clear to all key stakeholders
- Local and subject matter expertise is being actively engaged
- Listening and learning are being prioritized over existing power
- Process is tackling core issues that promote inequity
- Specific projects and programs are being identified
- Community buy-in for planning process is widespread

LISC Chicago created a tool that can be used to [track behaviors and actions](#) that will build capacity and set your process up for success.

## Creating Investment Plans

**The plan should outline a concrete roadmap.** The goals and strategies that emerge from the planning process should embrace the input of community residents, while also balancing the realities of what is feasible to accomplish given institutional and other contextual constraints. At the end of the planning process, neighborhoods should walk away with a workable plan for their communities and a set of initiatives in which funders (as well as LISC) can invest. The plan should remain fluid enough so

local partners may take advantage of new opportunities that will benefit the community, but concrete enough that there is a clear roadmap for moving forward.

First, though, you need to present your draft plan to the broad community for further feedback—and to seek neighborhood commitment and support. Securing this support, especially regarding the strategies for neighborhood improvements, is key to the success of implementing your plan.

Once your plan has been accepted by people and groups in your neighborhood and put into final form, you may want to present it to the Mayor’s Office, Chamber of Commerce and other agencies, so that they’re aware of the vision and strategy for your neighborhood.

Each community will prioritize and design their plan uniquely. Successful plans usually have the following comprehensive components:

<i>What (plan component)</i>	<i>Why (relevance to process)</i>
<u>Community overview</u> : an overview of community assets and opportunities, as well as the community’s built, demographic and historic contexts	This information can serve as a starting point for creating potential hypotheses that will help guide the planning process, ensure that key community assets are leveraged, and provide context for outside actors. This section may also be useful for future grant or communications materials.
<u>Asset Identification/Market analysis</u> : a qualitative and quantitative data analysis to create an inventory of opportunities and assets in a defined geographic zone to help understand the community’s potential	This analysis of trends can help stakeholders make informed decisions about strategies and develop recommendations that reflect both what the community desires and what the best opportunities are given the economic, social and governance context.
<u>Vision</u> : an articulation of the community’s high-level vision for the future of their neighborhood	The vision allows a community to speak with one voice on important issues, concerns and goals. The vision is arrived at through an interactive exercise that empower neighbors to create positive change by engaging in conversations that will spur great ideas that should take hold in the community.
<u>Action plan</u> : specific objectives and concrete action items that translate the vision statement into an actionable strategy	The action plan translates the high-level vision into concrete action items – including timeframes, implementation partners and success metrics. In doing so, the action plan allows groups of stakeholders – both residents and institutional actors – to co-design solutions in pursuit of a common goal.
<u>Land use and zoning plan</u> : suggested changes to land use and zoning that will be necessary to accomplish the strategies laid out in the plan	For communities experiencing significant change, a zoning plan can ensure that only projects that will benefit the community and local residents (such as those identified in the QOLP) have a likelihood of moving forward.

## Here are a few sample LISC Neighborhood Planning documents:

[Buffalo](#) (2022)  
[Indianapolis](#) (2020)  
[Richmond](#) (2019)

[Chicago](#) (2018)  
[Kansas City](#) (2018)  
[Cincinnati](#) (2016)

## Pulling Funds Together

[Develop a budget and identify resources for planning.](#) Co-creating a budget with your convening partners can help you coordinate and design elements of the planning process with an eye toward potential constraints. The cost of a planning effort can vary significantly depending on the size of the target area, team structure, and your ability to leverage existing relationships. Budgeting for the planning process is not small and should not be undervalued. A well-resourced planning effort respects the variety of contributors by paying them for their time and intellectual inputs. This includes budgeting stipends for community participation as well.

When contracting for various roles in your planning effort, strive to hire local minority and women owned businesses with the skills, expertise, relationships, and geographic experience that will enhance the services provided, improve outcomes of the planning, and potentially build longer term implementation relationships.

[Fundraising for implementation is ongoing.](#) Similar to early action projects, early fundraising wins for implementation of the strategies are helpful to build support and show that external partners value the work. Since there will likely be a wide range of strategies within the plan, this means there are always many opportunities to look for financial support:

- Local philanthropic organizations may be interested in strategies specifically aimed to help certain populations like older adults or children, or programs in specific areas.
- Government partners may be looking for opportunities to align with their own strategic plans and the capacity to complete them. Therefore, it is helpful to involve government partners in the process and time the process, so they have your plans in hand when creating their budgets.
- Banking partners are also usually interested in community development opportunities, and community partners at banks can help build financing connections for projects that need those types of services.
- State agencies and national foundations also present regular calls for proposals and opportunities for community investment.
- LISC, as a community development financial institution (CDFI), provides lending products for nonprofit and community-led development initiatives. LISC is also skillful at partnering for collaborative fundraising and financing opportunities.

***Having a strong convening agency equipped with the capacity to search for, apply for, receive, and allocate funding is essential to building a fundraising core.*** You will want to consider the need for this ongoing capacity through the

duration of the implementation phase as well. The benefit of a shared agenda and collective impact approach to improving a neighborhood is that all partners and organizations can share resources, help fundraise, and show they are working together on a shared vision. Funders value when their investments are leveraged and contribute to larger scale or greater project impacts.

## Sustaining the Momentum

Some projects in your plan can be tackled immediately and accomplished within a period of months; these are your short-term projects. Others may require some building blocks to be in place, or demand resources that aren't yet available. These are medium-term projects that you may wish to tackle in years two and three of your plan. Finally, you'll have some long-term projects you may not be able to start for several years. Work toward them—and keep them in your vision. Consider how you will sustain participation, interest, and commitment of the steering team and partners to reach these longer-range goals.

No comprehensive community development plan is ever really final—or ever really finished. New challenges and opportunities arise every year. You'll want to be sure to revisit your plan in its entirety periodically to track your progress, make sure the projects you identified still make sense, and add new projects to address new needs.

Remember, it's important to work on projects that offer measurable results. You'll need to measure your progress based on the metrics you agreed to in your planning process. And don't forget that people and organizations change in your neighborhood, too. Revisiting your plan from time to time is a good way to get new people involved.

## Who else can help?

### LISC

LISC is a national, nonprofit organization that helps communities as they improve the physical and economic condition of their neighborhoods. LISC supports neighborhood-based community organizations and their immediate partners as they serve as critical vehicles in the neighborhood revitalization process. LISC provides early-stage financing for housing and economic development projects and other community-based programs.

LISC's value add to a planning effort:

- Provide strategic technical support to the process, drawing on both local knowledge, relationships, and national best practices
- Build capacity of convening partner to elevate the community infrastructure in a neighborhood
- Serve as a bridge between different stakeholder priorities, working to drive consensus between residents, grassroots organizations, and larger institutional actors



- As a CDFI, LISC can provide lending services to see that investment projects come to fruition

Many organizations have experience conducting needs assessments and developing focused strategies to address community issues. Positioning a community to create its own broad-based agenda, however, requires a finely tuned approach that considers the 'big picture' and mobilizes collective action based on meeting the community where it is. LISC has the specific experience as a convener and systems innovator to oversee this kind of collective impact process.

### **Neighborhood resource centers**

Neighborhood resource centers work with neighborhood-based organizations, like neighborhood and homeowner associations, community development corporations, faith-based groups, and other non-profits. They may offer technical assistance and training for grassroots organizations, workshops on topics in development, asset-based planning, etc.

### **University and college partners**

These institutions draw from the inter-disciplinary nature of college programs in architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, historic preservation, and social sciences and aids in community analysis, neighborhood visioning sessions, providing neighborhood sketches to help you see what your neighborhood might become, and more. Explore internships, service-learning courses, and clubs and groups that may be interested in partnering in your initiative.

### **Local government**

The city can provide a number of resources to neighborhoods preparing quality of life plans. Planning departments can often provide information on demographics and information about neighborhood assets and can help with land use and zoning issues. A citizen's or resident engagement office can usually connect you with city and county government, other community groups, and businesses across your area. In addition, various departments in city government will likely be required for collaboration and/or permission to complete implementation plans. It is strategic to engage and involve municipal partners early and often.

### **Arts & culture organizations**

Local arts and cultural organizations in your area can bring creativity and momentum to your efforts. Artists and culture-bearers can help bring people together, be a part of the process-design for your planning efforts and can engage new audiences. Make sure to engage artists early, so they can be involved in the information gathering, visioning, and strategy development phases of your initiative.

[The Center for Performance and Civic Practice](#) is a national resource for artists and communities working together for arts-based, community-led transformation.

### **Technical experts, consultants, and facilitators**

This process takes a lot of work and bandwidth. No one organization is an expert on all of the different components and parts of the process, especially when you need

topic-based expertise to help solve an issue. It is likely, however, that the expertise and skill is available for hire locally in your community and/or available for you to consult from elsewhere. Sometimes it can be helpful to have third party trained facilitators as part of the process so that all local partners and entities can participate in planning tasks together without being bogged down by facilitation tasks. In addition, specific skill sets such as statistical data analyses, GIS mapping, scenario planning, communications and marketing, graphic design and copy writing may all be things that improve your plan, and benefit from external support.

Consultant support can, of course, make your process more expensive, however it can also free you from some of the tedium that can often slow a process down. A strong convening partner and LISC can help with the management of consultant support, contract management, and identification of potential partnerships. We highly recommend searching locally for minority and women owned business enterprises (MWBE) consultant partners who value the neighborhood community and your goals.

## Acknowledgements & Improvements

Funding to create this guidebook was provided as part of the first phase of LISC's WITHIN WNY program, initiated with funds by the J. R. Oishei Foundation.

A multitude of partners engaged in the WITHIN East Side program, which took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, amidst racial justice reawakening, hybrid in-person/online work shifts, and with a new LISC team. We learned a lot of lessons throughout this process. Many local organizations have led neighborhood planning processes, analyses, and community engagements before us – through our learnings, we hope our efforts add to the local toolkits and resources available for a more inclusive approach to neighborhood investment.

This work was also informed by our partnership with our parent company at LISC and the tools and resources they generate for field offices to optimize work with local partners to realize local visions and goals. Other LISC field offices, in particular, LISC Indianapolis, Chicago, Houston, LA, among others have also shared many examples and tools for community planning as well.

***This process is ever evolving. Learning is ongoing. Creativity knows no limits.***

As such, this guidebook and its resources are living documents. Please share how we might improve these resources as you learn from your own experiences and check back periodically for updates.

Visit [www.lisc.org/wny](http://www.lisc.org/wny) to contact us with your input and feedback.







