

PLACE MATTERS Design Lab Twelve
Using Civic Engagement to Promote the Fair Health Movement
May 5 – 7, 2010 ■ Jefferson County

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OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

We are delighted you will join us for our twelfth Design Lab (DL) learning experience. Building on previous labs, our national learning community will convene in Birmingham, Alabama to support the Jefferson County team's *PLACE MATTERS* efforts. We greatly appreciate the team's hospitality and the time spent to organize the tour of their community. In addition, we extend a warm *PLACE MATTERS* welcome to our special guest speakers, as well as to our first-time Design Lab attendees.

For the benefit of all participants, and especially for new members of our national learning community, this concept paper provides a brief overview of the *PLACE MATTERS* initiative and context for the meeting in Birmingham. Building on all previous DL concept papers (Concept Papers from DL1 to DL11 are available online: <http://jointcenter.org/hpi/pages/design-labs>), the contents herein are intended to frame Design

Lab 12 and to provide a brief overview of the *PLACE MATTERS* initiative for new Team members. DL12 provides an opportunity for peer networking and collaborative learning across *PLACE MATTERS* communities through discussion and strategizing within and among your Teams. Based on the progress teams have made in their *PLACE MATTERS* community work, program planners have identified civic engagement and health impact assessments as critical strategies and tools to explore during this convening.

HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (HIA)

One of the goals of this Initiative is for teams to have the ability to analyze policies and determine their impact on communities specifically as they relate to health outcomes. A Health impact assessment (HIA) is an effective process to achieve this goal. HIA is commonly defined as "a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population."¹ This type of assessment is similar to an environmental impact assessment (EIA), which the government requires all agencies to conduct to determine whether or not their decisions will have a negative impact on the people and/or environment. Unlike the EIA, HIA is a voluntary process, and is usually employed by regulatory agencies and organizations who want to determine health impacts of policies before decisions are made to implement them. HIA provides an evidence-base that informs decision-makers of the ways in which

Design Lab Twelve: Meeting Goals

1. Learn about Jefferson County's determinants of obesity work in their community, as well as the history of the civil rights movement in Birmingham.
2. Explore civil rights and social justice as they relate to the *PLACE MATTERS* Initiative.
3. Explore civic engagement and how this strategy may be applied to *PLACE MATTERS* work.
4. Engage in team exercises to identify social justice and civil rights issues in each community and develop civic engagement strategies to address them.
5. Network with colleagues participating in *PLACE MATTERS*.
6. Provide a safe place to brainstorm new and innovative approaches.

¹ Health Impact Assessment. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Retrieved on 04.22.10 from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/hia.htm>.

social policy and policy in general create conditions that either support or hinder positive health outcomes.

The process involved in conducting an HIA is extensive. To support *PLACE MATTERS* teams' use of HIA, Dr. Jonathan Heller from Human Impact Partners (HIP) will provide Design Lab participants with a basic overview of how HIAs can support their efforts to engage community members, inform stakeholders, and influence policy makers. Ultimately, the process promotes an understanding of the social determinants of health and a greater sense of accountability and responsibility for policy decisions.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AS A *PLACE MATTERS* STRATEGY

The role of Civic Engagement in America's social change movements is undeniable. While the most popular reference would likely be the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s, there have been many other instances of civic engagement in American history. The fight for women's rights, the immigration debate, America's participation in various wars over the years, in addition to many local community concerns have all employed civic engagement strategies to actively involve masses of people in an issue, and most importantly to affect meaningful change. Of most recent note, civic engagement strategies were used by the current President when he worked as a community organizer prior to becoming a senator in Chicago, and throughout his presidential campaign.

Wikipedia generally defines civic engagement as "Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern," however, it is a term that has been hugely debated, especially because of the broad scope of related activities. Despite this debate, many will agree that efforts made by a group of people within a community to generate support for a particular cause, that ultimately influences change, is civic engagement.

In light of the rich history of civil rights in Alabama, it is fitting that a major portion of the DL12 program is focused on how civic engagement may be used in the *PLACE MATTERS* initiative. It is important to look back at significant events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott to analyze how a community takes hold of an issue and collectively acts to influence change. While this fact has not been the focus of many historical accounts of the boycott, it should be noted that although Rosa Parks is many times identified as the catalyst, there were other individuals who were the core activists of this movement and used civic engagement techniques. One such important person is African American professor Jo Ann Robinson. In 1954 she sent a letter to the Mayor of Montgomery, notifying him of the boycott, and after Rosa Parks got arrested in 1955, she mimeographed flyers and distributed them to the community to encourage blacks to get involved and join the boycott. She had a similar experience as Rosa Parks when a bus driver shouted at her for sitting in the front of a bus and sent her off the bus in tears.² In his book "Stride Toward Freedom" Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote this about Professor Robinson: "Apparently indefatigable, she, perhaps more than any other person, was active on every level of the protest."³

Another central figure in this movement was Edgar Daniel Dixon (many times referred to as the father of the civil rights movement), who bailed Rosa Parks out of jail. His role is particularly important because it was his strategic decision to use Rosa Parks as the "face" of the Montgomery bus boycott. She was by no means the first person to refuse to move from her seat or get arrested for that decision. However, because of her spotless record, E.D. Nixon was able to use her case (with her permission) to help break down desegregation.⁴ Once Rosa Parks' case was put before the community, they were convinced of its merit

² The Montgomery Bus Boycott. Retrieved 04.26.10 from <http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/montbus.html>

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958) 78.

⁴ The Montgomery Advertiser. Retrieved 04.26.10 from http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/bio_ednixon.htm.

and began to support it wholeheartedly. As a result, the boycott that was to have lasted a single day developed into a year-long movement.

Despite many challenges (including bomb threats and various legal tactics aimed at derailing the boycott), blacks remained off the buses. They also directly addressed the policies that supported this inequity by going to court armed with the recently passed *Brown vs. the Board of Education* Supreme Court decision as the basis for their case to desegregate the bus system. The critical lesson to be learned from this historical demonstration of civic engagement is that effective social change must be generated from within the community. Author Roberta Wright aptly described the effects of the boycott when she stated "It helped to launch a 10-year national struggle for freedom and justice, the Civil Rights Movement that stimulated others to do the same at home and abroad."⁵ Its success can be credited to strong leadership, commitment to a cause, the existence of a collective consciousness, and effective civic engagement strategies.

In terms of *PLACE MATTERS*, civic engagement can play a crucial role in moving forward the agenda of the Fair Health Movement. One of the most important achievements for teams is to persuade communities to make the connection between poor health outcomes and their well-being, and to engage them in the process of ensuring that those who make decisions for their communities have this perspective in mind. Several organizations such as the Harwood Foundation, the Kettering Foundation, and PolicyLink have focused on and dedicated resources towards researching, analyzing, and documenting methods of effective civic engagement that leaders use to involve people in shaping the future of their communities.

During the workshop, participants will be given an overview of civic engagement, historical context for successful civic engagement activities in America, as well as examples of strategies applied to various causes and social change efforts. Consultants from the Kettering Foundation, Ms. Peggy F. Sparks and Dr. Margaret Holt, will direct design lab participants through a process of developing strategies to tackle specific policy issues within their communities. The ultimate goal of the workshop is to assist teams to choose the most effective tools to garner and sustain support for their *PLACE MATTERS* work at home.

In this time of economic uncertainty and competition for scarce resources, it is vital that all *PLACE MATTERS* teams have strong and committed leadership, an established and viable infrastructure, clear messages regarding the work, and a well informed and fully engaged base of community members. Although philanthropy has done much to fund and support the beginnings of social change, as with *PLACE MATTERS*, the expectation and reality is that the sustainability of social and policy change efforts rests in the hands of the people.

***PLACE MATTERS* FRAMEWORK – BRIEF RECAP**

***PLACE MATTERS* is a national initiative of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Health Policy Institute (HPI) designed to improve the health of participating communities by addressing social conditions that lead to poor health.**

The Joint Center Health Policy Institute (HPI) approach to reducing/eliminating health disparities involves identifying the complex underlying causes of health disparities and defining strategies to address these root causes. A growing body of research clearly supports the notion that interventions targeting social determinants of health can indeed modify patterns of health, illness, and health disparities. Systematic and evidence-based translation of this knowledge into policy and practice remains limited. Targeting upstream causes of health and measuring the indicators associated with social determinants of

⁵ Roberta Hughes Wright, 1991. *The Birth of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. Southfield: Charro Press. p 123.

health are at the heart of our *PLACE MATTERS* work. ***Over a period of three to five years, PLACE MATTERS participants should be able to demonstrate and document progress, as well as the reasons for progress, toward redressing the social conditions associated with health inequities—and thereby toward reducing health disparities.***

PLACE MATTERS Unique emphases:

1. engage communities of color with poor population health status;
2. support multidisciplinary teams vis-à-vis a national learning community (supportive laboratory);
3. reduce/eliminate health inequities by addressing social determinants of health (i.e., actions should specifically address social issues at their roots, e.g., housing policies, etc.);
4. develop benchmarks and other means to monitor progress that demonstrates the effectiveness of addressing social determinants of health; and
5. document lessons learned and outcomes of addressing social determinants of health.

This Design Lab will indeed be another valuable opportunity for our *PLACE MATTERS* learning community and will serve as a critical building block in each Team's work to address the social factors that produce poor health outcomes, thereby creating health equity. We hope you will find this working meeting productive and invite you to leverage your participation in *PLACE MATTERS* to enhance your efforts and to strengthen your capacity to improve the health and well-being of your community. We invite DL12 participants to arrive prepared to:

- further develop Team communications strategies that frame social determinants of health (**to be well prepared, we encourage all participants to review all preparatory meeting materials in advance**);
- engage in teamwork, taking advantage of formal and informal opportunities to solidify Team activities and to advance strategic action plans;
- enhance existing logic models to include communications activities;
- consider opportunities associated with the recession to strengthen the safety nets available to your communities; and
- seek opportunities to network with *PLACE MATTERS* sites to benefit your local *PLACE MATTERS* work.

We look forward to seeing you in Birmingham!

PLACE MATTERS Communities

