

GEORGIA HEALTH POLICY CENTER



Atlanta Pilot: Systems Mapping Report

Presented to National League of Cities Institute
July 23, 2021



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National League of Cities Institute (NLCI) partnered with Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) and Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement (ARCHI) for a pilot to establish a city-wide well-being metric in metro Atlanta. ARCHI staff conducted key informant interviews and developed systems mapping post-work for community conversations to elicit feedback on its Centering Equity systems model. This mapping will help NLCI identify effective practices for participatory systems mapping and support equitable policy and system level change from the use of NLCI's proposed well-being metric.

Analysis of the key informant interviews and systems mapping post work identified the following findings:

- Stakeholders value incorporating community voice, highlighting the impact of systemic racism on community well-being, and having flexibility to tailor the model to their community's context
- Community members place a high importance on the factors of work and employment, community, access to healthcare, and personal finances due to their impact on happiness
- The model categorizes well-being factors to demonstrate the importance of equitable access but stakeholders identified types of social support and transportation as missing factors
- Community members felt access healthcare coverage, healthy food, and safe neighborhoods with active business development were more important to community well-being than aspects of the school, work, and economic environments

Based on the findings from systems mapping and its aim to provide NLCI with insights to develop a model for systems and policy change for its Atlanta well-being pilot, it is recommended that systems mapping continue to be a participatory process that allows community members to provide feedback for model refinement. It is also recommended that this model emphasize the impact of racism on access to resources and overall community well-being.

BACKGROUND

The National League of Cities Institute (NLCI) seeks to establish a city-level metric that broadens leaders' understanding of factors influencing well-being beyond traditional economic measures. NLCI partnered with Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) and Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement (ARCHI) to pilot its efforts in the metro Atlanta area and gain insight on the development and meaningful use of the proposed metric. This collaboration promoted the involvement of stakeholders from a variety of sectors and influence levels and ensured the research met existing needs, had input from key constituencies, and fostered policy action.

SYSTEMS MAPPING

Various stakeholders and communities were engaged to provide feedback on ARCHI's Centering Equity systems model. The model demonstrates the interconnectedness of aspects of an individual's life that contribute to their overall well-being and community-level well-being. The model also focuses on how equity can be considered as an integral component to community well-being. Stakeholders' feedback will inform the map's structure and its use as a tool to inform policy and systems level change.

Key Informant Interviews

During key informant interviews, conducted between March and May 2021, ARCHI staff shared a draft of the Centering Equity systems model. Interviewed stakeholders represented community-based and social service organizations across the metro Atlanta area. Their organizations served a variety of specific populations, including the LGBTQ+ and underrepresented racial ethnic communities, and their work focused on various aspects of well-being, including workforce development, housing, and education. Questions at the end of a semi-structured interview guide allowed stakeholders to provide comments on likes, dislikes, and recommendations for the Centering Equity systems model.

Community Conversations

In May and June 2021, ARCHI staff partnered with Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) to identify three metro Atlanta communities for community conversations: East Point, Chamblee, and the City of Atlanta. As a part of their post work for the conversations, community members completed an online survey to rank factors that affect happiness, identify areas that are important to achieve a high level of well-being, rank factors that influence well-being in their community, rank the ease to change factors, and identify factors impacted by racism. The systems modeling post work was completed by seven community members from the East Point conversation and five community members from the City of Atlanta conversation. The community member from

Chamblee who completed a survey with questions aligning with the conversation guide also provided feedback on the systems model.

All interviews and community conversations were audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed to generate recommendations for improving ARCHI's Centering Equity systems model to maximize its use as a tool for systems and policy level change.

FINDINGS

The following findings were informed by qualitative analysis of the key informant interviews and preliminary themes from community members' systems modeling post work.

Stakeholders value incorporating community voice, highlighting the impact of systemic racism on community well-being, and having flexibility to tailor the model to their community's context

Overall, interviewed stakeholders liked the systems model as a visual. They highlighted the importance of incorporating community voice into the model through stories. Stakeholders mentioned that the model was somewhat busy, which aligns with the model's challenge to convey the complexity of community well-being without seeming overwhelming. Stories from community members could help to socialize this complexity and make it more digestible when it is shared with decisionmakers. Stakeholders also provided recommendations for highlighting specific features of the model. They emphasized the importance for the model to elevate how systemic racism impacts overall community well-being. Others recognized the importance of highlighting racism, but also wanted to see opportunities in the model to *"break the red and change how these things operate"* to demonstrate action steps that can be taken to address systemic racism. Others reinforced the importance of showing how access to services is integrated throughout the model, including highlighting healthcare insurance coverage and employee wages that support out-of-pocket costs for healthcare. Stakeholders expressed a need to tailor the model which aligns with the ways they discussed they could utilize the model for their work. Some mentioned showing the model at community meetings and allowing members to state what they think is important without having all components pre-defined. Another stakeholder suggested showing the model one layer at a time and obtaining feedback from community groups. One stakeholder suggested the visual could be a powerful tool if linked with underlying data to demonstrate connections among components.

Community members place a high importance on the factors of work and employment, community, access to healthcare, and personal finances due to their impact on happiness

For the systems model post work, community members were asked to rank the five most important factors that affect happiness. Across all thirteen rankings, work and employment (11), community (10), access to healthcare (9), and personal finance (9) were included the most. Three

community members ranked personal finance as the most important factor that impacts happiness. One community member noted *“being able to pay for your bills/housing/transportation is the basics of being able to have a healthy/happy life.”* Others shared that *“when your finances are in order you are able to do a lot more”* and *“this area is a huge issue with folks being priced out of their homes.”* Community, purpose, access to healthcare, and work and employment were each ranked as the most important factor for happiness by two community members. Community was ranked number one because *“social relationships are critical to human happiness”* and when residents feel they are embraced and welcomed, they participate in community activities and look out for their neighbors. Work and employment was ranked as the most important factor because people being happily and gainfully employed makes a difference *“in their disposition and outlook on life”* and *“they will take care of [their] community and look out for each other, helping to cut down on crime.”* Community members felt purpose was the most important factor because *“it’s the why, who, what and where”* and without it, they have no drive and are put in a slump that prevents them from reaching their full potential. Access to healthcare was highly ranked by community members because it *“it gives [them] a bit of peace of mind and [they] can focus on other things”* and if they *“are not physically well, [they] cannot be mentally and emotionally well.”*

The model categorizes well-being factors to demonstrate the importance of equitable access but stakeholders identified types of social support and transportation as missing factors

ARCHI’s Centering Equity systems model categorizes factors that are important to achieve a high level of well-being into three main areas: economics, education, and health. Community members expressed that these areas were important because education is needed to obtain a well-paying job, which facilitates economic and emotional well-being, and healthcare speaks to their need for physical and mental well-being. One member shared these areas *“are all foundational to the way that people interact with their communities and the access that they have to things.”* Another explained the importance of these factors on a community level. When economics, education, and health are present, *“it will bring strength, unity and one common goal to everyone in working towards the good of the community.”* Community members also emphasized the impact of these areas on achieving equitable well-being outcomes across their communities. One shared that *“not having the right support or resources when it comes to education leave[s] us in an ongoing loop of disparity.”*

This theme of access and support was reinforced when stakeholders shared the factors they felt were missing from the model. Interviewed stakeholders mentioned including additional factors of spirituality, interpersonal interactions, social support/social connections, transportation, and community trauma and reconciliation. Community members echoed the need to add factors that highlight social support and equitable access. They mentioned it is important to include factors about their *“degree of connectedness and opportunities for people to interact”* and access to transit, public parks/spaces, and technical education. To further highlight equity, community

members recommended the model incorporate racial identity *“because different races have different experiences in life.”* They also mentioned a need to add factors related to personal safety and ownership because *“being part of something [and] being involved in the process of building is critical.”* Community members emphasized the importance of not including too many factors in the system and concentrating on the areas of economics, education, and health because *“these are most tangible and capable of systems change.”*

Community members felt access healthcare coverage, healthy food, and safe neighborhoods with active business development were more important to community well-being than aspects of the school, work, and economic environments

Community members were asked to rank the ten factors that were the most important and least important to well-being in their community. Food security and neighborhood safety were each ranked as the most important factors by three community members. Those who ranked food security as most important mentioned that adequate nutrition makes everything else possible and highlighted that *“residents have a human right to food security”* and *“a food desert is what keeps neighborhoods down.”* Community members who ranked neighborhood safety as most important to community well-being felt that safety was the basis for everything and without feeling safe in your home, school, work or community, *“your whole world is stunted.”* Healthcare coverage and business development were each ranked as the most important factors by two community members. They emphasized that healthcare coverage was important for physical and mental well-being and business development was of high importance because it will bring revenue, people, activity, and liveliness to communities. Community members also ranked food security, business development, and healthcare coverage as factors that were easy to change which may contribute to their importance ranking. They mentioned that business development can be incentivized and food security and healthcare coverage can be changed through resources, such as food banks, and federal policies, including Obamacare and Medicaid expansion. Despite community members ranking these factors with high importance and ease to change, they ranked them low as factors impacted by racism. Community members ranked housing and job security as those factors most impacted by racism. They attributed housing’s ranking to the high amount of racial profiling in housing policies, development, and investment and *“discrimination practices in the form of policies, barriers, and biases against Black people dating back to Jim Crow.”* Similarly, community members emphasized the historical systemic racism associated with employment. They mentioned discrimination, racial profiling, stereotypes, and *“having gone through inadequate, segregated schools, [and] having low expectations”* has impacted job attainment in the community.

Many of the factors that community members ranked as least important to community well-being were associated with the school, work, and economic environments. Low ranked school factors include school-level and district funding, teacher composition, school personnel, teacher wage, and student/parent engagement. Work and economic factors that were ranked as least important to community well-being include housing development, job security, job attainment, employee age, and workforce readiness. These factors were also often ranked as hard to change and least

impacted by systemic racism by community members, which may have been associated with their lower importance ranking.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings from systems mapping and its aim to provide NLCI with insights to develop a model for systems and policy change for its Atlanta well-being pilot, it is recommended that systems mapping continue to be a participatory process that allows community members to provide feedback for model refinement. It is also recommended that this model emphasize the impact of racism on access to resources and overall community well-being. A systems model can be used as an effective tool to help stakeholders identify factors that community members mention are of high importance, effective levers for change, and most impacted by racism. Involving all stakeholders in the mapping process will ensure that everyone has a vested interest in participating in systems level change.

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