NorthEast Denver Colorado *East5ide Unified|Unido*

Learning and evaluation Site Visit

Introduction

In April 2017, the BUILD Health Challenge evaluation team from Spark Policy Institute conducted a two day site visit with the Northeast Denver Colorado BUILD collaboration, *East5ide Unified|Unido*. The goals of the BUILD evaluation are to establish an evidence base for the BUILD approach and to refine the BUILD approach at the local level.

The site visit served as an opportunity to collect examples of efforts that reflect the BUILD principles at the local level and contribute to shifts in policy, regulations, funding, services, partnerships, and infrastructure, as well as emerging evidence of impact on upstream issues.

The key takeaways are based on the evaluation team’s data collection during the site visit and are intended to promote discussion among the *East5ide Unified|Unido* partners as they move forward in their work.

For any questions related to this document, contact Laura Trent, Senior Consultant at Spark Policy Institute (laura@sparkpolicy.com).

Key Takeaways

*East5ide Unified|Unido* is a community-driven collaboration across five neighborhoods in northeast Denver: Clayton, Cole, Five Points, Skyland/North City Park, and Whittier. *East5ide Unified|Unido* received a one-year planning grant from the BUILD Health Challenge in 2015 and successfully submitted a proposal for a one-year planning-to-implementation grant in 2016.

The mission of *East5ide Unified|Unido* is to *build a thriving network of support systems and a community-wide commitment to leveling the playing field for young children so that they can succeed in school and in life*. The partnership is focusing on a broad collection of upstream health factors affecting young children (ages 0-8) and their families, including financial stability, housing, male involvement, education, prenatal and child health, mental health, community safety, public benefits, and community cohesion.

The primary partners include Civic Canopy (the community-based non-profit organization); Denver Health Medical Center, Saint Joseph Hospital, Kaiser Permanente, and Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center (the four hospital/health system organizations); and Denver Public Health (the local public health department).

This summary reflects insights from phone and in-person conversations with the Northeast Denver partner representatives and other stakeholders, site visit observation of meetings, and review of grant proposals, reports, and other background materials prior to the site visit.

At the time of the site visit (April 3-4, 2017) the *East5ide Unified|Unido* partners were beginning to transition from a process-focused planning phase to an action-oriented implementation phase.

Authentic Community-Driven Engagement

The *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative was intentional and methodical in engaging a broad, diverse group of community stakeholders during the planning grant phase. The partners who developed the proposal for the planning phase of the BUILD initiative expanded the leadership team of the grant to include a variety of community leaders and residents early in the process.

**Trusted Backbone Organization**: Civic Canopy, the community-based organization acting as the lead agency for the grant, has a long-standing and trusted role in metro Denver in facilitating community engagement through collective impact models. The organization is located in one of the target neighborhoods that comprise the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative. The staff of Civic Canopy describe their role as “acting in service to the initiative as the backbone to the backbone of *East5ide Unified|Unido*.”

The staff drew upon their expertise in facilitation and technical assistance tools and processes to support the council meetings and community-wide engagement events. The health system and public health partners specifically noted that they were motivated to participate in the BUILD grant because of Civic Canopy’s previous community-based work and reputation for supporting capacity-building and collective impact.

**Grassroots Leaders**: While staff of Civic Canopy supported the planning processes of the initiative, they did not position themselves as the “community leader or voice.” Rather, they intentionally leveraged existing relationships with community leaders and residents, and grassroots organizations located in and serving the five neighborhoods to join the initiative as council members, facilitators, content experts, service providers, and outreach teams to guide the planning process and shape the implementation action plan.

Community residents, representatives of local organization and business leaders, civil leaders, youth, and other stakeholders from the five neighborhoods have lead and shaped the initiative from its inception – crafting the vision, articulating core values, identifying long-term goals, and forming workgroups for implementation.

**Definition of Community**: While the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative focuses on the five neighborhoods, essentially the 80205 zip code in metro Denver, how community is defined goes beyond being a resident of the geographic area. During the site visit, many individuals emphasized that the five neighborhoods have unique cultural heritage and multi-generational families that instill a deep sense of pride and commitment.

Community is not simply the current residents of the 80205 zip code, but also former residents, extended families and friends of current residents, business owners, faith-based organizations, schools, service providers, etc. -- people who “live, work, play, worship, and connect with the area.” All of whom are seen as important voices and resources to shape and guide the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative.

**Influence of Gentrification**: Also emphasized during the site visit discussions was how gentrification, happening at varying intensity and pace across the five neighborhoods, will require thoughtful reflection about “inclusively engaging all of the community.” Individuals noted that the initiative will need to be mindful of the influence of changing demographic and economic conditions on the upstream issues and root causes that are the focus of the initiative. Proactively engaging new residents, businesses, and organizations so that the community leverages the gentrification changes for positive ends, rather than purely negative, is a prime opportunity for the initiative.

Branding of the Initiative

The *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative is not housed under any one of the grant partner organizations (i.e., the community-based organization, public health agency, or health systems partners) or subsumed under an existing program. Rather the leadership team of the grant initiative, with guidance from the community, developed a name, logo, slogan, and website as part of the planning phase.

**The Sum is Greater than Its Parts**: The “5” in *East5ide Unified|Unido* is intentional, signifying the five neighborhoods in Northeast Denver that are the focus on the initiative. The branding of the initiative as a separate entity in the community, beyond just the collaborating partners of the BUILD grant, is aimed at communicating that it is a community-wide movement supporting equity and social justice principles.

**Community Assets and Responsibility**: This initiative is viewed as “of the community, by the community, for the community” and stands in contrast to top-down, external-entity lead work that is “done to the community.” The leadership of the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative have used an appreciative-inquiry, assets-focused approach to create safe spaces where people are able to share their experiences, insights, beliefs, and concerns.

The assets-focused approach enables the initiative to tap into the rich history, organizational capacity, economic growth, and community commitment. The leadership of the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative agreed, that as part of the “norms” of their work community members and businesses would receive funding to create community outreach events, conduct data collection, provide direct services, and provide food/facilities for internal meetings and public events.

As multiple individuals noted during the site visit, it is important for “folks to see themselves in the work and that their deep roots in the community are recognized and valued.” Throughout the two years of the planning and implementation grants, a slow paradigm shift has occurred with the community members are seeing themselves as the leaders and shapers of the initiative, rather than only being asked for limited input or being the recipients of pre-designed programs. In other words, the paradigm has moved away from a passive to an active role, grassroots-led rather than top-down.

Multiple Health System Partners

Across the two years of the planning and implementation grants, *East5ide Unified|Unido* leadership has expanded the number of health systems partners committed to the initiative: Denver Health Medical Center, Saint Joseph Hospital, Kaiser Permanente, and Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center. These four health systems provide direct health care and prevention programs to the five neighborhoods in Northeast Denver (as well as other geographic areas of metro Denver and the state). Saint Joseph Hospital, Kaiser Permanente, and Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center are located next to each other on a medical campus near the *East5ide Unified|Unido* geographic area.

**Role of Health Systems in the Community**: The Chief Executive Officers of the four health system partners, as well as some members of their leadership teams, are relatively new to their positions – many within the past 1-5 years. Across the four hospital systems, opportunities for collective synergy and defining new roles in the community are being actively discussed as the initiative transitions from planning to implementation.

During the site visit, representatives from the four hospital systems noted that each of the institutions has a unique institutional mission and provides different medical services and specialized programs within and outside of the community. While there is business competition between the four systems given their concentration in the metro Denver area, stakeholders emphasized that the “plus-side” of that competition is that it is in each institution’s interest to become active partners in the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative.

The BUILD Health Initiative grant framework, with the community-based organization as the lead, allows the four health system partners to participate “in a conceptual space that is attractive to leadership and allows them to pivot the work to address the needs of the community” without competing to lead the work or creating a negative power-dynamic.

**Value of Participation**: Drawing upon the lens of the public health partner – the intersection between primary care and population health – the hospital partners are considering the value of leveraging their expertise and resources to address upstream issues of health and change the historical role of healthcare in the community.

The health systems partners have community advisory councils, but those councils do not traditionally provide the breadth and depth of community input and leadership that are essential parts of the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative. A benefit of being part of the community discussions is the surfacing of ideas for leveraging the health system partners’ community benefit departments, job training and workforce development programs, health screening and preventative care services, and community-based clinic infrastructures to address entrenched and emergent issues in the community – and to create sustainability after the BUILD grant ends.

Reflection Questions

Implementation of the action plan is now a top priority for the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative and, in part, hinges on creating infrastructure and processes that over time lead to systems level changes. The *East5ide Unified|Unido* partners may wish to reflect on the following questions as they continue to refine, expand, and evaluate their work.

* In transitioning from a planning phase into the implementation phase, what types of stakeholders are necessary to move from input-processes to action-steps? Who has been missing from the initiative essential to informing, activating, and supporting the work going forward?
* What range of skills, experience, capacity, and level-of-involvement will be necessary for those leading the implementation-phase structures and activities? What is the best mix of “thinkers” and “doers” to support the programs and activities of the workgroups? How will the pace of the work evolve?
* How will the leadership of the Council and workgroups continue to engage the community to ensure members are driving the work? To identify “small wins” to create momentum? To leverage the assets of the five neighborhoods to sustain the work?
* How is the leadership balancing using personal-relationships and word-of-mouth to encourage individuals to participate in the initiative, while also being strategic about engaging coalitions and organizations that can leverage resources and commit to systems-level change?
* How will the initiative balance emergent community needs while maintaining a focus on the broad collection of upstream health factors affecting young children (ages 0-8) and their families identified as priorities? How will it safeguard against becoming too diffuse to have positive impact?
* In what ways are the community-based, public-health, and health-systems partners engaging members of their own organizations to create institutional commitment and sustainability of resources for the initiative?
* How are the activities of the workgroups integrated with action plan goals? How will their activities increase communication, coordination, reduce duplication, focus services, surface challenges, and track impact on the upstream issues?
* How will organizational partners move beyond coordination of programs and services to policy and infrastructure changes for system-level impact over the next few years?
* What processes are in place to expand the current network of partners to ensure that health disparities and root causes of inequity are addressed? How are funders, entrepreneurs, policy-makers, community planners, building owners and landlords, educational institutions, and others in positions of power being cultivated to support *East5ide Unified|Unido*?
* What will be the priority metrics for tracking impact on the goals identified in the action plan (i.e., related to children, adults, physical environment, community resources, social interactions, etc.)? For example, how will indicators of social cohesion, mental health, safety, service integration, economic growth and stability, resident displacement, quality and affordability of housing stock, redirection of funding, spread of knowledge, and diversity of participants be measured?
* How will the leadership of the *East5ide Unified|Unido* initiative collectively share, analyze, and use data to guide their actions, as well as to disseminate learnings to diverse audiences?