

Deep Democracy: A Public Health Tool to Improve Community Health and Well-Being

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Abstract

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This thesis introduces the Just Transition Framework to navigate the complex ways the extractive economy impacts population health, challenging the efficacy of solutions that do not change this system. A new system or regenerative economy built around the universal goal of community health and well-being is envisioned using the Targeted Universalism Framework, which identifies three key barriers to achieving this goal and introduces three key policy groups for local governments to explore for solutions. Developing deep democracy as a public health initiative is supported for its ability to facilitate structural change, early connections to improving health outcomes, and potential for restorative justice with communities of color. Guidelines are crafted for local governments to implement deep democracy, providing a case example in King County, WA. Implementation considerations focus on increasing local resilience to prepare for policy set-backs as the extractive economy aims to protect itself. The vision is a national network of municipalities exercising deep democracy to facilitate community health and well-being.

PREFACE

I came to the University of Washington for a dual master's degree in public health and public administration to better understand how I can address the health disparities faced by communities of color. Having an undergraduate degree in Medical Anthropology and conducting health policy research that brought me into the spaces of health disparities, community engagement (low-income, refugee, and Black populations), food justice, and coalition building, I found myself looking to the intersections of our struggles – across race, income-level, gender, neighborhood, language. I was driven to answer questions informed by the place I lived, worked, and studied – Richmond, VA, the former capital of the Confederacy. *Why is there a 17-year shorter life expectancy among Black residents than their White counterparts across the James River? Why are Black residents experiencing higher burdens of chronic disease? Why are community health clinics the primary healthcare infrastructure in historically redlined neighborhoods? Why are Black residents dying of COVID-19 at faster rates?*

While race is the context in which we often discuss health disparities, I came to accept that it was wealth and the access to wealth that was the primary driver for these stark differences between White communities and communities of color. Where there is disinvestment, there is reduced health among residents. The community's well-being suffers. It is a narrative that we know well and witness time and time again. Those who can afford to either leave or purchase access to systems that protect their health (e.g., doctors, higher education, "good" employment, home ownership). As the neighborhood changes and undergoes displacement, new (wealthier) entities move in and alter the economic exchange

required to exist in that space. Mutual aid, reciprocal living, and publicly-held goods are replaced with privatization, rising costs, and an identity built around consumption.

This scenario and the questions posed above have two central flaws. First, the questions follow deficit thinking. Why are Black communities unhealthier, why are they dying faster, why do they experience higher disease burden? Their lack of health is the logical driver and therefore their fault, not the conditions that create this health difference. Positioning their “lack” brings in conversations of deservedness – if they are always sicker, is it worth investing in their health? Will they become healthier? Would resources be better invested elsewhere? Further, if they are historically prone to certain diseases or conditions (e.g., heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke, etc.), are there biological factors at play? Would public health intervention help? Is it not our job to *try* to make them healthier, to give them opportunities to be healthy? Both thoughts are well-intentioned and patronizing. Secondly, we measure their deficit in relationship to whiteness, effectively establishing “whiteness” as whole and what communities of color should strive for. Ultimately, deficit thinking and the language of disparities fail to recognize the power held by communities of color. They contribute the labor essential to our economy. They generate the wealth that established, White communities then extract.

Deficit thinking limits our ability to envision the possible. It affirms White ideologies (e.g., deservedness, hard work, capitalism, and imperialism) as the framework through which we work to generate prosperity. It is the philosophy that has enabled countries to mine Mother Earth for resources. It is the system that allows governments to mine communities of color for their resources (in the form of labor for service jobs, frontline work, land,

communities, ways of knowing and being, etc.). It is also the system that creates distance between those *who govern* and those *who are governed* – there is an expertise required to engage in governance that is gatekept through the illusion of meritocracy. The White, wealthy, and educated emerge in the highest numbers and fill the seats of our government.

The current state of our social service and public infrastructure reveals the disconnect between those making policy and those who are impacted. Policy reflects the fabric of our society; it generates our rules, how funds are allocated, which communities are prioritized, and how we approach solutions. Historically, policy has been used as a weapon against communities of color. **This paper strives to establish policy as a tool for restoration.** It envisions a path forward that fuels the power of communities of color to control their health and realities. This mandates a mechanism to decentralize power from extractive institutional systems while building networks that are locally-controlled and nourish growth. The ideal outcome is co-governance, where communities govern collaboratively with their elected and civic leaders, co-designing policies and stewarding their implementation.

This paper relies on several theories I have encountered throughout my three years at the University of Washington in the classroom at the schools of public health and public policy, my work at the Campus Sustainability Fund, the People’s Economy Lab, and the Washington State Environmental Justice Council. The *Just Transition Framework* (Movement Generation and the Climate Justice Alliance) has been central for how I effectively connect the many issues of injustice I have been drawn to in my academic career (housing, health, wealth, environment, economic, racial). It offers a pathway to boldly envision a future based

in existing in reciprocal relationship with one each other. *Targeted Universalism* (John A. Powell) challenges the notion that we should strive for whiteness and articulates how that limits our collective well-being. The *Political Determinants of Health* (Daniel E. Dawes) goes one rung further back than the social determinants of health, revealing that it is policy that holds the power to shape our health because policy creates our social reality. *A Zero-Sum mentality* (Heather McGhee) showcases how we all lose when we try to gatekeep resources – the gain for communities of color does not come at the loss of White communities. We hold the ability to create more wealth and there is more than enough to share for our collective benefit. Lastly, *Co-governance* (from various influences) models how to position communities of color to co-create policy and actively influence our futures.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my thesis committee for their expertise and guidance. Paul, you facilitated a formative space in our public health coursework that allowed me to explore these concepts. Scott, you have encouraged me to envision boldly and expansively. I could not have accomplished this without the steady support from both of you during my time at UW.

Thank you to Faduma Fido, a mentor I am fortunate enough to have. Faduma opened the world of regenerative economy, deep democracy, and shared the work being done at the People's Economy Lab. I am grateful for the Just Futures collaboration and the opportunity to learn how we tangibly create a better future, informed by community. Your scholarship and commitment to Seattle and Washington have made this thesis possible. Thank you.

Thank you to my family at the Campus Sustainability Fund, UW-Seattle. Working with you all these past three years has been my greatest honor. You showed me the theories of Just Transition, brought environmental justice to life, and gave me the confidence to step into my role to cultivate a sustainable future for all of us. Special gratitude to Kort, Boe, Gulsima, Kyle, Francis, Danny, Keya, Christoph, and the CSF Committee. May we continue the legacy.

Thank you to those who came before me, my current comrades, and the future generation who will continue this fight for justice. This thesis is produced in solidarity with the people's movement across the globe. Together, we will create a system of reciprocity and care.

Author Note:

Many of the ideas presented on capitalism, the extractive economy, and the role of public policy in enabling racism are not unique to only a few individuals or disciplines. The ideas presented aim to cite the authors who have written on it in depth or very clearly – these are non-exhaustive lists. For example, the Just Transition framework is credited in this paper to Movement Generation and the Climate Justice Alliance. However, their framework and principles expand on ideas introduced by Mark, Lenin, indigenous ways of knowing, and decades of insight from communities at the frontline of the climate crisis. This paper strives to further the conversation in issue identification and solution ideation for community well-being. Discourses found in the disciplines of environmental health, public health, public policy, governance, economics, and political science are navigated with the goal of bridging these conversations in an approachable narrative for greater potency and utility. Unless explicitly mentioned as unique to this paper’s approach, the reader should assume it is building on or highlighting existing knowledge (held commonly in communities of color and formally in the Academy).

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DEFINITIONS (organized by concept and alphabetically within)

Definitions reflect commonly-held understandings for the terms listed and aim to orient the reader to how the author will be using these terms throughout the paper. Credit will be given for newly coined phrases or to groups who popularized the dominant definition used.

Just Transition Framework – also referred to “Just Transition” or “a Just Transition”, a theoretical framework that emerged in the 1970s labor movement. It details the shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative one. Popular framework about environmental justice organizations and has growing use in Washington State (e.g., the Climate Justice Alliance, Front and Centered, People’s Economy Lab, etc.) (Movement Generation, 2017).

Extractive Economy – An economy that is oriented around extracting resources from workers (labor) and Mother Earth (land, minerals, fossil fuels), creating omnipresent scarcity. The goal is to create wealth for society’s elite (Movement Generation, 2017).

Localized Regenerative Economy – A highly localized economic system that promotes self-sufficiency, resilience, stability, and retainment of wealth (economic output) within the place it is situated in. Calls for smaller-scale production and consumption systems.

Regenerative Economy – An economy that is oriented around taking resources as needed and replenishing those removed to generate abundance (Movement Generation, 2017).

Co-Governance – also referred to as “collaborative governance,” a system shaped around shared governing responsibilities between those sitting in official seats and the community represented (i.e., the “Government” as an official institution and local stakeholders govern together). Government and community govern together to make collective policy decisions, co-create programs to meet community needs, and ensure effective implementation of these policies and programs (People’s Economy Lab, 2024).

Deep Democracy – A governance model centering citizen voice, opening access to all stages of the policy making process. Offers a practical method to start dialogue and discussion that seeks insight from the minority and marginalized to build a collectively held agenda. Differs from traditional “democracy,” which favors majority rule over the voice of the minority. Variations are known as “deliberative democracy” or “participatory democracy.” Sits under the umbrella of “co-governance” (People’s Economy Lab, 2024).

False Democracy – A “democratic” governance model where the policy-makers and elected officials do not represent the ideals of the populace (e.g., elected officials win seats despite losing the popular/majority citizen vote, government ignores citizen dissent, the power of citizen vote is diluted, the right to vote is restricted to certain population, etc.).

Equality – the goal to promote fairness between groups, creating similar experiences within systems and opportunities. Contrast in “inequality.”

Equity – the investment of resources and access that addresses historical differences and aims to create similar outcomes despite different starting points. Contrast is “inequity.”

Justice – the rectification for historic inequities and *creation of a system* that does not perpetuate oppression or exploitation. Contrast is “injustice.”

People Power – commonly used to describe the populist force in a social or political movement, speaks to the power of the people being governed to influence their government to shift their priorities in line with the organized demand.

Power – the ability for an individual or group to influence their present reality and future. In practice, those who hold high amounts wealth or status have increased power.

Frontline Communities – communities that experience the first and worst effects of climate change. In this paper, this term will also refer to communities of color who face injustices (environment, health, racial, and economic).

Institution – refers to a large, ubiquitous system that holds high power and safety in the status quo (e.g., the United States Federal Government, Universities, etc.). They serve to uphold the status quo and protect the interests of their investors.

Local Government – smaller scales of governance seen at town, city, and county levels. Their structure and power are subject to the larger state legislature and available resources. Typically seen as the form of governance closest to community-interests.

Deficit Thinking – normalizes dominant culture (White, wealthy, male, cisgender, heterosexual, etc.) and incites the belief that populations outside this dominant culture (people of color, poor residents, women, transgender, queer, etc.) are inherently lacking or deficient in some way. Promotes the phenomenon of White saviorism, where those in the dominant culture attempt to “save” those in deficit to them.

Health Disparities – also referred to as “health inequities,” the difference in health outcomes among different populations or communities. Most used in the terms of “class-based health disparities” or “racial health disparities” and denotes the lack of optimal health among those communities of lower-class or non-White race.

Wealth Disparities – also referred to as “wealth disparities” or “income disparities,” the difference in financial resources and assets.

Community Wealth Building – an economic development model formalized by the Democracy Collaborative in 2005 to that aims to transform local economies via community-ownership of assets and economic growth. Generated in response to rising wealth inequity experienced in marginalized communities, CWB promotes community health and sovereignty over livelihoods. It offers a contrasting model to privatization, concentrated ownership, and community disinvestment (*Community Wealth Building*, 2005).

Reciprocity – relationship systems that are built around taking care of one another. Individuals do not take from someone/something without also giving back, practicing gratitude and sustaining the abundance held within the relationship network.

Well-Being – speaks to the holistic (physical, mental, spiritual, financial, etc.) health of an individual. Promoted through individual happiness and community support.

Targeted Universalism – a theoretical framework created by John A. Powell at UC Berkeley's Othering and Belonging Institute that sets universal policy goals (e.g., a healthy environment for all, universal healthcare, access to free public transit, etc.) and charts how far away groups are from achieving them. Targeted policy interventions aim to remove these barriers for each group. Acknowledges that some in society are inherently closer to the goal and must overcome fewer barriers to reach the universally aspirational state (John A. Powell, 2019).

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PROBLEM STATEMENT // RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Problem Statement: Public policy has historically excluded communities of color from fully and effectively engaging in governance and the policy process, yielding poorer health outcomes among these communities and inherent mistrust in government to generate policies that act in their best interests.

Research Question: How do we create sustained well-being among communities of color who face wealth and health disparities?

- a. How do we create an alternative to a system that extracts wealth and health from communities of color?
- b. How do we build wealth, power, and self-determination among communities of color to control their reality and shape their future?
- c. What is the role of local government and policymakers in addressing poor health outcomes among communities of color at a systems level, instead of reactively in their provision of social services?
- d. How can we actively build trust between government and marginalized communities, creating pathways for them to directly influence policy outcomes? How can we champion the commitment of “no decisions about us, without us”¹ ?
- e. How can public health translate models of deep democracy into health interventions? What would be gained? What might be left unaddressed?

¹ Adapted from the common saying “nothing about us without us,” which originated among South African disability activists in the 1990s and has grown popular among marginalized groups who want a say in how they are governed.

BACKGROUND

The Just Transition Framework

Originating in the 1970s labor union and environmental justice (EJ) movements in the United States, a “Just Transition” characterizes the bold envisioning of communities of color – who endured harm at the hands of industry, poor health, and the first effects of a warming planet – for an alternate system that did not extract their labor or mine Mother Earth’s² land (*Just Transition - Climate Justice Alliance, 2023*). This vision is built around the knowledge system that humans exist within relationship to everything and do not get to take or cause harm without also experiencing the consequences (*Just Transition, 2017*). Wealth and privilege have protected those in decision-making positions from experiencing the consequences of their decisions to support an economy that prioritizes profit over people. While frontline communities/communities of color currently bear these burdens, it is not restricted to them. **Our system of extraction is unsustainable and will one day burden us all.** If we want to build a future that can create well-being for our populations and planet, we must center communities of color in solutions through meaningful and real engagement in our governance – they have been leading solutions out of necessity (*Just Transition - Climate Justice Alliance, 2023*).

Shifting our economic system from one that thrives off suppressing the marginalized voice to a system that champions it requires a cultural and ideological shift (i.e., a shift in worldview) (Movement Generation, 2017). White supremacy and the paternalistic belief that White leaders know best for communities of color must be replaced with self-determination

² Often used by indigenous communities and the EJ movement to refer to our planet, Earth. Meant to highlight that she is a living being that births all life and fosters our shared life. We cannot survive without our Mother.

and humility. Exclusion and private goods need to be traded for commonly-held and public goods. Profit needs to be traded for shared well-being, understanding that money is only one way to place value on prosperity. More tangibly, this cultural shift can be seen in small changes: single occupancy vehicles to mass transit, industrial food systems that yield huge waste to regenerative agriculture and food sovereignty, government food voucher programs to community gardens, gentrification to community rights and protection, privatized healthcare to universally accessible healthcare, and false democracy to shared governance (Movement Generation, 2017).

In many ways, the Just Transition is an idealized state that radically imagines a future of liberation for communities of color that suffer in the current economic model (*Just Transition - Climate Justice Alliance, 2023*). It excels in characterizing our extractive system but struggles in tangibly guiding the path forward to an alternate and attainable reality for a regenerative economy. In 2017, Movement Generation³ and the Climate Justice Alliance⁴ created a visual framework (see *Figure 2*) and eight principles of practice for a Just Transition (see *Appendix I*) to formalize this decades' long aspiration (Movement Generation, 2017; *Just Transition - Climate Justice Alliance, 2023*). The framework organizes the extractive and regenerative economic models into five core pillars/functions (see *Figure 1*):

³ Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project (mg) is based in Berkeley, CA and conceptualized in the early 2000s by a planning committee of grassroots organizers, movement builders, and popular educators organizing across communities and issue areas. mg's focus after Hurricane Katrina expanded to address opportunities and challenges of working-class communities or color to address ecology, sustainability, and the global ecological crisis. <https://movementgeneration.org/about/#our-story>

⁴ The Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) is a national, non-governmental collective of over 70 rural and urban community-based organizations formed in 2013 to create a "new center of gravity in the climate movement by uniting frontline communities and organizations into a formidable force." CJA centers race, gender, and class in their solutions for a Just Transition, which integrate economic development, poverty alleviation, sustainability, and racial justice. <https://climatejusticealliance.org/about/>

1. **Worldview.** Our worldview/culture is what orients the economy’s structure to those within it – it sets the limits of what is and is not accepted, socializing individuals to align with the four other functions below.
2. **Resources.** Represents natural resources (particularly, precious natural resources). Can be renewable (wind, water, etc.) or non-renewable (fossil fuels).
3. **Work.** Represents human work (labor) used in conjunction with “resources” to achieve the “purpose.” Labor is often seen as an infinite, renewable resource (i.e., there are always more people and there are 24 hours of work available). However, this reaches an asymptote as citizens reach illness and burnout from work.
4. **Purpose.** The ultimate goal that resources and work are mobilized to help achieve.
5. **Governance.** The influencing system that organizes and facilitates the successful operation of the economy to achieve its designated purpose. Exists in a positive feedback loop with the purpose (they inform and uphold each other).

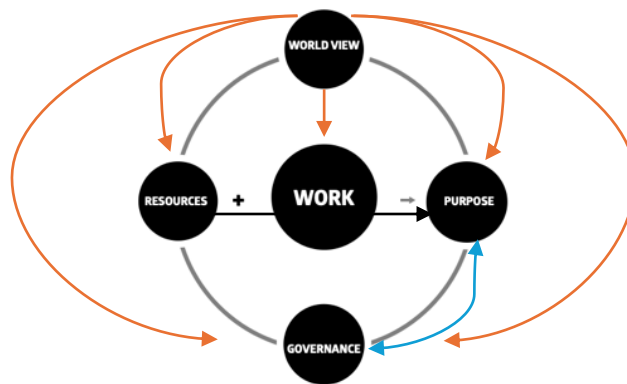


Figure 1. **The Five Pillars of The Economy in the Just Transition Framework.** Image taken from Movement Generation’s Zine, accessed here: https://movementgeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/JT_booklet_Eng_printspreads.pdf
 Note: author added arrows to demonstrate relationships between pillars.

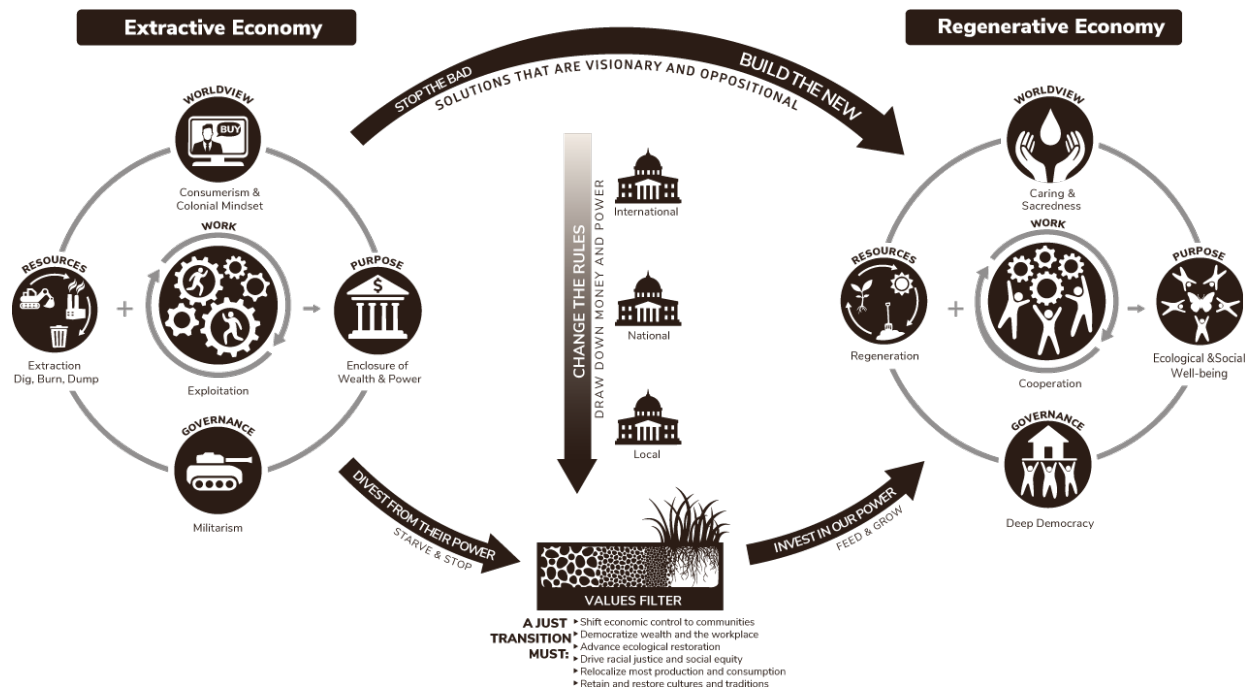


Figure 2. **The Just Transition Framework.** Image taken from Movement Generation’s Zine, accessed here: https://movementgeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/JT_booklet_Eng_printspreads.pdf. Note: the framework is oriented to a Western economic model, specifically the United States’ economy. But it can be broadly applied to nations affected by imperialism, capitalism, or the global economy.

The Extractive Economy

Under the Just Transition Framework, the purpose of our current economic model is to enclose wealth and power among the elite (e.g., imperialist nations or the wealthiest 1% in the United States) (Movement Generation, 2017). It does this through the means of exploiting work (labor) and extracting resources (Movement Generation, 2017). Social classifications of “working class,” “unskilled laborers,” “underdeveloped peoples,” and “third world countries” are generated to justify their exploitation and mine the resources they possess. Expendability fuels the mentality of “dig, burn, and dump,” which ignores the natural limits of our natural and social world to support rapid growth and mining. Fulfillment of this purpose is done to the detriment of our planet and people, except for the elite few for whom the system is designed to benefit (Movement Generation, 2017).

This purpose is upheld through a governance system of militarism, which Movement Generation (MG) defines as “structural, well organized, systematic violence” (Movement Generation, 2017). MG primarily focuses on militarism exercised abroad against third world countries through imperialism⁵ and traditional military force (e.g., war, settlements, military bases, etc.)⁶ (Movement Generation, 2017). However, this paper also argues militarism is practiced domestically against communities of color through policy and false democracy, which creates a social structure of state-sanctioned violence against Black and Brown bodies (Flynn et al., 2017). Many people of color are forced into occupations and lives of exploitation, generating a poor social class focused on survival (Flynn et al., 2017; Kendi, 2016; Wilkerson, 2020).

The worldview of consumerism and colonialism work to generate domestic luxuries and create the illusion of (attainable) prosperity (Movement Generation, 2017). The American dream of (equal) opportunity perpetuates social power among the wealthy class – they have attained wealth and are examples of what to strive for (Flynn et al., 2017; McGhee, 2021). The working class therefore the system by contributing their labor in the hope of one day attaining the promised wealth and prosperity (McGhee, 2021). Although they provide the labor that makes this economic system function, the working class believe they hold limited power to change the system (Movement Generation, 2017). Under a capitalistic system, wealth is associated with power – citizens work to one day attain enough wealth to dictate

⁵ The geographic expansion of a country’s borders through military force or diplomacy to increase influence and power. Often motivated by increasing access to resources or spreading cultural/ideological beliefs.

⁶ “The announcement of an oil discovery in any territory is comparable to the declaration of war against the territory.” – Nnimmo Bassey, of Environmental Rights Action Nigeria and Chair of Oilwatch Africa (Movement Generation, 2017), accessed here: https://movementgeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/JT_booklet_English_SPREADs_web.pdf

their future. In an idealized free market with “bootstrap” ideology⁷, those who are most successful are seen as the most deserving, validating the purpose of this economic structure (Bernardo et al., 2018; Wilkerson, 2020). Concurrently, the colonial mindset of domination over weaker countries and peoples normalizes “sacrifice zones” as inevitable – both in poor countries abroad and communities of color at home (Flynn et al., 2017). Violence endured elsewhere is accepted as essential for the comfort and promise of prosperity in their communities. This encourages individuals to dissociate from the violence caused in this system and limits large scale challenges to the form of governance.

THE CONSEQUENCES TO POPULATION HEALTH

The Relationship Between Health And Profit

The Just Transition Framework focuses on an extractive economy’s dire consequences to our planet and ecological well-being. However, it also carries detrimental impacts to population health, community health, and our collective well-being.

Communities of color face the frontlines of two insidious actors: 1) the domestic militarism that directly divests in their health and 2) the threat of experiencing the health impacts of a worsening climate exacerbated by an imperialist military. In an extractive economy, health outcomes in poor communities of color⁸ (e.g., life expectancy, infant mortality rates, burden of chronic illnesses, etc.) serve as a barometer for the system’s performance. A sicker working class indicates “successful” extraction of labor – so much

⁷ Common term for “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” or the American mentality to work harder to get out of an undesired socioeconomic state. Has connections to the Protestant work ethic, which determines an individual’s value based on how hard they work and the sum of money they can produce.

⁸ Oriented to poor communities of color because they face the most extraction in the current economic model and endure the greatest health impacts. However, the impacts are visible in average citizen health.

that it has shifted labor from a renewable resource (good quality of life, desire to work, many eligible years of work) to a non-renewable resource (burn out, survival mode, illness, and death). In this system, optimal extraction of labor *should* translate to maximized profits. However, this only holds true to a limit—a “successful⁹” extractive economy is unsustainable.

Maximum extraction and exploitation for a prolonged period will deplete the worker pool at a rate that exceeds replenishment because **health outcomes of poor communities of color and profits are inversely related**. The system will eventually exhaust most workers to exploit and resources to mine (i.e., the system is unsustainable). When this happens, there will be a temporary delay before the profits fall to mirror the production life cycle – there is time between point of labor extraction and profit gain. However, as industrial production cycles grow shorter, there will be less time/ability to absorb reductions in worker labor.

Lower profits won’t recover until the resources can replenish (i.e., more labor enters the market), which will take longer at this stage because of the degree of depletion and dampened resilience (e.g., a working class with chronic illness or a forest nearly wiped out). Newly replenished resources will be immediately harvested to uphold the starving system (e.g., harvesting juvenile trees for wood instead of an old growth forest), creating smaller gains in profits and a severely dwindling resource pool that teeters around total depletion. The system cannot afford the time required for resources to fully replenish and must harvest to serve the economy’s purpose, causing faster decay in the final stages (see *Figure 3* for the visual representation).

⁹ Defined as “successful” achievement of the extractive economy’s purpose: the concentration, control, and enclosure of wealth and power among the elite (domestically in the US and globally).

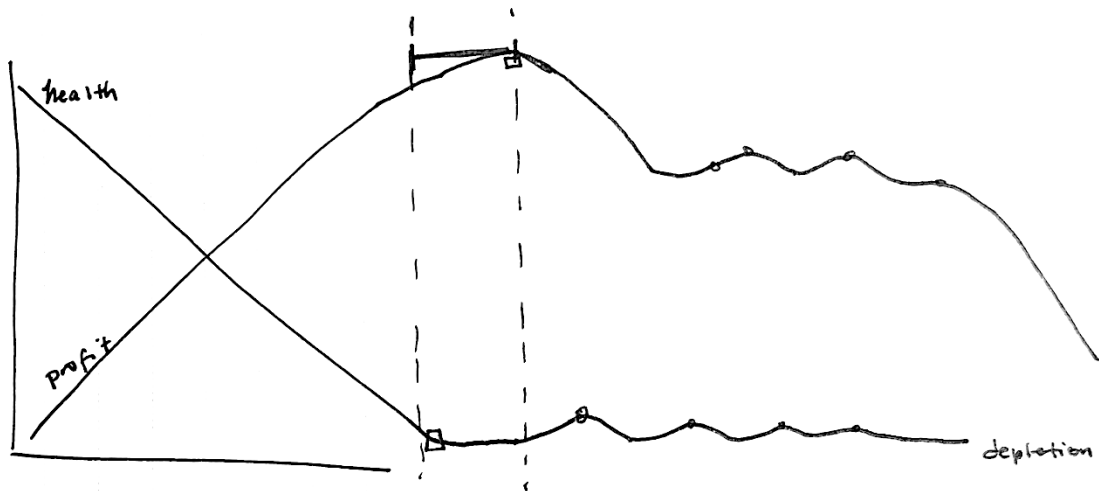


Figure 3. Relationship Between Health Outcomes in Poor Communities of Color and Profit. Health is the proxy for worker exploitation and profit is the proxy for fulfillment of the extractive economy's purpose. Assumptions include: the working class expands in this system during early stages of decay (need to create more wage workers to exploit), workers will eventually be depleted across the board (in the US and overseas), the advancement of ecological destruction (extracting resources) will increase the negative health impact of communities of color through releasing toxins, the scarcity of workers will drive depletion of the working class to obsolescence, and the system will fail following depletion.

The U.S.A. and the Limits Of The Extractive Economy

The United States is currently experiencing the limits of the extractive economy.

The top 1% hold more wealth than the bottom 90% of Americans and dominate the primary methods for wealth building (e.g., stocks and mutual funds) (Braveman et al., 2018). The richest 400 American families control more wealth than *all* 10 million Black households combined (Perry et al., 2024) Additionally, wealth at the top has grown rapidly. In 1990, the top 1% controlled 6 times more wealth than the bottom 50%¹⁰ (Leonhardt, 2021). In 2021, this figure has increased to 16 times more wealth than the bottom 50% (Leonhardt, 2021).

To reframe the concentration of wealth not in a comparator or disparity, the 2019 US Survey

¹⁰ In this paper, the bottom 50% of Americans will be referred to as the “working class.” The author notes working class typically means not reaching a bachelor’s degree for education level. However, the author chooses to use the classification to characterize Americans who have limited wealth and must work to live.

of Consumer Finances found the wealthiest 1% of American households owned 37% of the US economy’s total private wealth – the wealthiest 10% owned 76% of total wealth and the bottom 50% (i.e., the working class) owned 1.5% (see *Table 1*)(Xavier, 2021).

Table 1. Distribution of Wealth in the United States. Image taken from Xavier (2021), accessed here: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3915439>. Note: data is from the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances and is likely underreported in the upper distribution due to the self-reporting metric.

Percentile	Wealth share
Bottom 50%	1.5
Middle 40%	22.1
Top 10%	76.4
Top 5%	64.9
Top 1%	37.2

Concurrently, 21% of American households have either zero or negative wealth – these households are disproportionately Black and Latino (Braveman et al., 2018; (Kochhar et al., 2023). Black Americans live on average six years less than White Americans (Hill & Artiga, 2023). Black infants are 2.4 times more likely to die before reaching one year of age than White babies and are nearly 4 times more likely to die due to complications from low-birth weight (Office of Minority Health et al., 2022). However, **in an extractive economy at its upper limit, it is not just the health of communities of color that suffer – it impacts health across the board** (Chancel, 2020). Poor communities of color are the warning sign. The United States has the greatest wealth inequity of *any* high-income nation (Chancel, 2020). It also experiences the worst health outcomes in life expectancy, infant mortality, avoidable mortality, and maternal mortality among its global peers (Braveman et al., 2018).

Public Health Must Shift Its Thinking: Disparities To Justice

Public health has attempted to answer the question of why communities of color face worse health outcomes. Solutions are explored across the subfields of health disparities, behavioral health, community health, care delivery optimization, the social determinants of health, health policy, and countless more. The creation of the socioecological model (SEM) and the social determinants of health (SDOH) were monumental gains in shifting the discipline's approach from behavior change to policy and structural change (see *Appendix II* for SEM and SDOH visuals). The diseases most prevalent among Black communities (e.g., diabetes, chronic heart disease, hypertension, and stroke) that were often met with the goal of facilitating individual behavior change (i.e., placing the blame on the person and their “unhealthy” choices) were now viewed as consequences of the built environment like food deserts or lack of access to care (Satcher, 2008). Naturally, the connection emerged between policy, racism, income level, and built environment (Dawes, 2020). Decades of observational research indicate lower income levels are more likely to result in increased burden of disease and shorter life-expectancy (Finkelstein et al., 2022).

Although less studied, the evidence pool linking national wealth inequity to poorer health outcomes continues to grow – focus is both on the impacts on the nation's poorest citizens and average national health (Anderson et al., 2024; Chancel, 2020). Differences in wealth are most significantly attributed to slavery and the long list of racist policies that facilitated the growth of White wealth while stifling wealth for people of color (see *Figure 4*) (Hanks et al., 2018; *Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI)*, n.d.). The discipline has openly declared racism as a public health crisis and is actively working to close the racial wealth

gap. However, wealth building programs, more progressive tax structures, reparations, and other innovative policy solutions to increase Black-owned assets and intergenerational wealth cannot close the racial wealth gap (Muhammad et al., 2017; Weller & Roberts 2021; Williamson, 2020).

The Center for American Progress in their report “Eliminating the Black-White Wealth Gap is a Generational Challenge” implores policymakers to undertake the generational fight and to continue working on innovative solutions to close this gap, which fuels disparities in health outcomes (Weller & Roberts, 2021). Prosperity Now’s “The Road to Zero Wealth: How the Racial Wealth Divide is Hollowing Out America’s Middle Class” report warns that without drastic intervention in building durable assets and changing American taxation structure, median Black household wealth will reach \$0 by 2053 – people of color are predicted to become the majority population in 2043 (Muhammad et al., 2017). While there must be focus on the limited wealth of communities of color and the impacts that has on their ability to access health, the solution to less wealth cannot simply be to create more wealth. In an extractive economy, wealth *will consistently pool* at the top – it is designed to concentrate wealth and control among those with the largest capital (Movement Generation, 2017).

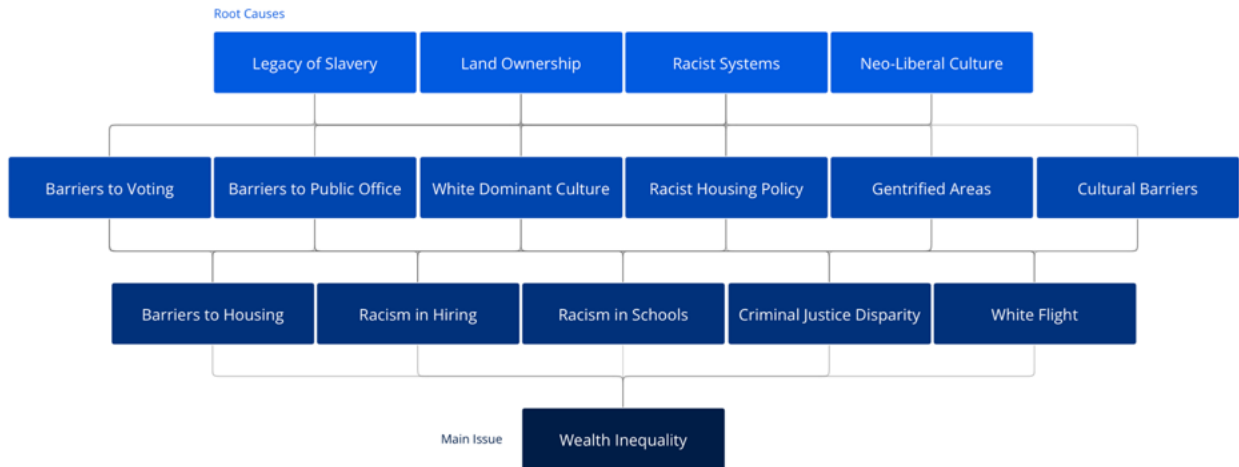


Figure 4. **Conceptual Map of the Root Causes of Wealth Inequity.** Image taken from the Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative website, accessed here: <https://www.seattle.gov/rsji/racial-equity-research/community-wealth>

Any solution that pumps money into communities with the goal of increasing their upward mobility and power will not fix our problem. If not paired with efforts to change the system away from an extractive economy, community wealth efforts will elongate the crisis – the influx of funds will serve as a lifeline to keep the working class afloat, upholding a pool of workers eligible to exploit and wealth to extract. To address the health of poor communities of color, the discipline must change its thinking. **White health can no longer serve as the comparator for ideal health outcomes.** This positions White health as optimal health, limiting the solutions the discipline can imagine. The United States is in an unsustainable model and communities of color need policy change transformative enough to ignite the transition to a regenerative economy.

DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH

Achieving A Different Reality: Targeted Universalism

The Targeted Universalism framework (created by John A. Powell from the Othering and Belonging Institute, UC-Berkeley) avoids the disparity conversation through setting a

universal goal, which represents an ideal state (john a. powell, 2019). The framework encourages bold envisioning for a different future and does not concern itself with political feasibility,¹¹ which favors the extractive economy (i.e., the status quo). This universal goal could be healthcare for all, free public higher education, mass transit that connects citizens to anywhere they need to go, or in this paper's case: all neighborhoods serve as a place to foster community health and shared well-being. This goal draws from the purpose of the regenerative economy (ecological and social well-being) but uses a stronger population health lens and orients it to local systems like neighborhoods.

The smaller scope of local government and neighborhoods was selected because of their potential to directly impact communities. Local government impacts the day-to-day life of citizens, serve as innovative venues for policy change, and provide community members with greater access to their elected officials than higher levels of governance (Christopher, 2023). Although local governments are limited in their reach, they provide an approachable opportunity to build out new strategies to improve community health and well-being. This paper strives to develop a Targeted Universalism Framework with implementation strategies that can be used by municipalities across the country (see Figure 5 for framework and Table 2 for implementation strategies). The language used aims to be non-partisan, however, the framework does accept certain conditions like racism and the role of public policy in creating poor health outcomes for communities of color.

¹¹ A criterion used in policy making that represents the likelihood for a policy to be adopted given the political climate. Tends to favor the status quo and discourage policies centered around justice or equity (directed at transforming the system and therefore unfavorable).

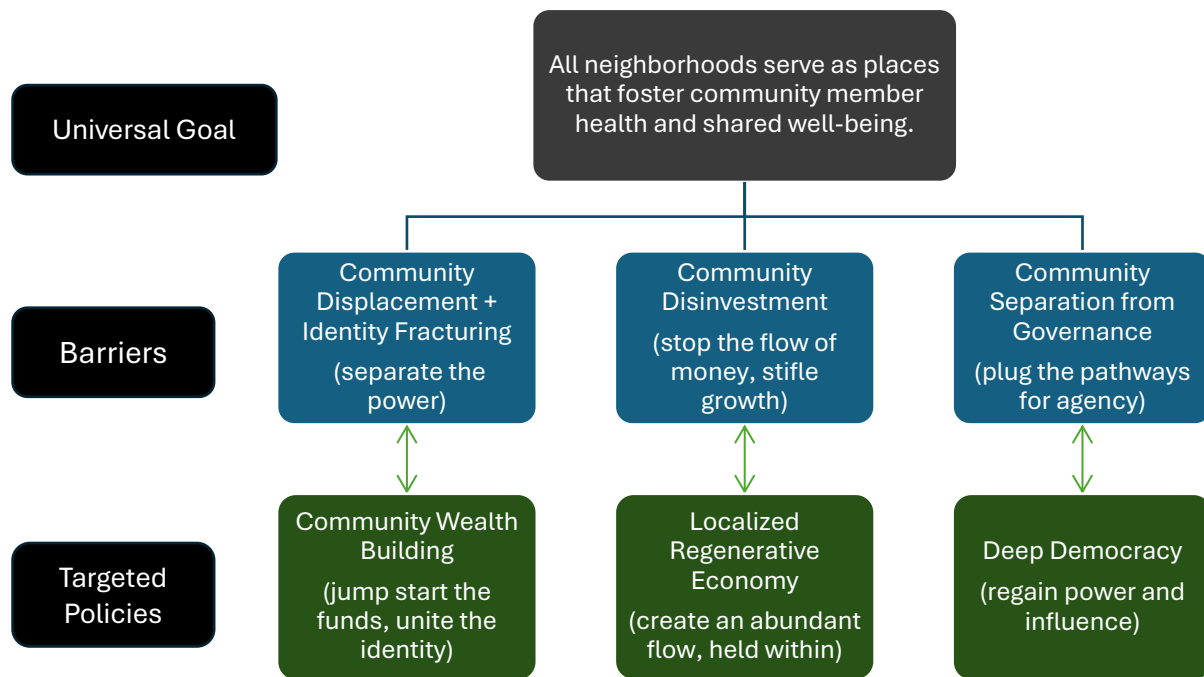


Figure 5. **Targeted Universalism Framework for Local Governments to Improve Community Well-being.** Adapted from the ideas presented in John A. Powell's published *Targeted Universalism: policy and practice report*, accessed here: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeted-universalism>

The Targeted Universalism Framework asserts different communities face unique barriers and will have different paths that vary in length to the universal goal (John A. Powell, 2019). Some (i.e., society's most privileged) may only have to overcome one barrier to reach the goal and others may be twenty away -- the goal is not satisfied until all groups reach it. Targeted policy groups are created to target specific barriers in the way of this universal goal, hence the name "Targeted Universalism" (John A. Powell, 2019). For this paper, the barriers aim to capture the main impacts of domestic militarism and violent policy against communities of color: community displacement and identity fracturing (e.g., redlining), community disinvestment (e.g., gentrification), and community separation from governance (e.g., voter suppression). The three targeted policies represent *groups* of policy interventions

and are further broken down into strategies (policies, programs, or interventions) that local governments could employ. The policy groups aim to emulate the CJA's Just Transition Principles (see *Appendix I*) and are as follows: community wealth building, localized regenerative economy, and deep democracy.

This paper uses a modified framework from John A. Powell's. Typically, progress is assessed through conducting "population assessments" across different population types that are relevant to the Universal goal (White and educated, Black and educated, etc.) (John A. Powell, 2019). The percent of each population type currently achieving the goal (pre-intervention) is used to characterize the extremity of the problem and serve as a baseline for progress (John A. Powell, 2019). This paper selects the health among poor communities of color as the progress metric since they are likely the last population to reach the goal.

This paper encourages a wider measure of health outcomes since the universal goal is around "community health" and "shared well-being," which are broader than physical health. These can include public health standards (e.g., life expectancy, infant mortality, prevalence of chronic illness, asthma, etc.), changes in environmental conditions that have high incidence among Black communities (e.g., residence in a food desert, proximity to an industrial site, education level, etc.), and community-informed measures of well-being (e.g., self-agency, expressions of gratitude, happiness, reduced stress, etc.). Local governments are encouraged to engage their communities through citizen assemblies¹² to assess whether members feel this universal goal has been reached.

¹² Government-driven meetings that assemble a group that is representative of their population (e.g., demographically, political beliefs, spiritual practices, etc.) to discuss a specific topic.

The three targeted policies offer the landscape of options for local governments to achieve the universal goal. However, it is recommended local governments *begin* with a single policy effort and adopt it as an initiative or united systematic effort to improve both implementation feasibility and impact. These policy groups do not exist in siloes and spillover or positive externalities will likely occur between them. For example, the development of a localized regenerative economy (TP2) could create a robust local economy and reduce risk for community displacement (B1). Similarly, Community Wealth Building (TP1) could grow community assets, wealth, and ultimately power – this would reduce the government’s ability to separate a newly well-resourced community from their systems of governance. Within each targeted policy is a wealth of strategies local governments can explore to meet their current political and policy climate, needs of community members, and internal capacity to lead the transformative change for achieving community well-being (see *Table 2* for a non-exhaustive list of strategies).

Table 2. Strategies for Achieving Targeted Policy Groups in the Targeted Universalism Framework for Improved Community Well-Being. Note: these are a sampling, this table is non-exhaustive. Strategies were selected based on the author’s exposure and perceived utility. The purpose descriptions for each strategy were created using the author’s gained knowledge (in classrooms, work, readings, etc.) and aimed to synthesize various learnings. None of the descriptions are unique to one individual and are assumed as common understandings/definitions unless explicitly cited.

Strategies for Achieving Targeted Policy Groups	
Community Wealth Building	Purpose: capital investment <i>jump start the funds, unite community identity</i>
Incubator Spaces	Create favorable conditions to accelerate the growth of new businesses, particularly minority-owned businesses that may struggle in the market. May also offer additional resources like technical support, office space, mentorship, and starting capital.
Mixed-Use Development	A zoning classification that permits buildings or shared development areas to have multiple uses (e.g., residential, commercial, medical, retail, office, or recreational).

Community-Owned Assets	Collective ownership and community control over assets like land, businesses, or real estate. Permits individuals with smaller amounts of capital to pool together resources to own assets, communities such as neighborhoods to have decision-making authority over their assets/land, determine who has access, and plan how assets are held in the long-term. Examples are community-owned farms, apartment buildings, banks, etc.
Capacity Building Grants	Money invested to grow the capacity of communities of color to develop a wealth-building infrastructure. Can include funds to support key community businesses, jumpstart neighborhood crowdfunding, develop community-owned assets, building a localized regenerative economy, or increasing personnel to support long-term growth and resilience (Theodos et al., 2021).
Localized Regenerative Economy	Purpose: grow and keep wealth in circular production/consumption systems <i>create an abundant flow of money, held within the community creating it</i>
Land Trusts	A specific form of “community-owned asset” that creates an organization to purchase land and places it in trust ¹³ . The organization has ownership of the land and long-term responsibility/preservation but transfers legal ownership of property to land stewards. Can be paired with other forms of community-owned assets like farms where members contribute labor for housing.
Housing Co-Operatives	A residential housing model where a corporation owns the home as an asset and residents are shareholders in the corporation, having influence over organization operation but not holding ownership of their housing unit. Could be a model paired with land trusts (e.g., a non-profit corporation owns the house on the land held in trust and establishes a “co-op”).

¹³ Refers to the “Deed in Trust” document that transfers legal ownership of the property away from the landowner to the stewarding organization or group of individuals.

Farmers Markets	Work to create a smaller-scale food production and consumption model. Local farmers are brought into an organized selling market to residents in the neighborhood. Consumers benefit from fresh produce and farmers get to sell directly to consumers. Farmers market can also include other sellers like product vendors, restaurants, and pop-ups. Typically, there are farmers market boards that facilitate organizing.
Waste Management and Agriculture	Building infrastructure that link systems between agricultural activities and waste management systems. For example, building commercial composting systems that can turn what would otherwise be waste (e.g., unsold produce and other organic materials) into a good (e.g., soil) that can be an input back into the agricultural system, reducing costs and waste.
Deep Democracy	Purpose: create pathways for power and shared decision-making <i>regain power and influence among communities of color</i>
Participatory Budgeting	Citizen control over portion of government budget via voting.
Ballot Initiative	Citizen-driven initiative to generate policy creation. Increased accessibility/utility separates the status quo version from this.
Citizen Assemblies	Government-driven. Seeks representative from a given population to vote on/come to consensus on policy decisions. Element of co-design, but typically limited to choice between options not beginning at ideation.
People’s Assemblies	Citizen-driven. Seeks representation to develop solutions to expansive issues (climate change, international health, etc.).
Community Assemblies	Community-driven, highly localized version of people’s assemblies. Members united through identity or geographic region.
Community Leadership Programs	Bolster community representation in Government in hopes to elevate power among marginalized communities.
Community Advisory Boards	Validate lived experience as a “way of knowing” and seek to increase representation of lived

	knowledge to earned knowledge in problem diagnosis and solution development.
Community Taskforce / Workgroup	Targeted community participation in agency programming. Typically comprised of a mix of issue experts and community representatives.
Community Engagement Plans	Active community engagement / participation in agency activities. Examples can be seen in levels 3-5 on the Community Engagement Continuum (see <i>Appendix V</i>).

Deep Democracy As a Public Health Initiative

Deep democracy should be local government’s starting policy group for three reasons: it has the greatest capacity to change the structure away from an extractive economy, there is existing literature connecting participatory budgeting (a deep democracy strategy) to increased community health, and it offers an opportunity for restoration and trust building among government entities and communities of color.

Although municipalities might have early progress and deep investment with Community Wealth Building (CWB), this alone cannot create the structural change necessary and should be explored as a supplementary strategy. Similarly, localized regenerative economy takes orchestrated effort to build up, likely impeding its ability to produce results quickly enough to maintain consistent funding.

I. The Just Transition Framework: Governance and Purpose

In the Just Transition Framework, it is governance that informs and upholds the economy’s purpose. If the governance is altered, the purpose will follow suit. Deep democracy serves as a clear entry point for transitioning from an economy organized around to purpose of enclosing wealth to fostering shared well-being.

II. Early Promises of Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB) was created by the Workers Party in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 to address rising economic and health inequities (Marquetti, 2000). Provided the origin of this practice, there is research exploring the connection between this deep democracy strategy to gains in health (Gonçalves, 2014; Touchton & Wampler, 2020). However, this pool of evidence is limited. Some more broadly focus on the impacts on well-being or health justice (Boulding & Wampler, 2010; Palmquist, 2020). A scoping review found 37 studies, which are mostly concentrated in its origin country, Brazil (Campbell et al., 2018).¹⁴ In this limited pool, Campbell et al. (2018) organized the way studies measured PB outcomes into three predominant categories: political, economic and budgetary, and health and social outcomes (see *Appendix III* for supporting figures). In each category, impact to society was labeled from individual effects to population gains and systems change.

Table 3. **Participatory Budgeting Outcome Measures on Society.** Author created table using findings from Campbell et al.'s (2018) Scoping Review on 37 studies, accessed here: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5735-8>

Participatory Budgeting Outcome Measures	
Outcome of Interest (in order of prevalence)	Impact x level of society
Political outcomes	Individual (participation) Systems (local democratic process)
Economic and budgetary outcomes	Population (health or social services provision) (public goods) (housing)
Health and social outcomes	Individual (personal health or well-being) (self-efficacy)(empowerment) Population (measurements of inequity – poverty rates, infant mortality)

¹⁴A scoping review (Campbell et al. 2018) identified 1,458 references across 21 databases with no restrictions on language or publication date. Of these, 39 articles that detailed 37 unique studies met the inclusion criteria of reporting on “original analysis of health, social, political, or economic or budgetary outcomes of PB.” Most of these studies were in South America (n=24) with the highest concentration in Brazil (n=19). Majority (89%) of the included studies focused on PB at the municipal level. More recent scoping or systematic review publications were not identified by the author.

Health and social outcomes were seen on individual and population levels (Campbell et al., 2018). Individuals gained personal health and well-being (from access to gains in the economic and budgetary outcomes + increased sense of political self-determination), improved feelings of self-efficacy, and greater reported empowerment in their government (Campbell et al., 2018). Populations benefits were characterized through changing measures of inequity (e.g., poverty rates and infant mortality). The two Brazilian studies that measured poverty rates in municipalities with PB reported reductions (World Bank, 2008; Boulding & Wampler, 2010). The five Brazilian studies on infant mortality garnered mixed results, although the two most recent ones reported a reduction in mortality rates (Goncalves, 2014; Touchon & Wampler, 2014).

Although there were limited studies (n=7) measuring “health and social outcomes,” the gains in the other two categories should yield indirect, upstream health benefits given the socioecological model of health (see *Appendix II* for the visual SEM model). Campbell et al. (2018) organizes the possible impacts of participatory budgeting on well-being into five pathways: 1) increase in democratic participation, 2) greater community cohesion, 3) improved allocation of funding to community’s prioritized public services, 4) increased spending on social determinants of health (e.g., sanitation, housing, transit, etc.), and 5) increased population health.

III. Restoration and Trust Building

Communities of color have faced historical exclusion from governance, which enabled violent policies across government branches such as the 13th amendment, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Geary Act (1892), *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Redlining

and Housing Discrimination (1935-1968), Japanese-American Internment or Executive Order 9066 (1942), voter suppression laws (continuing to this day), and countless more (McGhee, 2021; Kendi, 2017). Currently, citizens across races lack pathways for deep engagement with government (see *Appendix IV*). However, those who are most civically engaged (i.e., gain entry) are overwhelmingly White and wealthy (Phan & Kloos, 2023).

Deep democracy offers an opportunity to build trust between communities of color by centering them as a core decision maker in governance (People's Economy Lab, 2024). Government community engagement methods are typically passive so although communities are consulted, they are not given decision making authority (People's Economy Lab, 2024) (see *Appendix V* for the Community Engagement Continuum). This tactic of involvement without power risks further mistrust among communities for government to act in their best interest (Lang, 2022). Deep democracy offers an entirely different way of engaging and can signify a new path forward.

IMPLEMENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Readiness For Change Assessment: King County, WA

Local Governments should conduct an assessment to gauge their readiness to adopt the Targeted Universalism Framework and deep democracy a public health initiative. Although the Readiness for Change Assessment tool is typically used for program implementation, it is helpful at the municipal level to understand the current political climate, existing momentum for similar projects, cultural acceptance of key ideologies, and identifying clear barriers (Helfrich et al., 2009). This paper offers a “Readiness for Change Assessment” case example for King County, WA in the form of identifying 1) existing

programs/policies that align with deep democracy and its strategies (see *Table 4* for the policy and program landscape), 2) potential barriers to adoption and implementation (see *Table 5*), and 3) the chosen government entity to champion this work.

I. Identifying Existing Programs/Policies that Align With Deep Democracy Strategies

Table 4. King County's Policy and Program Landscape.

King County’s Policy and Program Landscape, includes Washington State initiatives that King County would have access to			
<i>Note: this is a non-exhaustive list. Other examples include the Social Housing Initiative (I-135), King County Regional Homeless Authority (KCRHA) Lived Experience Advisory Board, Africatown Community Land Trust, Othello Square, Crescent Collaborative, Friends of Little Saigon, and many more¹⁵.</i>			
Case Examples in Washington State (established year)	Targeted Policy	Strategies Used	Outtakes
King County Participatory Budgeting Initiative (2021)	Deep Democracy	Participatory Budgeting	Citizens gained control over the allocation of \$11M tax-paying dollars to fund 46 projects that addressed longstanding issues of racial equity in five of the most disadvantaged communities in unincorporated King County (Gloria L. Briggs, 2023).
People’s Economy Lab’s Community Assemblies Project (2024)	Deep Democracy	Community Assemblies	Currently in the pilot phase, PEL has won two contracts to launch community assemblies – one on the Seattle

¹⁵ Projects listed were found on the City of Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative section on Community Wealth: <https://www.seattle.gov/rsji/racial-equity-research/community-wealth>

			<p>Comprehensive Plan and another on community-defined metrics of well-being for the HEAL Act. Assemblies aim to provide an avenue for Washington residents affected by policy change to congregate and set shared policy priorities, lead co-design, and inform implementation (People’s Voice on Climate et al., 2024).</p>
<p>Sage Leaders Community Leadership Institute (2015)</p>	<p>Deep Democracy</p>	<p>Community Leadership Programs</p>	<p>Offers a pointed 6-month training program in local government and justice. Develops a network of BIPOC community leaders for civic and elected positions in Washington State. Placement on Boards and Commissions, preparation for elected office, and access to mentorship increased civic engagement and feelings of agency to control future outcomes for communities of color (Kristin K. Joy, 2017; Puget Sound Sage & Sage Leaders, 2015).</p>
<p>Washington State Environmental Justice Council (2021)</p>	<p>Deep Democracy + Community Wealth Building</p>	<p>Seed Grants + Community Advisory Boards</p>	<p>A 16-person council that works directly with government agencies to improve well-being of Frontline</p>

			communities, make recommendations to legislature, and allocate funds to materially invest in frontline communities of the climate crisis. 7 community representatives and 2 tribal representatives present on the council (Environmental Justice Council, 2021).
Washington State Health Equity Zones Initiative (2021)	Deep Democracy + Community Wealth Building	Seed Grants and Community Advisory Board + Community Workgroup/Taskforce	Community Advisory Boards identified Health Equity Zones to receive \$200,000 of government funds to address health disparities. Community representatives in identified zones determine health priorities and solutions to address them (Washington State Department of Health et al., 2023).
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods' Generational Wealth Initiative (2021)	Deep Democracy + Community Wealth Building + Regenerative Economy	Seed grants, Community Advisory Boards	Convened community roundtables for 14-months to guide agency interventions for addressing the racial wealth gap in Seattle. Six interventions were identified to keep wealth in the hands of the people who create it, growing the wealth of their community. Broad-based worker ownership, access to

			affordable capital and community-controlled capital, community ownership of real estate, progressive procurement, equitable small business ecosystems, and wealth retention and asset building programs. Over \$1.3M will be invested over two years to support nine pilot community wealth building projects (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods et al., 2024).
Evergreen Land Trust Association (1974)	Deep Democracy + Regenerative Economy + Community Wealth Building	Land Trusts, Housing Co-Operatives, Community-owned assets, Community Advisory Board	Association holds cooperative houses, farms, and forestlands in the Puget Sound Region across rural and urban landscapes. Assets are managed by a 15-member community advisory board to ensure use for generations to come. Members engage in circular economy through housing residents offering labor to the farms, which provide food to the residents and gain revenue to keep rent low (Evergreen Land Trust, n.d.).

II. Identifying Potential Barriers to Adoption and Implementation

Table 5. *Potential Barriers to Adoption and Implementation of Deep Democracy.*

Potential Barriers to Adoption and Implementation of Deep Democracy Initiative	
Barrier	Threat
Timing	Window of opportunity to adopt initiative – needs to coincide with County Council schedules for meetings, legislative budget timelines, trends in citizen discussion/opinion, and other big planning opportunities like Comprehensive Plans.
Funding	Lack of financial support could render the initiative dead. Similarly, relying on short-term funding sources in the form of pilot studies could threaten long-term sustainability and community buy-in. If communities are engaged and there is not money to continue the work, it could further reduce trust.
Lack of “empirical evidence” // evidentiary standards that favor science	The evidence pool directly linking deep democracy to health is limited (it is mostly explored in PB and even this link is limited). Despite the theoretical support for the potential health gains, the lack of scientific support may weaken efforts to launch deep democracy programs. Preference for science as the predominant way of knowing delay adoption until this evidence is developed.
Risk of confounding factors for measuring progress	There are many strategies within the deep democracy targeted policy group. Local governments may seek co-adoption to increase progress, which creates risk for confounding factors between strategies. Not knowing which policy was responsible for gains in health outcomes could weaken evidentiary support for funding.
Uncertainty of metrics for progress	Community health and well-being are difficult to measure and local governments will be tasked with innovation on how they design metrics. However, the room for creativity and community co-design on well-being standards may increase the difficulty of precision and assessment of progress towards the Universal Goal.

Political Will	The political climate and will of the political arena (actors and venues) to adopt the initiative will determine its success. Deep democracy is most successful when deeply operationalized and championed by its enacting government.
Organizational Capacity	Ability for the administering organization or agency or policy-making body to lead the deep democracy work. If no clear hosting group, implementation could become disjointed and slow progress.

III. Designating a Government Entity to Champion this Work

For King County, WA the Metropolitan King County Council is selected as the champion for a deep democracy initiative. As the legislative body for this level of government (i.e., the county), the Council sets policies, enacts laws, and adopts budgets that guide services to more than 2.3 million residents – they hold the greatest capacity to create an initiative that can span across all 74 cities within King County (*Metropolitan King County Council - King County, Washington, n.d.*). It is recommended to collaborate with the Board of Health Committee, which sets county-wide public policy to develop the initiative as a public health intervention (*Council Meetings, Committees, and Agendas - King County, Washington, n.d.*). A second potential venue is the Transpiration, Economy, and Environment Committee, which focuses on topics like economic development and pay disparity (i.e., income inequity) (*Council Meetings, Committees, and Agendas - King County, Washington, n.d.*). It is suggested to launch the City of Seattle as a pilot since it is the largest city in the county and has early efforts for deep democracy (see *Table 4*), increasing its ability to overcome barriers of funding, political will, and organizational capacity.

Implementation Considerations

I. Building Evidence For Deep Democracy

There is a lack of empirical evidence to demonstrate the magnitude deep democracy can impact health and well-being, especially when administered at the municipal level. Evidence is limited in part because 1) deep democracy is not very prevalent in the United States, 2) there is not a unified definition of what constitutes deep democracy and therefore limited results with the search term of “deep democracy and health,” and 3) it is commonly viewed as a governance tool for improving civic health instead of community health. Five of the seven programs included in the policy landscape (see Table 4) started in the last four years (2021 and onward). There is the opportunity to begin taking outcome data specifically focused on community health and well-being.

People’s Economy Lab’s Community Assemblies project offers a particularly exciting opportunity because it aims to involve community members into the Seattle Comprehensive Plan (for long-term structural planning) and develop community-defined metrics of well-being for frontline communities in Washington (People’s Economy Lab, 2024). Local governments are encouraged to seek mixed method data, highlighting community member anecdotes to build narratives to support continued funding. Broadening the data types attempt to reconcile the difference between health (quantifiable) and well-being (encapsulates additional gains to physical health like happiness, security, joy, etc.). The lack of evidence should be seen as an opportunity to build out culturally-relevant metrics tailored to the targeted universalism framework that center community assessment of “success.”

II. Combining Deep Democracy With Other Targeted Policy Groups

Once deep democracy is adopted as an initiative, local governments should look for points of connectivity with existing programming or opportunities for capacity building for Community Wealth Building or Localized Regenerative Economy. Theoretically, the deployment of all three targeted policy areas together would provide the greatest mitigation against the primary barriers to the universal goal – co-deployment may only be discouraged in attempt to reduce confounding barriers in evidence building. However, local governments should aim to integrate all targeted policies into long-term strategic plans like Comprehensive Plans or Community and Economic Development Plans.

III. Reconciling With Setbacks And Building Resilience

History has demonstrated that progressive policy is vulnerable to retrenchment, especially ones focused on racial equity or justice (Flynn et al., 2017). The system is designed to protect itself and its purpose (Movement Generation, 2017). Deep democracy is a pathway towards innovate approaches to co-governance, which inherently seek to give communities of color greater power in governance – an area they have faced historical exclusion from. Local governments who champion this work should understand that the institution favors the status quo and setbacks are expected. Setbacks indicate transformative change is underway and should be seen as encouragement to keep pushing.

Forming coalitions across municipalities leading work in deep democracy will increase support and resilience, positioning local governments to sustain their efforts. These could be regional, national, or global. The Irish government leads a nationwide citizen's assembly project on core issues to their constitution, Australia has demonstrated early gains

in local government's use of deep democracy strategies, Brazil has the longest history of practicing participatory budgeting across their country at different levels, and New York City is the largest American city to adopt a city-wide hybrid between participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies (People's Voice on Climate et al., 2024; De La Hoz, 2023). Cultivating a community of support and celebrating the wins is key for achieving the long-term goal of justice (Brown, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This paper navigates a largely uncharted conversation in public health, although many other disciplines are exploring parts of this discussion on the relationship between governance, health, wealth, racism, policy, and the economy. The discipline has long struggled with how to improve the health of communities of color. Gains will not be found in solutions that uphold the current extractive economy. The poor health experienced by communities of color serves as a warning to all of us for the risk an economy centered around extracting wealth and exploiting labor to benefit the elite poses to our collective well-being. Public health must be bold in its envisioning and lead a united initiative to demonstrate the opportunity deep democracy presents in addressing community health at the highest system level – governance. Participatory budgeting and forms of deep democracy are gaining traction and it is important to not miss the window to measure their effects on community health. This is the moment to make the connections and expand the breadth of Public Health's impact to facilitate well-being. Public health must lean into the roles of deep democracy and co-governance in effectively addressing racism. Exclusion from governance is a public health crisis and the discipline needs to start treating it that way.

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APPENDIX I. Climate Justice Alliance’s Just Transition Principles (2017)

List of principles accessed here: https://climatejusticealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CJA_JustTransition_Principles_final_hi-rez.pdf

CJA Just Transition Principles

There are existing principles, including the Principles of Environmental Justice and Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, that have been important in guiding our work. The Just Transition principles below are an attempt to consolidate and synthesize various Just Transition principles from among CJA members and allies, built off the deep work and discussions amongst ourselves. Understanding that Just Transition will look different in different places, we believe a core set of shared principles can strengthen our collective work.

A Just Transition moves us toward Buen Vivir

Buen Vivir means that we can *live well* without *living better* at the expense of others. Workers, community residents, women and Indigenous Peoples around the world have a fundamental human right to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education and shelter. We must have just relationships with each other and with the natural world, of which we are a part. The rights of peoples, communities and nature must supersede the rights of the individual.

A Just Transition creates Meaningful Work

A Just Transition centers on the development of human potential, creating opportunities for people to learn, grow, and develop to their full capacities and interests. We are all born leaders, and a regenerative economy supports and nurtures that leadership. In the process, we are transforming ourselves, each other, our communities, and our society as a whole. Meaningful work is life-affirming.

A Just Transition upholds Self Determination

All peoples have the right to participate in decisions that impact their lives. This requires democratic governance in our communities, including our workplaces. Communities must have the power to shape their economies, as producers, as consumers, and in our relationships with each other. Not only do we have the right to self determination, but self determination is one of our greatest tools to realize the world we need. The people who are most affected by the extractive economy — the frontline workers and the fenceline communities — have the resilience and expertise to be in the leadership of crafting solutions.

A Just Transition equitably redistributes Resources and Power

We must work to build new systems that are good for all people, and not just a few. Just Transition must actively work against and transform current and historic social inequities based on race, class, gender, immigrant status and other forms of oppression. Just

Transition fights to reclaim capital and resources for the regeneration of geographies and sectors of the economy where these inequities are most pervasive.

A Just Transition requires Regenerative Ecological Economics

Just Transition must advance ecological resilience, reduce resource consumption, restore biodiversity and traditional ways of life, and undermine extractive economies, including capitalism, that erode the ecological basis of our collective well-being. This requires a re-localization and democratization of primary production and consumption by building up local food systems, local clean energy, and small-scale production that are sustainable economically and ecologically. This also means producing to *live well* without *living better* at the expense of others.

A Just Transition retains Culture and Tradition

Capitalism has forced many communities to sacrifice culture and tradition for economic survival. It has also defaced and destroyed land held as sacred. Just Transition must create inclusionary spaces for all traditions and cultures, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant economy. It should also make reparations for land that has been stolen and/or destroyed by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, genocide and slavery.

A Just Transition embodies Local, Regional, National and International Solidarity

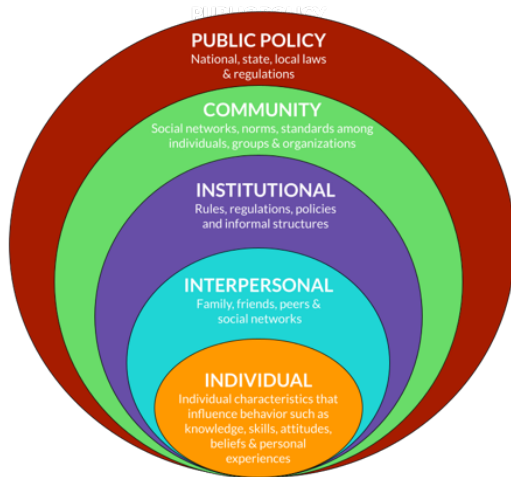
A Just Transition must be liberatory and transformative. The impact of the extractive economy knows no borders. We recognize the interconnectedness of our communities as well as our issues. Therefore, our solutions call for local, regional, national and global solidarity that confronts imperialism and militarism.

A Just Transition builds What We Need Now

We must build the world we need now. This may begin at a local small scale, and must expand to begin to displace extractive practices. We must build and flex the muscles needed to meet our communities' needs.

APPENDIX II. In Visuals, the SEM and SDOH

Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) from Lee et al. (2017), accessed here: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924x.2017.1356780>

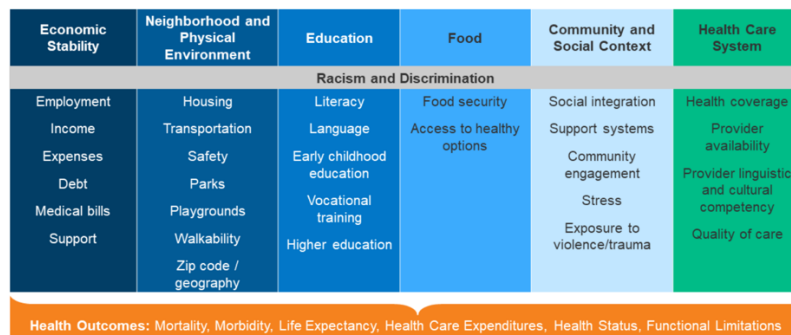


Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) from CHES Health Solutions (2022), accessed here: <https://www.chesshealthsolutions.com/2021/09/08/what-are-social-determinants-of-health-and-why-do-they-matter/>



Social and Economic Factors Drive Health Outcomes (extension of SDOH model from Artiga (2021)), accessed here: <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/health-disparities-symptom-broader-social-economic-inequities/>

Social and Economic Factors Drive Health Outcomes



APPENDIX III. Campbell et al. (2018) Supporting Figures

Table 3 Cross-tabulation of study design by outcome category

Outcomes	Case studies single	Case studies multiple	Quantitative Observational Study (Population level data)	RCT
Population Social Impacts (poverty, health, education, housing, sanitation)	Kendall 2015 [18] Walker 2013/2016 [44, 45]		^a Biderman 2007 [24] ^a Boulding 2010 [9] ^a Goncalves 2014 [25] ^a Touchton 2014 [26] ^a WorldBank 2008 [8]	
Economic and budgetary (funding of public services)	Stewart 2014 [20]	Cabannes 2005 [49] Cabannes 2015 [39] Del Prado 2015 [40] Dzinic 2016 [17]	Biderman 2007 [24] Boulding 2010 [9] Da Silva 2014 [33] Goncalves 2014 [25] Jaramillo 2013 [23] Jaramillo 2015 [27] Touchton 2014 [26] ^a WorldBank 2008 [8] Grillos 2017 [28]	Beuermann 2014 [21]
Political (participation, democratic processes, political systems)	Abers 1998 [34] Baiocchi 2001 [47] Baiocchi 2003 [35] Célérier 2015 [36] Hernandez 2010 [41] ^a Kendall 2015 [18] ^a Stewart 2014 [20] ^a Walker 2013/2016 [44, 45] Hajdarowicz 2018 [63]	Bassoli 2012 [48] ^a Cabannes 2015 [39] Luchmann 2012 [42] McNulty 2015 [43] Montambeault 2016 [50] Nylen 2003 [37] Renno 2010 [51] SQW Consulting 2011 [19] Talpin 2012 [38] Wu 2011 [46] Gregorčič 2016 [52]	Borba 2012 [32] Garcia 2011 [29] Schneider 2002 [22] Wampler 2007/2012 ^b [30, 31] ^a WorldBank 2008 [8]	

^a Study has outcomes in more than one outcome category

^b Wampler 2007/2012 analysis of survey data. Multiple dates indicates same data used in two articles

Table 1 How PB can affect the health, social, democratic and economic outcomes of individuals

The intervention, participatory budgeting, is expected to impact on the health, social and economic outcomes of individuals involved through the following stages, derived from UN-Habitat and World Bank reports (Cabannes 2004, Shah 2007) and (Boulding and Wampler 2010, page 126):

- **Participation:** communities can decide how designated public money is spent.
- **Collaboration:** being involved in the PB decision process enables citizens to exercise political rights, develop civic skills and build social cohesion.
- **Prioritisation:** improvements in priority public services may improve the wellbeing of individuals in that community, either directly through impacts on their health (e.g. reduction in disease, better access to medical services) or via social determinants of health (e.g. housing, education).
- **Allocation:** distribution of resources according to identified needs results in greater efficiency in the allocation of public funds, and greater accountability of budgetary procedures.

APPENDIX IV. Citizen Pathways to Influence Government

Created by author and aims to portray general mechanisms for citizen engagement in government – the mechanisms are not disaggregated by level of governance (local, state, and federal). Citizen usage may be accompanied with a citation if offering a statistic. Otherwise, usage commentary aims to generally describe citizen awareness and likelihood to use the mechanism based on the author’s education in governance and diverse work with communities. This table is meant to serve as a guide – it is not exhaustive and simply seeks to characterize the limited scope for citizen influence on governance. For undocumented residents, citizens who possess a felony charge, and youth, the scope of influence is even smaller.

<i>Citizen Pathways to Influence Government</i>		
Mechanism (in order of likelihood)	Citizen Usage	Impact on Decisions / Policy
<i>Direction: Citizens influencing Government</i>		
<i>Voting</i>	Low- Medium. Most Americans only vote in presidential elections and do not engage in other federal, state, or local elections. Engagement is lacking overall. The 2020 presidential election ranked the highest turnout in the 21 st century – still, only 67% of eligible voters participated (US Census Bureau, 2021). Voter suppression further decreases engagement (e.g., photo IDs, repealed voting rights for felony charges, polling hours, citizenship status, etc.)(Tensley, 2021). An estimated 4.4 million Americans are denied the right to vote because of felony charges (Uggen et al., 2024).	Medium. Voting serves as a conduit to policy decisions. Citizens elect representatives who are then entrusted to engage in policy decisions. There are very few opportunities for citizens to directly vote on policies. Note: although rare, these do exist and will be explored later in this paper.
<i>Calling elected representative</i>	Low. Uncommon pathway for citizens trying to influence government. Most who exercise this pathway are repeated users who have sense of authority or entitlement over the elected representative (less common with communities of color).	Low. A way to voice opinions, but dependent on elected representative to translate to action. Typically, will not incite action unless many similar requests are received. Can either increase distrust in government (if

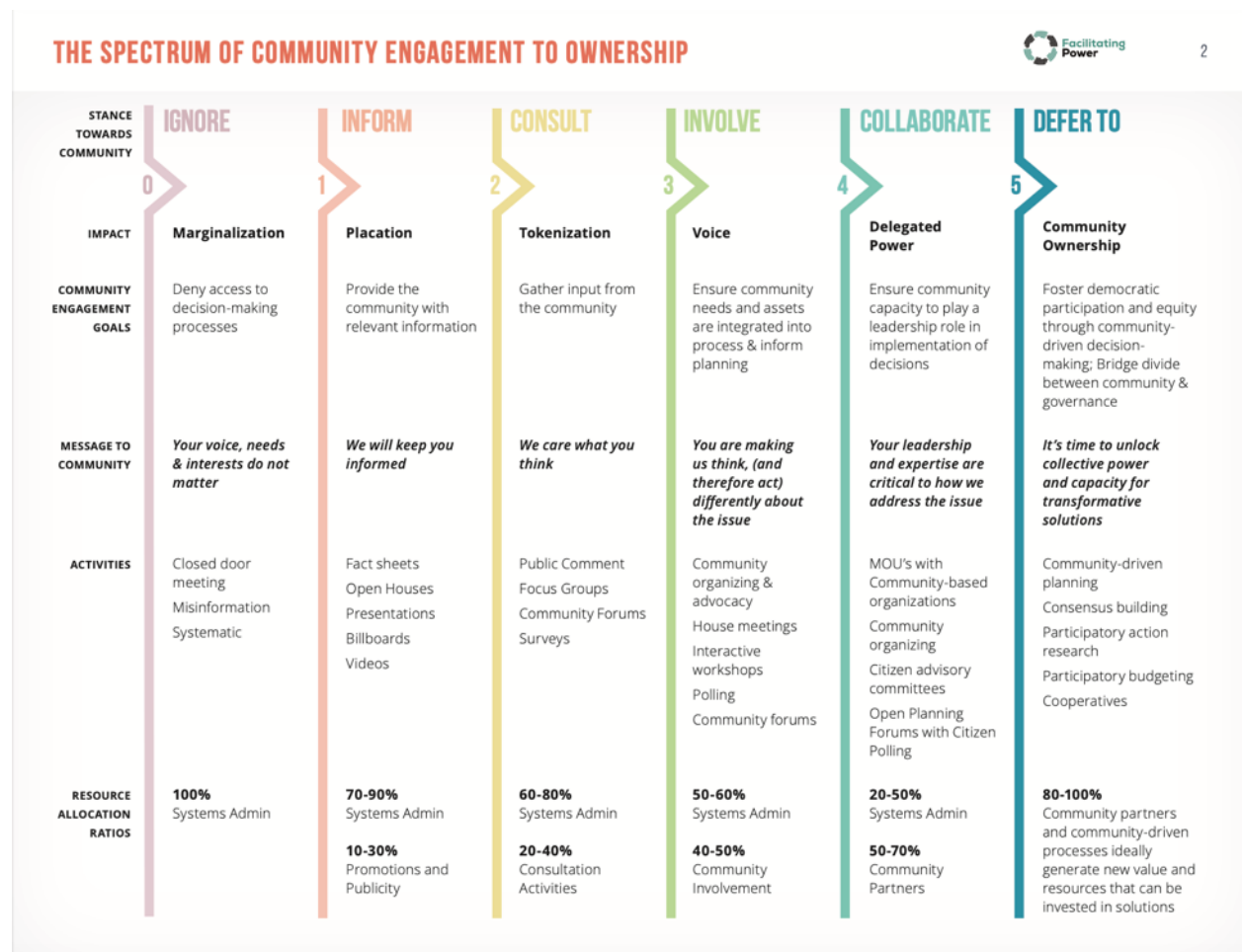
	<p>Growing more common with increasing citizen dissent and education. A Johns Hopkins survey of 1,500 Americans found that 80 percent could not name their state legislator – while there is not direct data on call incidence, it can be assumed it is also limited (Rosen, 2018).</p>	<p>continually ignored) or increase faith in pathways for influence (if requests are heard/implemented).</p>
<p>Advocating for Policy Change</p>	<p>Low. Although lobbying is a large avenue, this is most commonly conducted by professional lobbyists. Average citizens do not typically engage in direct advocacy for policy change but can contribute to general citizen opinions, public discourse, and building coalitions. They can also provide supporting testimonies (organized by special interest groups or lobbyists).</p>	<p>Low-Medium. A way to voice opinions, but dependent on elected representative to translate to action. Creating coalitions to demand change has been the historic path for communities of color to influence policy change.</p>
<p>Ballot Initiative</p>	<p>Low. Limited to certain municipalities. Currently, 24 states allow for ballot initiatives (Whitesell, 2024). However, each state has different permissions for which municipalities can exercise it. Ballot initiatives are less commonly known as a method to create policy and influence governance because of the barriers placed on them (e.g., signature collection, submission timeline, etc.)</p>	<p>Medium. If able to meet extensive requirements for passage, high potential to create policy change / law since it is a form of direct democracy. However, as ballot initiatives grow more popular, so is the incidence of legislators altering citizen initiatives (Whitesell, 2024).</p>
<p>Serving on Boards and Commissions</p>	<p>Low. Not generally promoted to communities of color and many organized around volunteer labor.</p>	<p>Low-High. Depends on the board or commission. Those with higher influence (e.g., City Planning Commission, Economic Development, etc.) are much more difficult to enter. Uncompensated</p>

		<i>labor requires level of financial privilege or community support that threatens sustainability of engagement.</i>
<i>Running for Office</i>	Very low. <i>Approximately 2% of Americans run for office and less than 1% of the American population serves as an elected official (Motel, 2014). Meritocracy upholds certain image of elected officials. However, local government is more likely to elect candidates from non-traditional backgrounds.</i>	High. <i>Significant influence on policy creation and implementation. However, stark change that threatens the economic model's purpose can threaten longevity in role and sustained influence.</i>
<i>Direction: Government seeking citizen input (i.e., Community Engagement)</i>		
<i>Public Comment</i>	Low. <i>Typically exercised by citizens with sense of entitlement over government (less common with communities of color) and who have familiarity with the format (intimidating, short speaking time, and formality).</i>	Low. <i>Provides pathway to share voice and opinions. However, most public comment periods are very short and citizens are regularly cut-off.</i>
<i>Town Halls</i>	Low. <i>Typically practiced in an infrequent cadence, during working hours. Attendance favors individuals who have the time and resources to go. However, COVID-19 pandemic has facilitated an increase in hybrid and virtual formats, which have increased engagement.</i>	Low. <i>Provides pathway to share voice and opinions. However, most are seeking feedback or advice and do not offer opportunity to have strong influence over the issue at hand.</i>
<i>Community Listening Sessions</i>	Low. <i>Attendance favors individuals who have the time and resources to go, which contradicts who government/agencies would benefit hearing from the most.</i>	Very low. <i>Provides pathway to share voice and opinions. However, most are seeking feedback on things that are already occurring and do not offer opportunity to have strong influence over the issue at hand.</i>

<p><i>Online Feedback Forum</i></p>	<p>Low. Typically exercised by citizens with sense of entitlement over government (less common with communities of color) or repeated dissenters from government.</p>	<p>Very low. Provides pathway to share voice and opinions. However, most are seeking feedback and do not offer opportunity to have strong influence over the issue at hand. Online format yields even lower perceived influence.</p>
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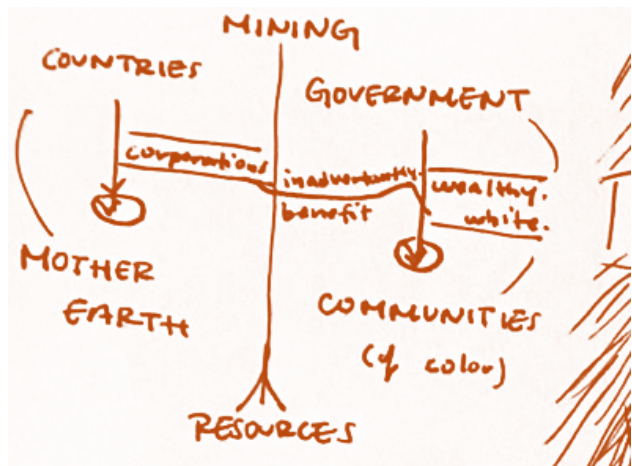
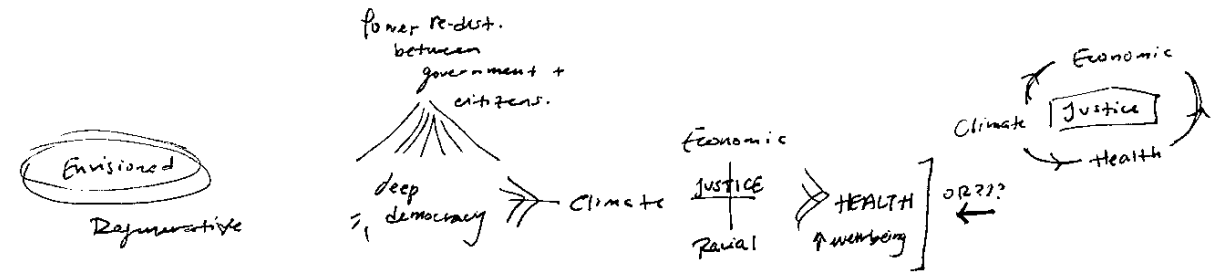
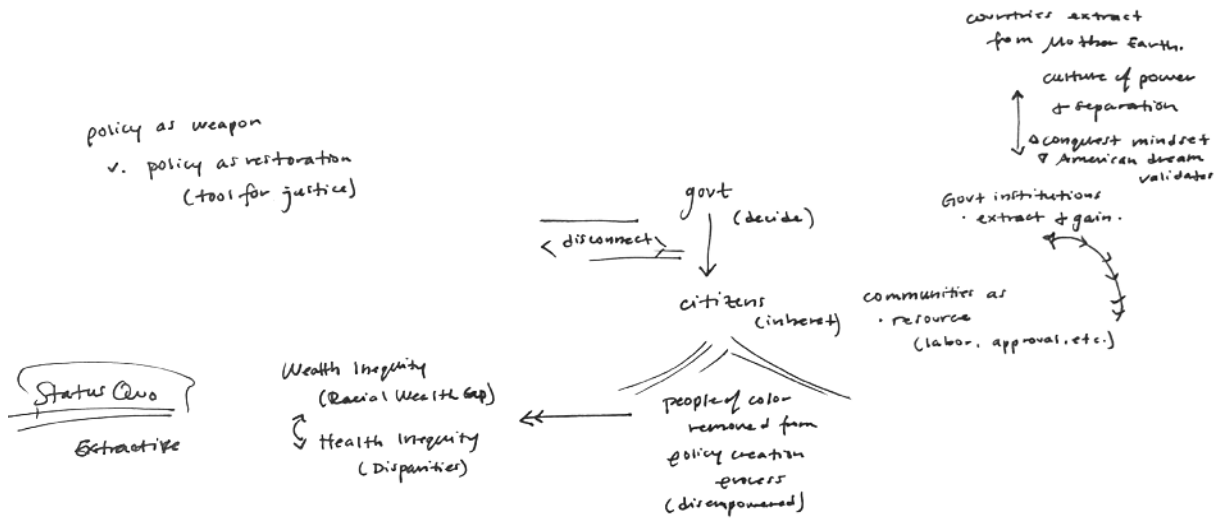
APPENDIX V. The Community Engagement Continuum

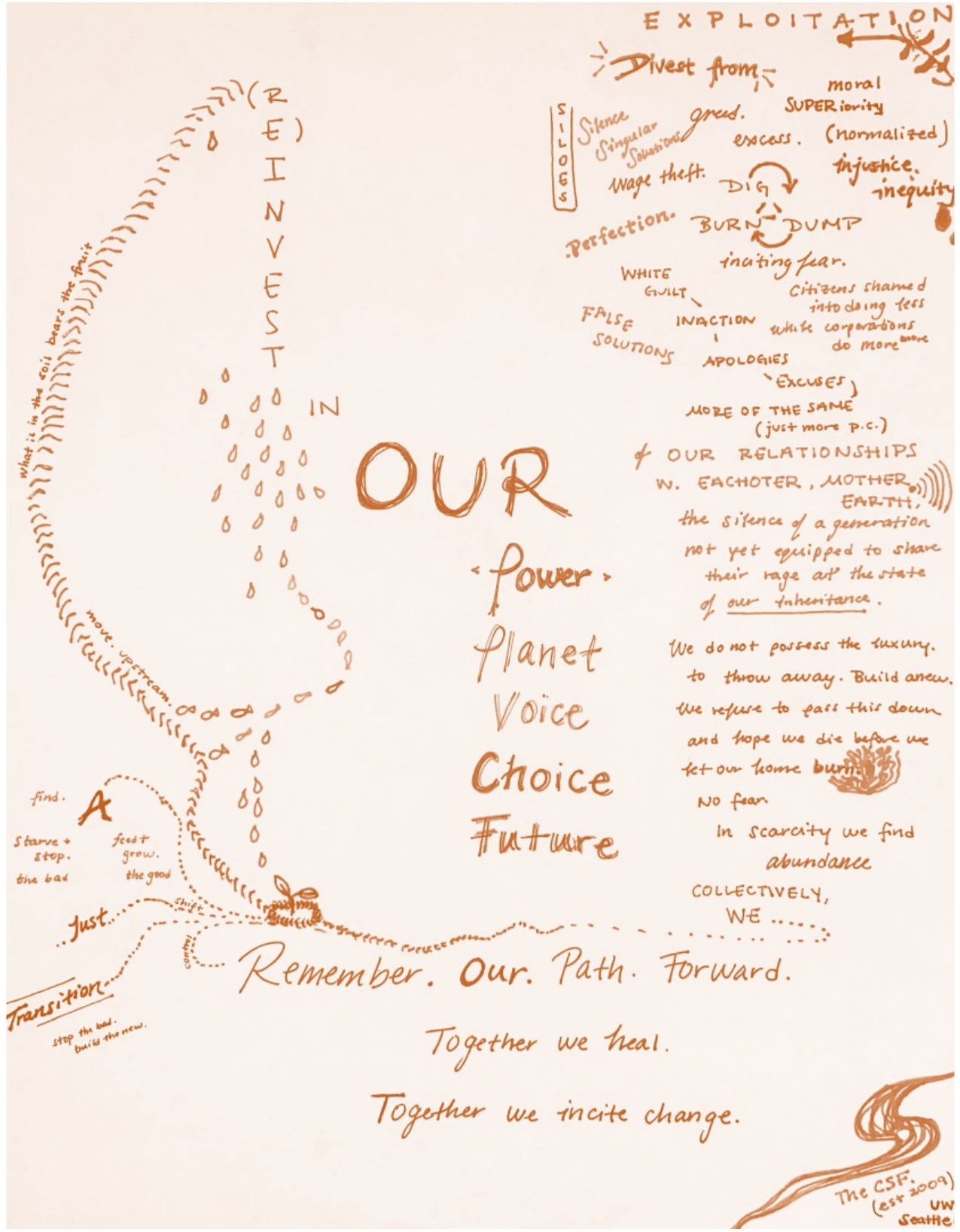
The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership from González et al. (2019), accessed here: <https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-to-Ownership.pdf>



Early Conceptual Sketches For Thesis

Sketches were created by author. Concepts from the Just Transition movement.





EXPLOITATION

Divest from

SILLOS

Silence
Singular
Submissions
Wage theft.

greed.
excess. (normalized)
injustice, inequity

Perfection. BURN DUMP

WHITE GUILT
FALSE SOLUTIONS
APOLOGIES
EXCUSES

MORE OF THE SAME
(just more P.C.)

OUR RELATIONSHIPS
W. EACH OTHER, MOTHER EARTH.
the silence of a generation
not yet equipped to share
their rage at the state
of our inheritance.

We do not possess the luxury
to throw away. Build anew.
We refuse to pass this down
and hope we die before we
let our home burn.

NO fear
In scarcity we find
abundance

COLLECTIVELY,
WE



OUR

- <power>
- Planet
- Voice
- Choice
- Future

Remember. Our. Path. Forward.

Together we heal.

Together we incite change.

The CSF.
(est 2009)
UW
Seattle