

# Groundwork USA Open Space Actions

## Theory of Change Guiding Document

### Introduction and Overview

Groundwork USA (GWUSA) worked in partnership with Harder+Company Community Research, Groundwork Trusts (Trusts) and GWUSA's Advisory Board to develop a Theory of Change (ToC) for GWUSA's Open Space Actions. This document provides an overview of the ToC and its components, and definitions of identified outcomes.

The ToC is designed to show GWUSA's approach and activities in working with underserved communities to activate and transform open spaces, and can be read from both top to bottom and left to right. Starting from the top to bottom, the reader can see the overarching **Vision** and all the constituent components that allow GWUSA to fulfill the Vision that 'all people live in healthy and equitable communities'. Under the Vision are GWUSA's three mutually reinforcing strategies that comprise their **Approach** to community-driven transformation: Changing Places, Changing Systems, and Changing Lives. These strategies inform the **Activities** Trusts undertake in partnership with communities across the country, which are intended to influence key identified **Outcomes**. Reading the bottom half of the ToC, the reader can see the conceptual linkages between the **Activities** and **Outcomes** which are informed by the **Approach** and which ultimately lead to the GWUSA **Vision**.

The GWUSA Open Space Actions ToC includes the following components:

- **Vision:** GWUSA's success in achieving their identified outcomes will lead toward our ultimate vision that all people live in healthy and equitable communities. 'Healthy communities' and 'equitable communities' are defined as follows:
  - **Healthy communities:** Places where all people have equitable access to adequate housing, transportation, quality health care, and safe places to exercise and play; and which promote economic security through access to employment and income opportunities.(1)
  - **Equity:** Just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential through identification and ownership of the root causes of societal disparities.
- **Approach:** The projects and programs of Trusts support community-driven transformation via three mutually reinforcing strategies: Changing Places, Changing Systems, and Changing Lives.
- **Activities:** These three strategies, Changing Places, Changing Systems, and Changing Lives, inform and guide the implementation of our activities. Trusts transform, activate and use high-potential land for community benefit across the US through activities such as:
  - Promoting active, healthy lifestyles
  - Developing environmental youth leaders
  - Training youth and adults for green jobs and careers
  - Delivering educational programs that promote wellbeing
  - Transforming and reclaiming vacant and contaminated land
  - Restoring and enhancing urban waterways
  - Activating and stewarding public spaces, building communities
  - Building partnerships, driving advocacy
  - Mobilizing community stakeholders and resources
  - Leading community assessment and visioning
- **Outcomes:** Working together on these activities, Trusts and communities aim to achieve the outcomes

defined in Exhibit 1.

## GWUSA Open Space Actions ToC Outcomes Definitions

Exhibit 1 below outlines the outcome definitions included in Groundwork's Open Space Actions Theory of Change. For specific indicators, please refer to the evaluation plan.

### Exhibit 1. Outcome Definitions

<b>Changing Lives</b>	<b>Strong social capital<sup>1,2</sup></b> Perceptions of the interpersonal trust, sharing, and reciprocity within and between social networks. Civic engagement is a shared value among stakeholders in the community.
	<b>More equitable access to job/career pipelines</b> All community members have access to jobs, job and skills training, career opportunities, networks, and supportive community resources designed to facilitate these opportunities.
	<b>A new generation of environmental and civic leaders</b> Youth are sensitized to environmental, economic and social issues, and are provided opportunities for learning, hands-on stewardship, advocacy, and the value of civic engagement.
	<b>Increase in practice of healthy habits among community members</b> Individuals and communities are equitably exposed to a built environment that offers safe ways to practice healthy living, whether consuming fresh food, choosing non-motorized transit options, or the like. The environments in which they reside support and facilitate these choices.
<b>Changing Places</b>	<b>More equitable access to quality green spaces<sup>3,4,5</sup></b> All community members have access, within 10-15 minutes (approximately ¼ mile), to and feel safe using natural and/or built environment covered by vegetation, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Green spaces that serve various social, recreational, nutritional, educational and transit functions (e.g., parks, playgrounds, soccer fields, community gardens, greenways, trails, urban farms)</li><li>• Corridors for active transportation, physical activity, ecological habitat restoration, storm water management, etc.</li><li>• Inclusive features such as benches, lighting, way-finding signage.</li><li>• Smaller green space features (e.g., street trees and roadside vegetation)</li><li>• Green spaces not available for public access or recreational use (e.g., green infrastructure for storm water management)</li></ul>
	<b>More equitable access to healthy foods and safe growing spaces<sup>6,7</sup></b> All community members have access to healthy food options and the opportunity to learn about and participate in food growing activities. There are low rates of food insecurity among community members, and there are programs and services targeted to mitigate food insecurity (e.g., food pantries).
	<b>Safer, more stable neighborhoods<sup>8,9,10</sup></b> Community members feel safe in their neighborhoods at different times of day, as well as when engaged in different activities. Community members can stay in their neighborhoods by choice in stable housing.
	<b>Greater climate resilience<sup>11</sup></b> Individuals and communities feel they collectively own and have the capacity to adapt to changing climate and environmental condition both through individual and community-level behavior change. The community actively plans and manages reduction of risk to human health, safety and wellbeing as climates change.
	<b>Cleaner air, land, and water</b> Community members live in neighborhoods with clean air, land, and water, safe from toxins and pollutants.

**Changing  
Systems**

**Strong community agency and ownership<sup>12,13</sup>**

There is a strong sense of connection and interconnectedness in community among individuals and in the community at large. Further, community members and stakeholders work together on a shared agenda to take action in pursuit of community priorities through “an intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.”

**Increased collective efficacy<sup>14</sup>**

Community members are able to come together for the good of the community to achieve common goals and preserve shared values.

**Supportive cross-sector alliances**

Cross-sector stakeholders work collaboratively and oriented toward community benefit. They actively share information and work to integrate planning and policy efforts that promote the social good.

**More equitable allocation of community resources**

Community resources are accessible and equitably allocated. The processes for allocating and accessing community resources are transparent and community organizations make conscientious efforts to ensure outreach to all community members where applicable.

**Shared leadership and decision-making**

Community stakeholders see themselves as equal partners in driving a community revitalization agenda. They perceive their voice as being heard, and stakeholders set an inclusive tone and cast a wide net to bring all stakeholders to the decision-making table.

## References

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