

Example Strategies Promoting Social Cohesion

Following are some example strategies for promoting social cohesion. While these have been collected from the literature and are showing some promising potential, their inclusion on these pages does not imply they are a good fit for your community. Please use the links provided to learn more about the strategies. The strategies are organized into three categories:

Environment Strategies



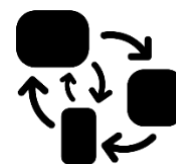
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Environment Strategies

Strategies to shift aspects of the physical, built, or social environment

Design community and built environments to promote social cohesion



Design neighborhood environments to promote social interaction

Communities can promote social cohesion by using city planning to design physical environments that encourage human interactions. For example, communities can promote mixed-use developments, pedestrian-friendly features, and community amenities such as parks and plazas. (British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) and design public places for people to safely congregate and exercise (Umberson and Montez, 2010).

http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/>

- **Example:** The 2010 Richmond Community Wellness Strategy suggests planning principles that draw connections between the physical environment (such as the size of blocks, presence of sidewalks, number of parks and trails, availability of bike lanes, and nearness of shops and recreational and cultural facilities) and the social impact of whether residents know their neighbors and feel part of the community. (directly cited from British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf
- **Example:** The District of Squamish's Downtown Neighborhood Plan includes the design requirement that "mid- and large-scale new buildings in downtown shall provide public plazas, to create opportunities for social interaction and to contribute to the livability and vibrancy of the downtown. (directly cited from British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

Secure space in new multi-unit housing developments to promote social interaction

Create spaces within multi-unit housing developments to promote social connectedness and cohesion. (British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

- **Example:** The City of Richmond's 2013–2022 Social Development Strategy identifies the action item of developing a guideline on the City's role and procedures for assisting community agencies to secure space, particularly in planned new developments. (directly cited from British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

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Integrate art, history, and culture into public gathering spaces

Enhance public gathering spaces by adding in locally driven art, history, or cultural elements. (British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

- **Example** Communities across B.C. have created Spirit Squares as gathering places for residents and spaces for community events. Fort St. James’s Spirit Square is home to a collection of public artwork depicting the rich historical and cultural fabric of the area. Benches, picnic tables and beautiful landscaping encourage people to spend time with other citizens in the square. (directly cited from British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

Create community gardens to promote social interaction

Develop community gardens to promote social connections between family, friends, and neighbors.

- **Example:** The New York Mills community garden was formed to benefit local gardeners (or would-be-gardeners) and help people meet their food needs. Plots are offered free on a first come basis to civic groups, church groups or service groups and offers neighbors the opportunity to come together. (Southern Rural Development Center, 2008) <http://srdc.msstate.edu/fop/levelthree/trainarc/socialcapital/strengtheningnetworks.pdf>

Design social settings to promote social cohesion

Develop local “Learning Circles” to help build social connections

Learning circles are made up of people who meet regularly in neighborhood groups to share information and wisdom to improve their lives. (Southern Rural Development Center, 2008)

<http://srdc.msstate.edu/fop/levelthree/trainarc/socialcapital/strengtheningnetworks.pdf>



Embed ongoing opportunities for relationship building between diverse community leaders.

Create opportunities to bring together resident leaders across diverse community groups to improve ties between people with different backgrounds.

- **Example:** A local design team was created in Marshall, Minnesota to bring together leaders of the many ethnic groups and civic organizations in the community to build a community leadership development program. As a result of the program, people representing diverse sectors of the community will have more opportunities to engage and work together on common concerns. (Southern Rural Development Center, 2008) <http://srdc.msstate.edu/fop/levelthree/trainarc/socialcapital/strengtheningnetworks.pdf>

Design online network technology to promote social cohesion

Design accessible, technology infrastructure to build social connections, community awareness, and action.

- **Example:** The Camfield Estates–MIT *Creating Community Connections Project* developed a technological infrastructure at a predominantly African American, low-to moderate-income housing development. The infrastructure offered every family a new computer, software, high-speed Internet connection, comprehensive courses, and a web-based community-building system co-designed with residents. As a result of the project, participants expanded their local ties, increased their awareness of community resources and local issues, and developed an improved communication and information flow at the development



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(Pinkett, 2002). <https://www.media.mit.edu/publications/creating-community-connections-sociocultural-constructionism-and-an-asset-based-approach-to-community-technology-and-community-building/>

- **Example.** SpartanConnect, a student-centered social media site, was developed for students to connect with one another before arriving on campus to promote feelings of connection between students and their on-campus residential “neighborhoods” at Michigan State University. Increased use of this site was related to greater perceptions of a diverse social support system which suggests that targeted social media sites can increase the support networks within a community (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield & Fiore, 2011). <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1096751611000443>

Policy Strategies

Strategies to shift policies, practices, or procedures

Use zoning codes and tax incentives to focus development on promoting social cohesion



Use zoning, density bonuses, and tax incentives to encourage residential developers to create spaces promoting social connectedness

For example, encourage common, shared-use spaces such as community centers, parks, libraries, child-care centers, and recreation centers. (British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015)

http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

- **Example:** In the Marpole neighborhood in Vancouver, city planners use density bonuses as a zoning tool, which allows developers to build more floor space than normally allowed in exchange for community amenities, such as community centers, libraries and parks. (directly cited from British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

Remove or redesign policies that increase relationships burdens for some groups



Remove or redesign policies that hinder social connectedness

For example, many programs for the sick and elderly increase caregiving responsibilities for family members—responsibilities that may impose stress on caregivers and on family relationships. This problem is exacerbated by hospital and insurance policies that force family members to provide medical care at home. These costs are borne more heavily by women, minorities, and those with fewer socioeconomic resources. Policy efforts should recognize that specific programs might benefit some groups but harm others. (Directly cited from Umberson and Montez, 2010)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/>

Example Strategies Promoting Social Cohesion

Create joint use policies to promote opportunities for social connection



Use joint-use policies to make school spaces accessible to promote social interaction

Create policies to allow residents to use school facilities and playgrounds for community-use. Simple strategies like unlocking the school playground basketball court so it can be used on weekends can increase access. (Glickman 2012). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24830053>.

- **Example:** Latino Health Access (LHA) developed a community access agreement at the neighborhood Roosevelt Elementary School, which was accessible and familiar to residents. Prior agreements were primarily with sports leagues and required a fee – most local residents could not afford these options. LHA and residents were able to establish a community access agreement at Roosevelt so everyone in the community gained free access to recreational space. (CDC, 2013) <https://www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/dch/pdf/HealthEquityGuide.pdf>

System Strategies

Strategies to shift aspects of the community system

System Strategies address these key community system characteristics:

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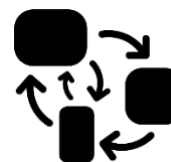
RESOURCES

Human, financial, and social resources

Build people's knowledge and skills to promote social cohesion

Add elements into school curriculum to promote social connection and cohesion

Schools can help to reduce the risk of social isolation by embedding elements into the curriculum to build social-emotional skills, interests in civic engagement, and meaningful employment (Umberson and Montez, 2010) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/>



Build residents' capacity to effectively respond to racism and promote social cohesion

Communities can promote social cohesion by through programs to support bystanders to safely and effectively respond to racism. Programs should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the community. For example, the "Say No to Racism" training package can help communities to address racism via bystander intervention. (Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government, 2015) <http://www.acelg.org.au/socialcohesion/>

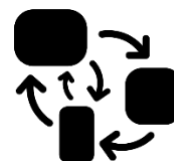
Example Strategies Promoting Social Cohesion

Re-allocate funding to promote social cohesion

Provide funding for neighborhood-led projects focused on strengthening social connections

Partner with local organizations (e.g., community foundations, non-profits, for-profit organizations, etc.) to provide funding for these projects.

- **Example** The Municipality of Saanich offers the Small Sparks and Neighborhood Matched Project Grants to support community-based associations and nonprofits to undertake projects or events that strengthen neighborhoods, promote participation in local activities and build collaborative relationships. (directly cited from British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015) http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf



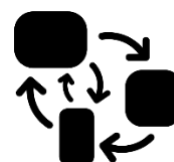
CONNECTIONS

Relationships and exchanges between people and organizations

Refer and connect socially isolated individuals to supports

Engage cross-sector providers and community stakeholders in identifying and referring isolated residents to social supports

Cross-sector service providers can help to identify and refer individuals most at risk for social isolation to resources and opportunities for social support. Research suggests the groups of people experiencing the following are more likely to be socially isolated; chronic low income, elderly, being a teen parent or low-income lone parent, high household mobility or homelessness, family dysfunction, domestic abuse, have a child with a disability. (Family & Community Support Services, 2014). Others are also more likely to be burdened by caring for others in their family or social networks (e.g., women, especially African American women). (Umberson and Montez, 2010) https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/fcss/fcss_brief4_positivesocialties.pdf?noredirect=1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/>



Use 211 to refer residents to opportunities, programs, and supports

This strategy can be used to increase awareness of these opportunities for both residents and professionals. Ensure 211 is current and stakeholders are aware of this resource

Include information into regular mailings reaching residents

Talk with local businesses or organizations to embed key information about available services or targeted changes into regular communications such as gas bills, school report cards, and newsletters.

Utilize technology to increase awareness of community resources, events, and information

Locate large screen displays in public places to advertise services, events and people's interests, and invite community members to communicate, participate and interact. This approach can help to foster social capital and community building function. (Huysman & Wulf, 2006). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220220740_IT_to_Support_Knowledge_Sharing_in_Communities_towards_a_Social_Capital_Analysis

Partner with groups, organizations, or collaboratives with similar goals to increase visibility

Combine outreach efforts with groups pursuing similar goals to reach more settings and families.

Example Strategies Promoting Social Cohesion

Connect immigrants with sources for social support

Informal networks of social support are especially important for the adjustment and mental health of immigrants and refugees. Professionals can help refer immigrants with key members of the community (e.g., members of immigrants' associations and grass-roots organizations, religious leaders, business owners, and established immigrants) who can provide multiple types of support. Volunteers may assist newcomers with everyday activities such as shopping, using public transportation, banking, accessing other public services, and so on. Volunteers may also introduce newcomers with their network of friends and family through social activities, which fosters positive social ties. (Directly cited from Family & Community Support Services, 2014)

https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/fcss/fcss_brief4_positivesocialties.pdf?noredirect=1

Help socially isolated families get involved at their children's school

Research suggests interaction in their children's school can improve some families' social connections. Family liaison services can help parents get more engaged at the school. Family involvement in schools can also improve access to needed support and services received by families if these services are provided on-site at the schools. (Family & Community Support Services, 2014)

https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/fcss/fcss_brief4_positivesocialties.pdf?noredirect=1

Understand resident input about outreach language and how to best reach them with information

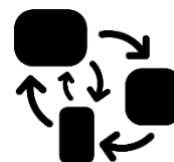
Gather input through direct service interactions, advisory boards, etc. Resident input can ensure outreach information is easy to understand (no jargon) and reaches residents through preferred channels (e.g., social media, direct touches, mail, texts/phone, etc.).

Coordinate and align efforts to promote social cohesion and connections

Leverage private sector support and public-private partnerships

These partnerships can expand the array of available services, programs, and supports.

- **Example:** The Illinois Facilities Fund is a community lender that provides low-interest loans and technical assistance to non-profits for facility renovation and construction. Public- and private-sector resources and expertise combine to support capital improvements. <http://www.iff.org/>



Braid funding across efforts

This strategy can create larger collective pots of funding to support expansion of needed services. Consider how to bundle these services together to maximize funding (see Components section for examples of bundling services)

- **Example:** In MI, the Great Start Readiness Program, Early Childhood Special Education, and Head Start have braided funds to cover the cost of preschool classrooms. These funds can be coordinated and allocated so that they are not overlapping and are able to fill any gaps. http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Braided_Funding_in_Early_Childhood_Education_402501_7.pdf

Create a shared consent form

This strategy gives families the opportunity to give consent to information sharing across organizations given current policies such as HIPAA and FERPA.

Develop integrated electronic information systems/software

These systems make client information accessible to multiple organizations based on residents' consent

Example Strategies Promoting Social Cohesion

- **Example:** Healthy Beginnings out of Palm Beach, Florida, includes an integrated data system that tracks individual children as they move between providers in the service delivery network.
<http://www.bridgespan.org/getattachment/feb8d3d3-042c-4a7b-a828-3b5bda8283a9/Achieving-Kindergarten-Readiness-for-All-Our-Child.aspx>

MINDSETS

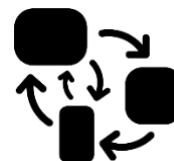
Shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and priorities

Shift mindsets around social cohesion

Social marketing campaigns to shift community attitudes around social cohesion

Studies suggest social marketing/media campaigns that are carefully crafted, prototyped with end users, fully funded, highly targeted for specific audiences and goals, and sustained over a long period of time can have positive impacts on behaviors. (Glickman et al., 2012).

<http://store.aapd.org/index.php/professional-resources/reference-manual.html> ;
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24830053>



Support grass-roots, resident-driven advocacy campaigns

Support local residents in advocating for changes promoting social cohesion in their community. For example, support residents to approach local, state, or federal officials with information about needed shifts in community planning, budgeting, and infrastructure.

- **Example:** Michigan's Children Sandbox Party is the state's leading non-partisan grassroots advocacy network for children, youth and families. Their aim is to advance state policies, practices and investments that support health, development and learning from cradle to career.
<http://www.michigansandboxparty.org/>

COMPONENTS

Range, quality, effectiveness, and accessibility of services, supports, and opportunities

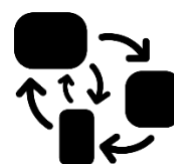
Expand the array of programs, supports, and opportunities promoting social cohesion and connection

Organize accessible social support groups

Support groups bring together people with similar experiences and needs to provide a source of community, information, and acceptance (Reblin & Uchino, 2008)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2729718/>

- **Example:** A six-session weekly support group for street-involved/homeless youth in Toronto gave the youth a conceptual foundation in social support, positive self-concept and resilience, emotional understanding, and self-determination. The youth played a key role in determining the direction of conversation in the sessions (McCay et al., 2011).
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2011.00301.x/full>
- **Example:** The Girls' Circle program provides a supportive environment for preteen and adolescent girls and focuses on improving connections, building empathic relationships, and developing skill resiliency. After completing the ten-week program, there was a significant increase in the girls' self-reported level of social support (Dollette et al., n.d.).
<https://onecirclefoundation.org/docs/fullreport.pdf>



Example Strategies Promoting Social Cohesion

- **NOTE:** research suggests social support groups are more effective for people who currently perceive they have low social support. (Helgeson, Cohen, Schulz, & Yasko. Group Support Interventions for Women with Breast Cancer: Who Benefits from What? Health Psychology. 2000; 19:107–14.)

Support youth mentoring programs to create sustained relationships with caring adults

Mentoring programs (e.g., big brothers/big sisters) can provide opportunities to further develop their social support networks. Studies show these mentoring relationships can improve youth perceptions of support from peers and from significant adults in their social networks. (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014)
http://www.mentoring.org/images/uploads/Report_TheMentoringEffect.pdf

Organize community sports and recreation opportunities.

Organized sports can help to build community identity and a sense of community, particularly in rural areas (Spaaij, 2009).

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17430430903137787?src=recsys&journalCode=fcss20>

- **Example:** The Positive Futures through Sport Foundation uses a sports-based social inclusion approach. It is a relationship strategy centered on building mutual respect and trust (which are social capital markers) through the engagement of sports. Positive Futures uses sports as a hook to engage and encourage young people to look at the broader issues that affect them. It is a method for building community participation and citizenship (directly cited from Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008). https://mafiadoc.com/development-through-sport-development-through-sport_59c2e8fa1723dd3c81fd7993.html

Support community-based clubs to provide opportunities for social connection.

- **Example:** Antrim County supports several 4-H clubs that provide volunteers and youth with opportunities for learning and relationship building. Clubs can be short term (e.g., single project), after school, in-school, community-based, or SPIN clubs (Special Interest, short term). In 2015, Antrim County had seven clubs with 90 members and 24 volunteers. (Michigan State University Extension , 2016)
http://www.antrimcounty.org/downloads/4antrim_county_msue_201516_annual_report.pdf

Provide accessible education and counseling supports to improve marital relationships

Ensure these supports are available and accessible, and targeted for groups most in need.

- **Example:** The Health and Human Service’s Healthy Marriage Initiative is designed to promote positive marital interactions that may foster mental and physical health of couples and their children. This initiative uses a multifaceted approach, including public awareness campaigns, education, and counseling services delivered through local organizations such as schools and faith-based organizations. (Directly cited from Umberson and Montez, 2010)
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/>

Initiate efforts to prevent and alleviate harm caused by child abuse and domestic violence

Studies suggest negative child-parent and spouse relationships cause toxic levels of stress that negatively impact a range of outcomes, including health. Prevention efforts should address the root causes of these relationship dynamics, and supports should be provided to reduce the harm caused by these relationship dynamics. (Umberson and Montez, 2010)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/>

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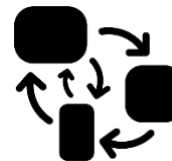
Create opportunities for the inclusion of newcomers into the community

Create opportunities to promote social cohesion in communities with large populations of immigrants and refugees. For example, some communities host tours for newcomers in the community and conversation circles between youth. (British Columbia Healthy Communities Society, 2015)

http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/hfbc-social-connectedness-actionguide-v03_07.30.15_weblinks.pdf

Offer programming and supports at accessible times and locations

Co-locate multiple opportunities, cross-sector providers, or programs to improve access.



For example, locate: programing in neighborhood settings (e.g., churches, schools); a DHS worker within the schools; mental health providers in physician offices. Engage residents in identifying the best locations for these programs and providers.

- **Example:** The Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Brooklyn (New York), is the community nucleus for immigrant families who need help overcoming cultural, economic, and language barriers to help their children succeed in school. The hub provides intensive individual, family, and group counseling, neighborhood-based foster care, and emergency services such as crisis intervention, food, and clothing. Networking extends to the police, churches, and elected officials. www.cflsp.org

Have settings and providers deliver bundled services or opportunities

This helps to reduce the number of visits residents need to make and simultaneously meet multiple needs.

- **Example** For example, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department awarded mini-grants to community-based organizations to provide bundled tobacco cessation services to populations at high risk for tobacco use. These grants allowed cessation counseling, referrals, and nicotine replacement therapy to be offered on site in places like health care clinics, mental health facilities, and college campuses. <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/sccphd/en-us/healthproviders/tobaccoprevention/Pages/default.aspx>

Hire shared staff to provide opportunities or services at multiple settings.

Combine resources to hire a staff that can rotate across settings.

Create satellite offices

Integrate satellite offices in neighborhoods where targeted residents live to improve access to needed opportunities or services

- **Example:** Children’s Hospital of Milwaukee opened clinics in neighborhoods where there were too few care providers to meet the primary care and dental needs of residents. Two of their clinics are located at sites already serving low-income families, including the YMCA. These sites provide health services to children AND caregivers. <https://www.chw.org/about/news-room/press-releases/2015/12/care-closer-to-home>

Extend hours beyond traditional 9-5 schedules

Extended hours can make it easier for working residents to participate.

- **Example:** The [Chambliss Center for Children](https://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/featured-work/chambliss-center-for-childrens-early-learning-program-provides-affordable-child-care-for-families) in Chattanooga, Tennessee makes it easy for parents who work 2nd and 3rd shifts or are in school to access high quality care for their children by offering affordable, high-quality learning environments, nutritious meals, school transportation and care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, for children ranging from 6 weeks to 12 years. <https://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/featured-work/chambliss-center-for-childrens-early-learning-program-provides-affordable-child-care-for-families>

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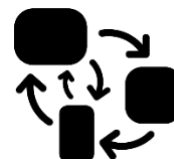
Offer opportunities, supports, or services during existing gathering times.

Offer time-limited opportunities, resources, supports, and services (e.g., flu shots) during parent-teacher conferences, family nights, and other events where families naturally gather.

Improve affordability of services and supports to increase access

Offer sliding fee scales or scholarships

These practices can make it more affordable for residents to engage in needed supports and services



Coordinate third-party payments on behalf of families whenever possible

For example, utilize childcare subsidies or Medicaid to help fund needed services or programs.

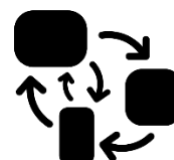
POWER

How decisions are made, who participates, whose voice matters

Engage diverse stakeholders in decision-making

Create resident action teams

These settings empower residents to design and implement action to promote targeted changes



- **Example:** In Michigan, local parent coalitions serve as key partners in the Great Start Network. Parents meet to determine collective priorities, set goals for each year, and work with local services providers to design and implement collective efforts. Parent coalition members are key advocates on the issues of early childhood in their community
<http://www.greatstartforkids.org/content/great-start-parent-coalition-overview>

Help organizations and efforts create opportunities to engage residents (youth-adult) in decision-making

Provide opportunities for residents to influence decisions on local changes (Miller, 2011).

<http://www.phi.org/uploads/application/files/jpmrtjk4r5poqaz0sm2n11tlyiybkusw0mfjfsv0qxli98yin.pdf>

- **Example:** The City of East Jordan engaged residents in Community Action Teams (CATs) to discuss system barriers and develop recommendations related to: (1) Access and Transportation, (2) Energy and Economy, (3) Environment and Natural, (4) Human and Social, and (5) Neighborhoods and Infrastructure. (Charlevoix County Planning Commission, 2015).
<https://charlevoixcountymi.documents-on-demand.com/Document/cec61c3b-5df7-e511-9e45-001fbc00ed84/Planning%20Commission%20Packet%20October%2001,%202015.pdf>
- **Example.** The PATCH Advocacy Fellowship trains youth as advocate leaders and works to integrate their voices into state-level decision-making on issues of adolescent health. Teens are trained to deliver workshops on how to improve adolescent health care experiences and become important, informal resources with their peers (PATCH, n.d.).
<http://www.wipatch.org/patch-advocacy-fellowship.html>

Help organizations create internal opportunities for staff provide input and engage in decision-making.

For example, setting aside time during staff meetings or during annual review processes for staff to identify emerging issues related to targeted changes and design strategies.