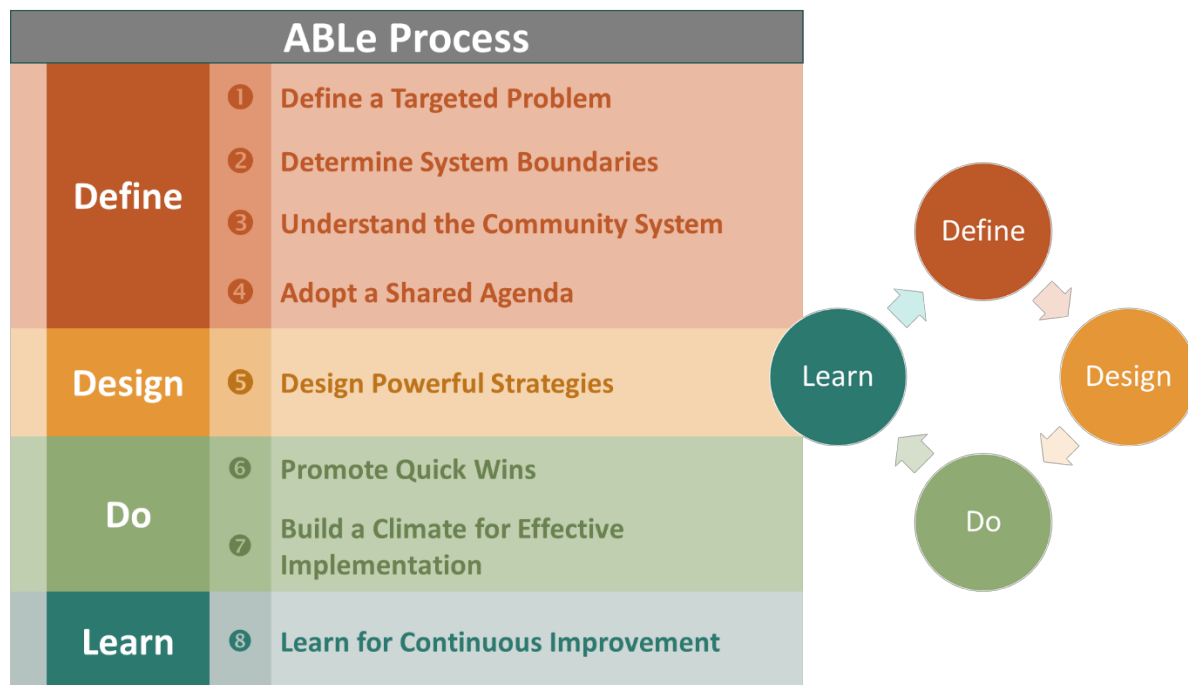The following document summarizes the ABLe Change process, a series of 8 steps for bringing about more effective community systems promoting health.

ABLe Process

Define
- ❶ Define a Targeted Problem
- ❷ Determine System Boundaries
- ❸ Understand the Community System
- ❹ Adopt a Shared Agenda

Design
- ❺ Design Powerful Strategies

Do
- ❻ Promote Quick Wins
- ❼ Build a Climate for Effective Implementation

Learn
- ❽ Learn for Continuous Improvement

Define → Design → Do → Learn →

Each of these 8 steps are described in detail below, including relevant activities and hyperlinked tools. Use this guide to help your community pursue transformative change. See the ABLe website (ablechange.msu.edu) for additional tools.

This symbol indicates a printed version of tool is included in the ABLe Change Manual Binder.

Step 1: Define the Problem

One of the most important steps in a community change effort is engaging diverse stakeholders in defining the problem to target for change. While many communities prefer to focus on goals and assets, systems change efforts often prioritize SOLVING PROBLEMS because the problem lens provides insights into community habits and fits well with many systems change processes.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Identify Local Problem: Engage stakeholders in identifying a local problem(s) to target for change (e.g., wellbeing, health). **ABLe Manual pages 29-34**	• Example Visioning Process to Develop a Shared Definition of the Targeted Problem. This example facilitation process describes how to engage stakeholders in defining a targeted problem/impact.
Use data to understand inequities: Gather and organize disaggregated data (e.g., by age, race/ethnicity, gender, geography, and other relevant characteristics) on the problem to help stakeholders understand and prioritize inequities within this data to target for change, including local resident groups experiencing the worst outcomes related to the problem. **ABLe Manual pages 36-46**	• Inequity Synthesis Template. This template provides an example of how to summarize the key inequities in the data. • Equity Impact Assessment: Define. This tool provides questions to help you understand and prioritize local inequities in your community.
Create Problem Framework: Summarize prioritized equity problem(s) into a Shared Vision or Problem Framework, and identify ways to embed across the community or region. **ABLe Manual page 47**	• Shared Vision or Problem Framework. The following is an example a Shared Vision template.

Step 2: Determine System Boundaries

Some systems thinkers say that collectively defining boundaries around a targeted problem can be one of the most transformative processes within a change effort. This is because these boundaries determine who and what is targeted for change, and which voices have a role in the effort's ongoing learning and action. A close look at potential inequities is an essential part of defining a targeted problem.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Identify relevant perspectives across vertical (e.g., leaders, staff, residents) and horizontal (e.g., cross-sector, cross-department) levels who should be engaged to address targeted problems and prioritized inequities from step 1. **ABLe Manual pages 51-65**	• Identifying Relevant Perspectives. Use this tool to identify which perspectives still need to be engaged to understand and address your targeted problem.
Align infrastructure with expanded system boundaries. Determine how to expand or create an infrastructure to engage prioritized perspective groups. • Design infrastructure to provide safe spaces for stakeholders to authentically engage in discussion and learning (e.g., affinity groups). • **ABLe Manual pages 71-79.**	• Weaving Cheat Sheet. This tool can assist facilitators in integrating information and learning across groups within your infrastructure to promote a more cohesive change effort.

Step 3: Understand the System

Once a community has defined a targeted problem and determined the boundaries around who should be engaged to address that problem, they are ready to understand why the problem is happening. Specifically, this involves uncovering the community conditions and social determinants contributing to the problem within the local community.

The System Scan process is organized around 6 system characteristics that help groups use a "systems lens" to explore root cause contributing to targeted problems. These system characteristics include: Mindsets, Components, Connections, Regulations, Resources, and Power.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Design your System Scan. Design an approach to "scan" community system conditions influencing the targeted problem, including: • Review existing information on why your prioritized problems are happening in your community or region (e.g., from past surveys, focus groups, evaluation reports, or databases). • Given this data, identify what *additional* information is still needed to understand why your targeted problems are happening, including root causes driving local social determinants of health and community system issues. • Identify the diverse perspectives and sources best positioned to provide this information, and design feasible methods and approaches to engage them.	• Systems Characteristic Clover Leaf. This tool summarizes the ABLe Change System Characteristics used within the system scanning process. • Equity Impact Assessment: Define. This tool provides a menu of example questions you could use to explore community system issues contributing to targeted inequities. • Assessing Program/Effort Reach Worksheet. This tool provides a series of questions to help assess the reach of local programs and efforts addressing your targeted problems. • System Scan Design Guide Use this tool to organize your system scan plans, including what questions to ask, who (or what settings) to engage to answer these questions, and approaches for gathering this information. • System Scan Design Guide - Equity Focus. Use this tool to organize your system scan plans, including what questions to ask, who (or what settings) to engage to answer these questions, and approaches for gathering this information. • System Scan Methods Decision Matrix. Use this tool to determine which system scanning methods are right for your group given available resources.

	• **Guide to Gathering Input from Families.** This tool provides example approaches for gathering information from constituents and local families.
Engage stakeholders in scanning. Once you have finalized your system scanning plans and piloted your questions and methods with relevant stakeholders, begin collecting your data. Remember to adjust your system scan questions over time in response to what you are learning. **ABLe Manual pages 111-160.**	• **System Scan Note-Taking Tips for Scribes**. Note takers can use this tip sheet to help capture detailed notes during system scan conversations. • **System Scan Data Organizing Tool** How to organize and prepare data on root causes for the sense-making process.
Engage stakeholders in making sense of system scan information. Prepare system scan information for sense-making, and then engage stakeholders in sorting system scan information and developing themes. **ABLe Manual pages 161-168.**	• **Summary of System Scan Priorities** A template to help summarize the prioritized root causes emerging out of the System Scanning process. • **System Scan Data Organizing Tool** How to organize and prepare data on root causes for the sense-making process.
Create a Design Challenge. Determine a design challenge focus from Shared Vision, and prioritize powerful and feasible root causes from system scan to target with efforts. Identify who in the community or region can address non-prioritized root causes and create a feedback loop to share information. **ABLe Manual pages 169-181.**	• **Strategy Design Template.** Use this template to capture your design challenge and prioritized root causes to use in the strategy design process.

Step 4: Adopt a Shared Agenda

A Shared Agenda is a tool to unite diverse stakeholders around a shared set of targeted systems changes. The Shared Agenda helps stakeholders within a local infrastructure – from youth and families all the way to top leaders – align their efforts to promote the same systems changes while pursuing unique action and learning from their particular system perspective.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Develop a Shared Agenda. Create a Shared Agenda incorporating your group's prioritized targets for change emerging from step 3. Use the shared agenda to align collective efforts around prioritized systems change targets. **ABLe Manual pages 183-188.**	• **Shared Agenda Template**. Use this template to create a shared agenda for your efforts.

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Step 5: Design Powerful Strategies

Once you have identified and prioritized root causes contributing to your targeted problems (including Social Determinants of Health and Community System issues), you are ready to design Powerful Systems Change Strategies. Powerful strategies transform the local community system by tackling root causes AND creating new desired habits.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Design Powerful Systems Change Strategies. Use the following approaches to design powerful systems change strategies: address root causes, saturate the community, disrupt the status quo, and design for equity. **ABLe Manual pages 189-248**.	• Strategy Design Check List. Use this checklist to identify how to improve the power of your strategies by using the ABLe strategy approaches. • Strategy Design Template. Use this template to capture your strategy design ideas to address prioritized root causes. • Equity Impact Assessment: Design. This tool provides a process to assess and strengthen the extent to which current or proposed strategies will promote equity.
Prepare For Action. Consider how to align the system in support of your strategies, and how to design strategies for effective implementation (e.g., diffusion, use, and dose). Engage stakeholders who are essential for implementation, and identify where to prototype and pilot strategy ideas. **ABLe Manual pages 249-300.**	• Prototype Planning. Use this worksheet to plan out how to prototype your strategy ideas.

Step 6: Promote Quick Wins

Effective change efforts foster small, immediate changes across the system. The foundation of this work is referred to as "small wins." A small win is a change in the system that is accomplished within three months or less. Small wins meet little resistance in the system, and any barriers are easy to overcome. Small wins ultimately lead to larger wins and to the desired systems changes.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Initiate Action. Engage stakeholders across community in launching actions that can be accomplished within 3 months or less to move strategies and efforts forward (e.g., develop and embed new policies, processes, or protocols, create social marketing materials, etc.). Provide behind the scenes coaching support to ensure actions are implemented effectively. **ABLe Manual pages 301-319**.	• Quick Wins Guide. Use this resource to help groups initiate quick wins with the aim of promoting large scale community change. • Systems Change Action Record. Use this tool to keep track of initiated and accomplished quick win actions, as well as resulting outcomes. • Quick Win Run Chart Database. Use this database to generate run chart visuals of initiated and accomplished quick win actions. (request via email: michirlearning@gmail.com)

Step 7: Build a Climate for Effective Implementation

Great strategic designs for promoting community change are not enough; systems change efforts must also attend to how effectively their proposed strategies are carried out by assessing and building a climate for effective implementation.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Gather Rapid Feedback on Implementation Efforts. Set up processes to gather rapid feedback from relevant perspectives on the diffusion, use, and dose of initiated strategies, and address emerging implementation concerns. **ABLe Manual pages 321-343.**	• Planning to Gather Feedback on Implementation. Use this tool to plan out how to gather feedback on the implementation of your efforts.

Step 8: Learn for Continuous Improvement

Successful change efforts not only initiate action, but they also learn about whether their strategies are making a difference in targeted problems. This iterative, ongoing learning process promotes continuous improvement and adaptation.

Activities within this Step	ABLe Tools
Assess Impact and Determine next steps. Gather rapid feedback to assess if your efforts are making a difference in your prioritized root causes and Targeted Problems, and use findings to determine whether to: • Revisit your problem definition • Design a different solution or adjust your approach • Pay more attention to implementation concerns • Expand your effort and take it to scale because it was successful • Collect more data to better understand your impact • Share your success with others in the community **ABLe Manual pages 345-382**.	• Action Learning Cycle Cheat Sheet. This tool summarizes a series of simple facilitation questions you can use to promote action learning for continuous improvement.