



# Evaluating “Midstream” and “Upstream” Impact

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Module 4c

A Short Course in Systems Approaches to Healthy Eating & Active Living  
Using the I+PSE Conceptual Framework for Action

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# Objectives



At the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Define midstream and upstream interventions
- Identify tools to assess partnerships
- Differentiate between organization, policy, and population impacts
- Describe the purpose of policy analysis versus policy impact evaluation



# Recommended Readings & Resources

- Building Community Resilience Initiative. Upstream Policy, Downstream Impact. YouTube Video (5 min) Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eH2llvYxMw>
- Brownson RC, Seiler R, Eyster AA. Measuring the impact of public health policy. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 2010 Jul;7(4):A77. Epub 2010 Jun 15. PMID: 20550835; PMCID: PMC2901575. Available <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2901575/>
- Freudenberg N, Franzosa E, Chisholm J, Libman K. New approaches for moving upstream: How state and local health departments can transform practice to reduce health inequalities. *Health Education & Behavior.* 2015; 42(1):46S-56S.





# What are Midstream and Upstream Interventions?

## Midstream Interventions

- Focus on psychosocial levels and behaviors; include social marketing and the provision of health education to individuals, communities and populations *more broadly*.
- Community interventions, which encompass awareness raising and social change, may be considered midstream *and* upstream activities

## Upstream Interventions

- Focus on improving fundamental social and economic structures (i.e., systems) to decrease barriers and improve supports that allow people to achieve their full health potential
- Take a population focus and support efforts to promote social change; encompass workforce development, institutional practices, organizational change, policy, and legislation, to influence social norms that create and reinforce social and health inequities.



# Reality Check:

*Public Health is Challenged in Implementing Upstream Change Drivers*

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Public health is challenged in implementing “upstream” drivers that address health promotion and health inequities, a result of:

- Allegiance to the status quo (i.e., downstream interventions)
- Public health practice is often grounded in dominant biomedical and behavioral paradigms
- Health departments face legal and political limits on their scope of activities
- Limited evidence to evaluate the impact of upstream interventions



# Divergent Perspectives on Impacts on Health Equity

“**Upstream interventions** take a population focus and support efforts to promote social change; encompass workforce development, institutional practices, organizational change, policy, and legislation, to influence social norms that **create and reinforce social and health inequities.**”

Brown T, Smith S, Bhopal R, Kasim A, Summerbell C. Diet and physical activity interventions to prevent or treat obesity in South Asian children and adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2015;12(1):566-594. Published 2015 Jan 9. doi:10.3390/ijerph120100566, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4306880/pdf/ijerph-12-00566.pdf>

“Our findings are consistent with the idea that **‘downstream’ preventive interventions are more likely to increase health inequalities** than ‘upstream’ interventions.”

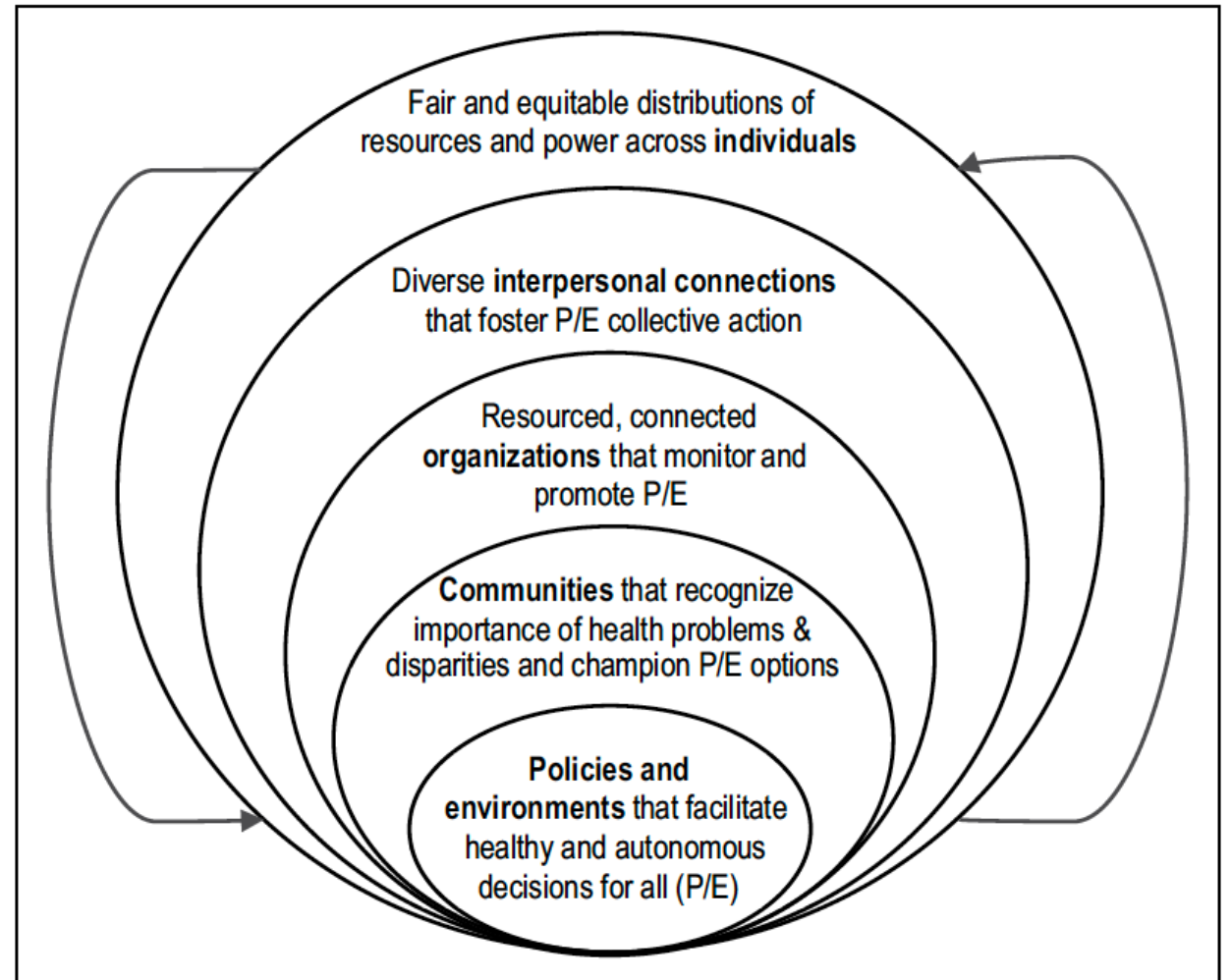
Lorenc T, Petticrew M, Welch V, *et al.* What types of interventions generate inequalities? Evidence from systematic reviews. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2013;**67**:190-193. <https://jech.bmj.com/content/67/2/190.short>



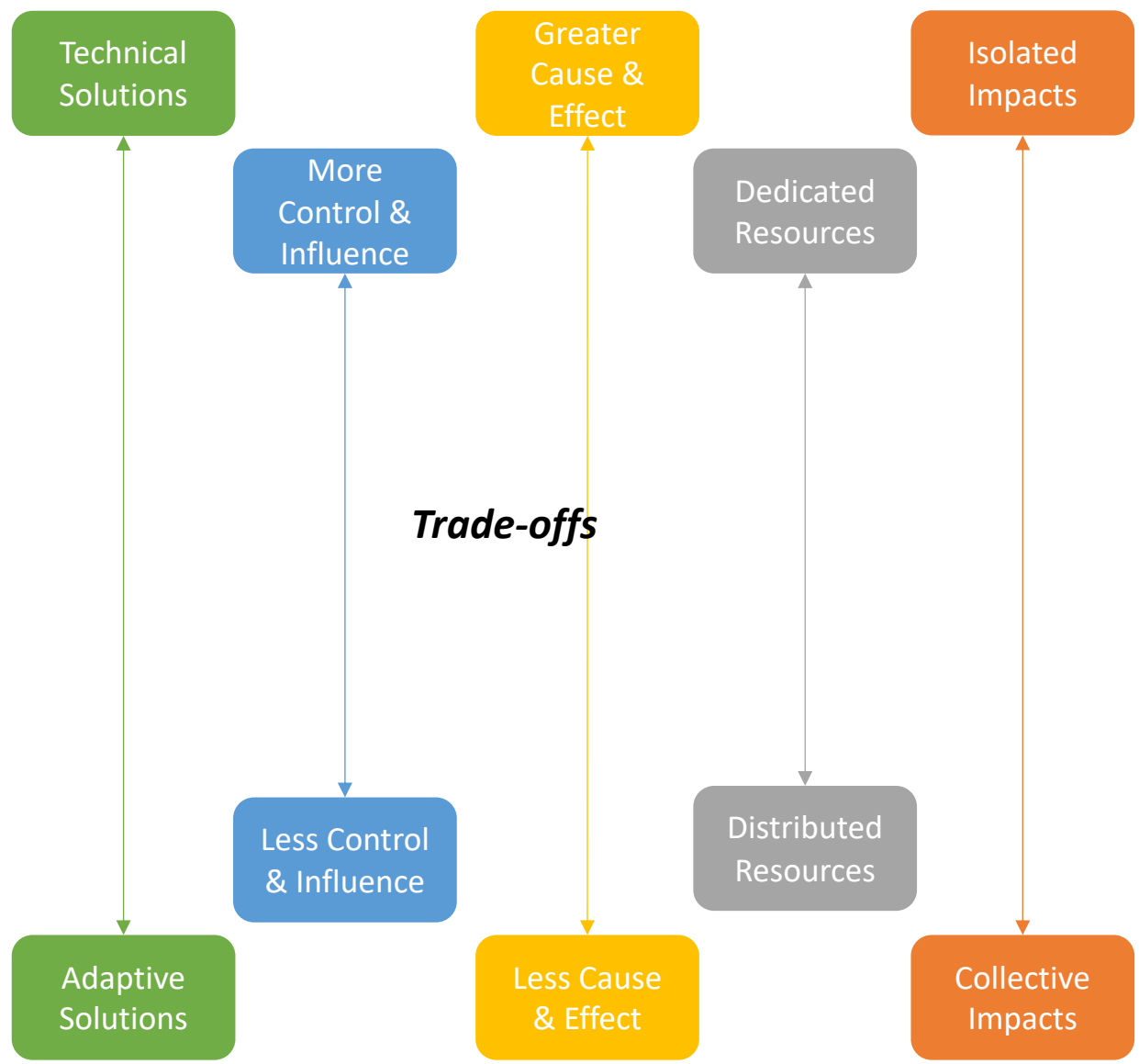
# Upstream Approaches and Health Equity

Health promotion professionals can foster structural change by:

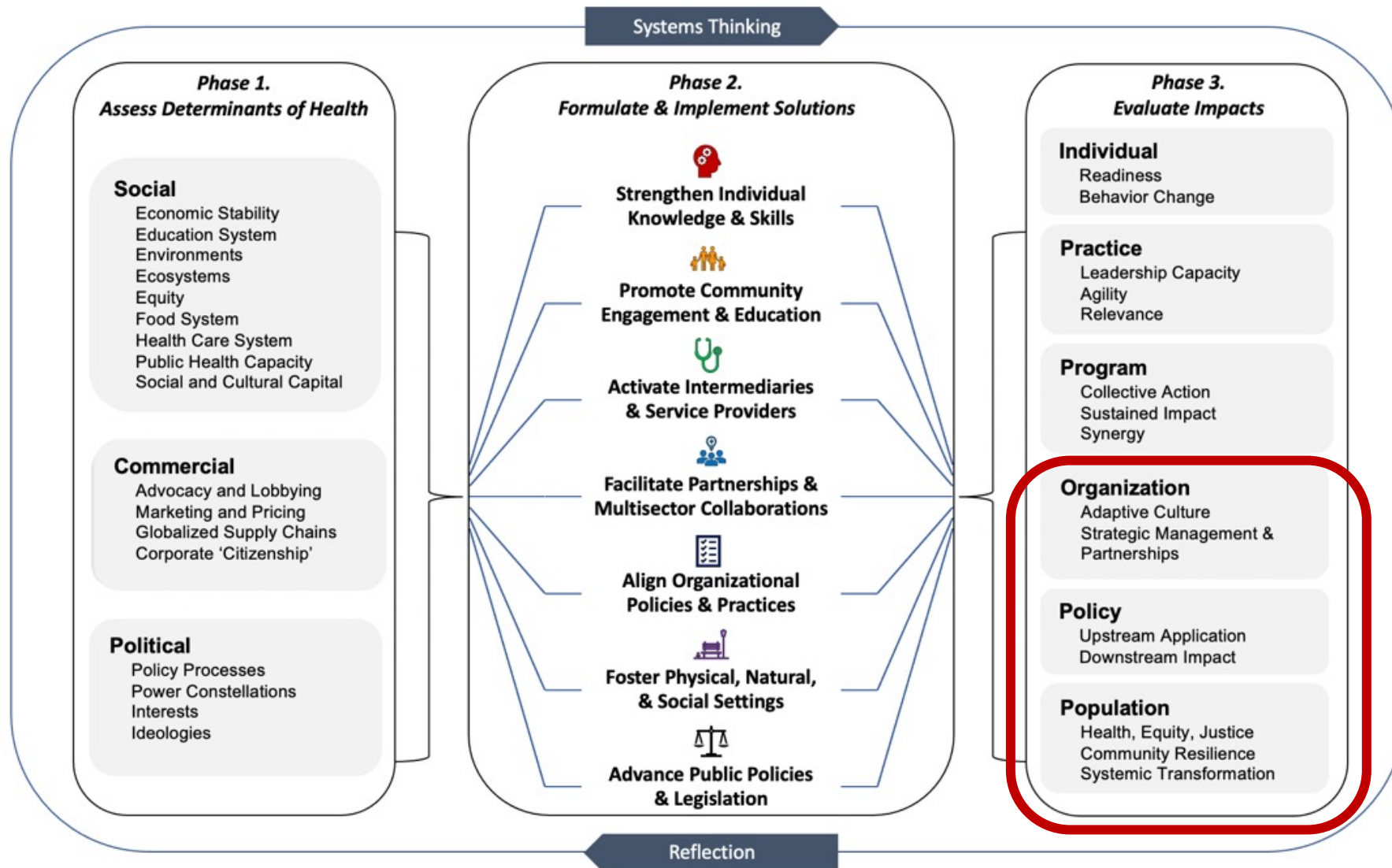
- Conveying the health and social relevance of policy and environmental change initiatives
- Building partnerships to support them
- Promoting more equitable distributions of the resources necessary for people to meet their daily needs, control their lives, and freely participate in the public sphere



**Figure 1.** “Inside out” social ecological model of policy and environmental change.







**Figure 1.** Individual Plus Policy System and Environmental (I+PSE) Conceptual Framework for Action



# Evaluating Organizational Impacts – Adaptive Culture & Action Learning

**Adaptive cultures** are characterized by responsibility for the organization is shared; elephants in the room are named; independent judgment is expected; leadership capacity is developed; reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized (Heifetz 2009)

**Action learning** strengthens leadership through continuous cycles of improving individual, team, and organizational performance (Marquardt et al 2009)

## Sample Evaluation Questions

- To what extent is systems thinking and reflection embedded in the organization?
- Which policies and practices within the organization have changed the culture of the organization to better address the adaptive challenge(s)?
- How have you, your team, and your organization improved your performance?



# Evaluating Organizational Impacts – Strategic Management & Partnerships

**Strategic management** is how an organization links planning, implementation, and evaluation; it is a continuing commitment to the mission and vision of the organization; nurtures a culture that identifies and supports the mission and vision; maintains a clear focus on the organization's strategic agenda (Bryson 2018)

**Partnerships** are the cultivation of informal to formal relationships with internal and external stakeholders who have similar public health missions and goals; defined roles and responsibilities in collaborative partnerships

## Sample Evaluation Questions

- What is the organization's strategy to formulating and implementing innovative solutions?
- How clear are the vision and change strategies of the organization communicated internally and externally?
- To what extent have partnerships advanced change? What qualities of partnerships have hindered or helped advance change?



# Tools to Evaluate Partnerships

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## Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory, 3rd Edition

Assess how your collaboration is doing on 44 success factors (Likert-type scale)

Available at <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/collaboration-factors-inventory-3rd-edition>





# Tools to Evaluate Partnerships

University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension.  
Evaluating Collaboratives.  
Reaching the Potential (July 1998)

Available at  
<https://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/G3658-08.pdf>

## Communication

- Network, round table
- Dialogue and common understanding. Share information. Explore common and conflicting interests

## Contribution

- Support Group
- Mutual exchanges to support each other's efforts. Build mutual obligation and trust

## Coordination

- Task force, council, alliance
- Match and coordinate needs, resources, and activities. Limit duplication of services. Adjust current activities for more efficient and effective results

## Cooperation

- Partnership, consortium, coalition
- Link resources to help groups achieve joint goals, Discover shared interests. Build trust by working together

## Collaboration

- Collaborative
- Develop shared vision. Build inter-dependent system to address issues and opportunities. Share resources.



# Evaluating Policy Impacts – Upstream Interventions

Advancing **organizational policies** that improve social, cultural, and economic structures that allow employees to thrive in adaptive environments

Leveraging **public policies** at local, state, and federal levels that focus on improving fundamental social and economic structures (i.e., systems) to decrease barriers and improve supports that allow people to achieve their full health potential

## Sample Evaluation Questions

- Which relationships with decisionmakers and policymakers have been formed or strengthened?
- How has policy and political knowledge been affected?
- Moving upstream, what policy levers at the population, organization, program, and practice levels can amplify food and nutrition services?



# Evaluating Policy Impacts – Downstream Impact

The intended and unintended effects, costs, and impacts as a result of policy implementation, specifically the consequences on social, commercial, and political determinants of health; impact on health equity

## Sample Evaluation Questions

- What policies have been implemented and what are the downstream impacts (e.g., alleviated or perpetuated health disparities)?
- To what degree has policy shifted to strengthen constituent/community, or population health?



# What is Policy Analysis?



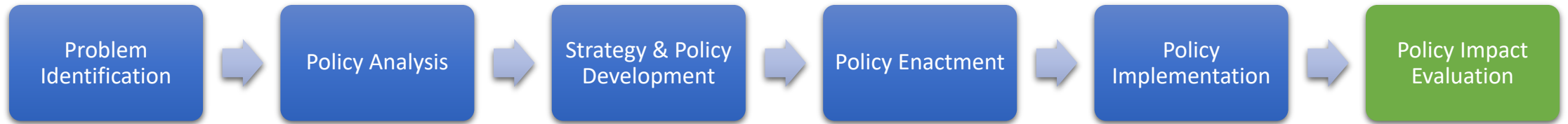
- A planning tool to identify potential policy options that could address the complex problem and compares the options, so you choose the most effective, efficient, and feasible policy
- Provides a systematic process to choose the policy option that may be best for the situation





# What is Policy Impact Evaluation?

**Did the policy produce the intended outcomes and impacts?**



- Demonstrates the impact of the policy by measuring changes in short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes
- Determines whether changes in outcomes can be attributed to the policy (cause – effect)
- Compares relative impacts of policies with different components
- Identifies the relative cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness of a policy



# Evaluating Population Impacts – Health Equity and Justice

Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care

## Sample Evaluation Questions

- What are the changes in health, social, economic, and environmental indicators?
- What power constellations have formed, shifted, or dissolved?
- How have public and private investments impacted health and equity?



# Evaluating Population Impacts – Community Resilience

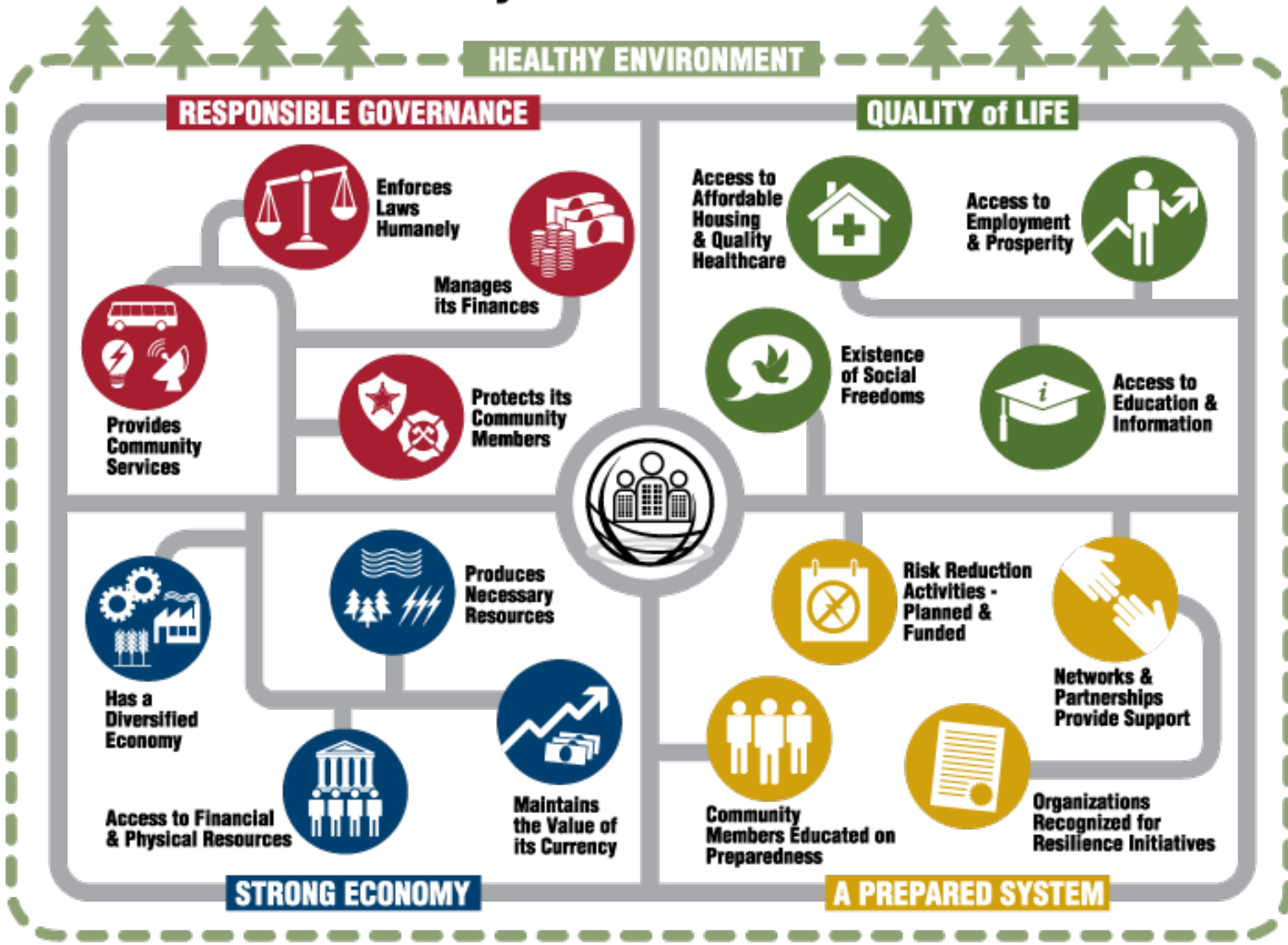
**Community resilience** is the ability of a community to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations. Systems that contribute to overall resilience or vulnerability of the community:

- Healthy environment
- Responsible governance
- Strong economy
- Prepared system
- High quality of life

## Sample Evaluation Questions

- What shifts have occurred that enable a community to better bounce back from a biological, economic, or environmental catastrophe (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) and regain a high quality of life?
- What are the facilitators and barriers to building human, economic, social, and ecological capital?
- What weaknesses or vulnerabilities exist within the community that hinder responsiveness?

# Community Resilience Framework™



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# Evaluating Population Impacts – Systemic Transformation

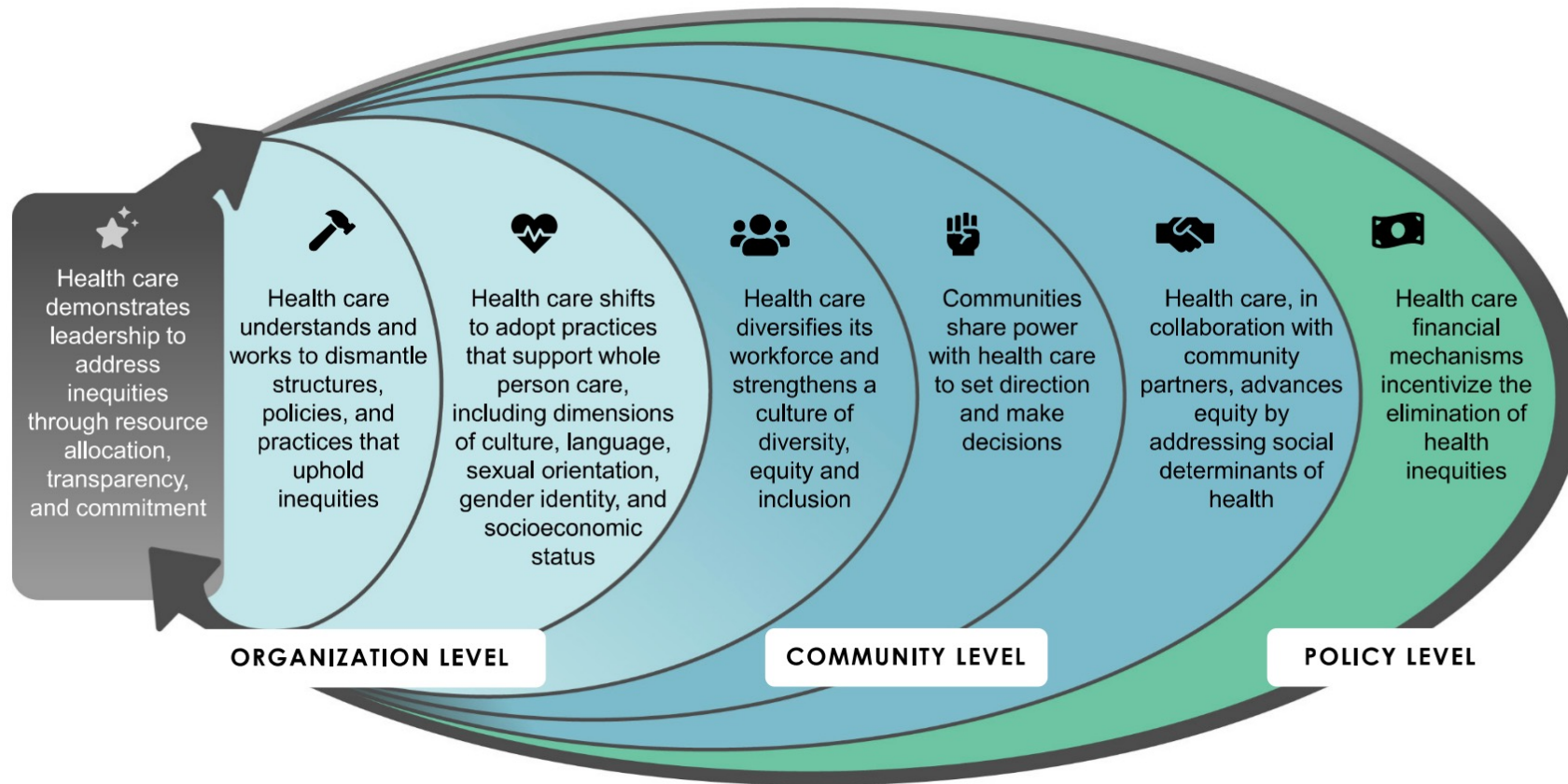
**Systemic transformation** is the result of dynamic and collective action to address an adaptive challenge; when change reaches all or most parts of a system affecting the general behavior of the entire system

## Sample Evaluation Questions

- How have drivers or influencers within various systems changed and what is the degree of the transformation?
- How has the collective wisdom about the adaptive challenge and viable solutions changed within organizations, stakeholders, policymakers, and the community?



# Systems Transformation Framework for Reducing Health Inequities in Health Care





# How to Positively Influence Systems

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- Approach adaptive challenges with a systems lens (i.e., systems mindset)
- Select systems frameworks, processes, and tools to support your work
- Understand human dynamics (boundaries, trust, relationships, engagement, assumptions, bias, communication, capacity to participate, power, equity)

# Key Take Aways

- Have an evaluation plan
- Count what matters
- Systemic changes requires systems thinking, collective action, and multidimensional change drivers
- The “level” of intervention will determine the impact on health equity
- Align with partners with whom you have common goals, built trust, and can share resources

