

WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO SUCCESSFUL POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE IN LAKE COUNTY?

What Those Involved Had to Say

OVERVIEW

Policy and systems change is necessary to confront the root causes of social issues and inequities that plague our local communities. Addressing these social issues (substance misuse, violence, housing insecurity, food insecurity, etc.) leads communities toward experiencing better health outcomes, more community connectedness, and safer, more stable homes. Policy and systems change is complex and challenging, but it can be done, as shown by the work happening to address the housing crisis in Lake County. That change did not happen spontaneously. Many people in the community contributed toward the success of these efforts, often over a long period of time. We hope to reflect some of that work throughout this report so that it can be celebrated and learned from for future policy and systems change efforts in Lake County and across other communities.

Across Lake County, community members participated in interviews in late 2023 and shared their perspectives about not only what contributed to the successful policy and systems change, but also what barriers they faced and how they overcame them. The individuals interviewed were people in the Housing Coalition or were involved with specific housing subcommittees under the umbrella of the Housing Coalition. These individuals represent different ages, racial/ethnic groups, sectors, and identity backgrounds and spoke from their perspectives. Taken together, these people told a broader story about what contributed to successful policy and systems change in their community.

The Community Organizing for Prevention Evaluation team is grateful to the community members who participated in interviews and shared their candid experiences around this process in their community.

DESCRIPTION OF THE POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGES IN LAKE COUNTY:

In an effort to address one aspect of the housing crisis in Lake County, a policy change around accommodation taxes in Leadville was proposed. **Accommodation taxes** are taxes that are applicable to hotels, motels, and short-term rentals that increase the amount of money visitors to Leadville pay in accommodation costs. These tax funds can then be used for specific purposes in the community, as determined by county officials. The 2022 ballot measure aimed to increase the accommodation tax by 3%. This initiative passed with overwhelming support. The Housing Coalition played an important role in the passing of this initiative by increasing awareness of the importance of this policy change and informing voters that the tax increase wouldn't impact their own finances, as this tax was only applicable to tourists visiting the community.

Advocates for this initiative began working with elected officials in the Spring of 2021. It was then put on the ballot during the summer of 2021, and was approved by voters in the fall of 2021. The measure was put into effect starting January 2022. The funds that were leveraged with this tax increase were then used to fund the establishment of the Leadville Lake County Regional Housing Authority, which aims to facilitate home construction and access to housing in the community.

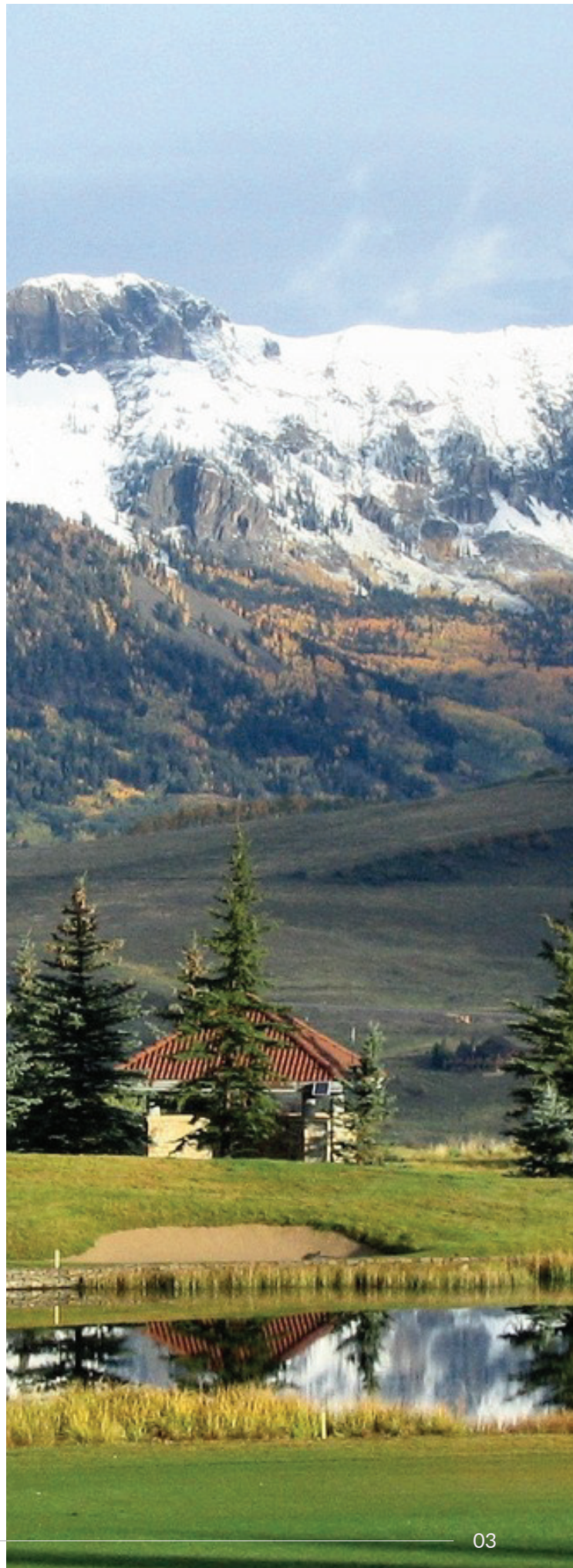
The Housing Coalition created a 'How to run a ballot measure' shortly after the campaign to share with other municipalities that have the legal authority to change Accommodation taxes can only be raised by municipalities. Counties must abide by the state statute. In 2022 Governor Polis passed House Bill 22-1117 that allowed communities to vote to approve up to 90% of accommodation taxes to be reallocated to housing, childcare, and economic development activities.

WHAT SOCIAL ISSUE DOES THIS IMPACT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LAKE COUNTY RESIDENTS?

Lake County residents are facing a housing crisis due to contributing factors such as aging infrastructure, cost inflation, and a short building season due to weather. This housing crisis inequitably impacts different members of the community, notably those working within the service industry and the Latine community. Even though people in the community had been talking about this issue for many years, there were still many who were not aware that affordable housing and homelessness is an ongoing issue impacting residents of Lake County.

Safe, quality, stable, and affordable housing can positively impact mental health, physical health, and overall well-being, and specifically promote healthy outcomes among youth. The provision of affordable housing options within communities can reduce household financial burdens, which in turn allows for the increased ability of households to meet their basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, healthcare). Affordable housing is effective in producing long-term positive health outcomes when options are stable and sustained by communities. Consistent and long-term access to affordable options can reduce a household's need to frequently move and/or relocate, which can promote access to and continuity of healthcare, reduce depression and anxiety, and decrease illicit drug use among youth.¹

¹ Nabihah Maqbool, Janet Viveiros, and Mindy Ault, "The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Health: A Research Summary," Insights from Housing Policy Research, 2015, www2.nhc.org/HSGandHealthLitRev_2015_final.pdf



HERE IS WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAD TO SAY ABOUT WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE CHANGES AROUND HOUSING POLICIES:

Building off pre-existing strengths.

Lake County Build-a-Generation (LCBAG) had seen housing as an issue in the past and was integral in helping to get the ball rolling on addressing the issue of housing insecurity in Lake County. The Department of Human Services Wrap Around program, Full Circle, local churches, and the food bank had been supporting those dealing with housing insecurity for many years. While these organizations had all been doing great work, efforts often remained uncoordinated and disconnected. One of the benefits of having the housing coalition directly connected to LCBAG is they were able to utilize the skills and abilities of the LCBAG Community Mobilizer, a paid staff member, to assist in the coordination of various local efforts, as well as engagement of the broader community in the policy change process.

Building awareness is essential for change.

Taking the time to educate folks across the community contributed to success and led to higher voter turnout for the accommodation tax initiative. It was important to spread this awareness across multiple levels and forums, such as public hearings and announcements, social media posts, and presentations at various community events.

Elected Officials



This included spending time building awareness with various elected officials who then became proponents of this policy change and advocated for this ballot measure to be placed on the local ballot.

Among local organizations



This included raising awareness among local organizations who serve individuals and families impacted by this social issue. An example of this was building awareness among school staff around how many students were experiencing housing insecurity, as many school staff were unaware that this was an issue impacting their students.

General Public



Many people were unaware that housing is an issue that is so widespread in the community, as it was not something that did not directly impact them. Part of the campaign included community canvassing and presenting at community events. These efforts increased support for the accommodation tax and provided a platform to raise awareness around other housing issues impacting the community.

Connections are key for community involvement.

Community members were often invited to join conversations or events by individuals who were already involved in the policy change process. This led to additional community members being engaged in the policy and systems change efforts. This was especially helpful in getting the Latine population involved because trusted leaders became involved in the work, which helped community members who were more burdened by housing insecurity feel more confident in participating in these community discussions.

One policy change has led to other policy and systems changes within the community.

The awareness and momentum that was needed to pass the accommodation tax policy change has had ripple effects. These conversations have also led to other successes around this social issue, such as the accommodation tax revenue funding the Leadville Lake County Regional Housing Authority and future affordable housing units. There has also been more community action, as seen through a local “match-making program”, where those looking for housing can be connected with those who have space for rent.

Consultants and facilitators were huge factors in success.

Having the resources to pay consultants and facilitators to lend their skill and expertise to the policy change process helped this initiative to reach success. Paid facilitators, like the community mobilizer for the Housing Coalition, were able to assist with de-escalation, relationship building, motivation and engagement, as well as facilitate collaboration between community members and organizations. They also played an important role in keeping the conversation alive in the community.

HERE'S WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS SAID WERE CHALLENGES IN THE POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE PROCESS:

Consistency is important to ease success.



Turnover and burnout are factors that have had negative impacts on the policy and systems change process. When individuals leave their current positions, it can take time to build trust and commitment from those who fill those positions and roles.

This work requires financial investment; budget accordingly.



Challenges arose when there was a lack of funding to support those doing the work (e.g., consultants, facilitators), as well as for any necessary infrastructure, like additional funding for the Leadville Lake County Regional Housing Authority. It is important that there are people committed to finding and securing grants that can fund the policy and systems change process. Having paid staff dedicated to the work helps keep it moving forward. Having paid staff can take the burden off community members, allowing them to participate in ways that don't push them to overcommit and potentially experience burnout.

Interpersonal conflicts can block progress.



Bringing people together from all walks of life, especially in a small community, can mean that there are lots of tricky conversations and situations to navigate. Some members of the community have more traditional power and influence than others. This can hinder progress around policy and systems change. A skilled staff member, like the Community Mobilizer for the Housing Coalition, can help to facilitate these conversations and decision-making processes in a way that minimizes conflict and potential harm.

HERE IS WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS SAID ABOUT LCBAG:

Systems level interventions.

Lake County Build a Generation (LCBAG) is one of the few entities in the community that has the capacity and resources to address issues that impact the community on a broader systems level. Sometimes the work looks slower than what other organizations are involved in, but community members have seen success because of LCBAG systems-level work over the years.

People have varying perceptions of LCBAG.

Community members spoke positively about the successes they have witnessed from working with LCBAG and generally had good experiences. In the general community, there might be some confusion about who LCBAG is and what work they are doing. Specifically, for the housing coalition funded by LCBAG, there is confusion around roles in the community between the Housing Coalition and the Leadville Lake County Regional Housing Authority. Work is currently being done to create less confusion by aligning efforts and establishing roles.

LESSONS LEARNED THROUGHOUT THIS PROCESS:

Anticipate tension when addressing social issues in the community.

Change is hard for individuals, organizations, and communities. Anytime the policy change process is started in a community, tensions will arise. This tension can also be reflected in other conversations arising from the policy change process. For example, there might be disagreements around who is the best person or agency to lead the work.

Map out what resources already exist in the community.

It is easy for the focus to be on the deficits of a community, or what the community needs or lacks. However, it is important to examine what strengths and resources already exist in a community that can be leveraged to support the policy and systems change effort. The resources could include human capital, financial resources, and other existing efforts that attract community attention.

Take your time and celebrate success.

The policy and systems change process naturally requires a community to be patient with the process. Expect that you'll encounter barriers, disappointments, and that there might have to be course-corrections throughout the process. Take notice of the various accomplishments that helped move the policy change process forward. Acknowledging these successes, even if a policy doesn't pass, can help keep a community motivated to be persistent around addressing social issues that negatively impact members of the community in the future.



OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD:

There is still more work to be done.

The Housing Coalition is currently working with the City Council's Planning and Zoning Board to change current codes related to **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)** regulations. ADUs are defined as an additional housing unit within or on the same property as a primary residence, which can include duplexes and small multi-family housing buildings. With the current zoning language around housing density, many lots within Lake County cannot permit an ADU due to the fact that they do not meet the lot size requirement. This limits additional housing for the county, a factor that is contributing to the housing crisis in Lake County.

A consultant was hired to assist the Housing Coalition in assessing current ADU zoning policies, as well as drafting changes in policy language that would increase the county's ability to create more ADUs. At the completion of these interviews city council was in the process of approving those language changes. The Housing Coalition continues to attend meetings to advocate for these changes, as well as continuing efforts to encourage residents to consider renting existing units to people living within the county (versus short-term rentals for visitors) in an effort to address the housing crisis in Lake County.

What can you do as a resident of Lake County?

Keep talking about the issue of affordable, safe and stable housing in Lake County.

Conversations and efforts that continue to educate people around the importance of this issue, including education around the importance and benefits of affordable housing, can only help keep the momentum going. For example, many community members spoke about how they hope these conversations will lead to the development of a new homeless shelter. Your voice can support future efforts to address this need.

Advocate for increased funding of the Leadville Lake County Regional Housing Authority.

Increased funding would allow the Housing Authority to proceed with projects that would positively impact families and individuals experiencing housing insecurity. Funding could also be used to continue the support of facilitators and contractors, which were found to be a crucial part of furthering these efforts.

Community members saw that policy change is possible.

Time could be spent identifying other policies that could be changed or implemented to impact other issues that the community is currently facing. These could be drafting new policies or improving policies that currently exist. As seen in this report, policy and systems change is possible when people speak out and organize around a shared vision or goal.



