

Teaching Driver Diagrams to Advance the Work of Community-based Collaboratives



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Attribute to: Holly Hayes; Paul Howard; Marie Schall; Chelsea Canedy; Renee Boynton-Jarrett; Aimee Budnik; Will Douglas; Esther Munene; Tricia Zahn; 100 Million Healthier Lives, convened by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

About 100 Million Healthier Lives and the SCALE Series

[100 Million Healthier Lives](#) (100MLives) is an unprecedented collaboration of change agents across sectors working to transform the way we think and act to create health, well-being, and equity. As part of 100MLives, the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) (RWJF) generously funded Spreading Community Accelerators through Learning and Evaluation (SCALE), which began in January 2015 and ended its second iteration, SCALE 2.0, in April 2019.

SCALE 2.0 (2017 - 2019) included work with more than 200 communities and 500 health care organizations through four core initiatives:

1. SCALE Health & Care (now known as [Pathways to Population Health](#))
2. Regions of Solutions
3. States of Solutions
4. Community Health Accelerators Initiative

The goal of SCALE was to work with communities and health care organizations to accelerate their journeys toward what RWJF refers to as a Culture of Health. In SCALE 2.0, the community coalitions began creating tools, resources, and strategies to adapt improvement science and make it more accessible for individuals from all backgrounds. Through these experiences, we gathered core models that have proven to be essential in advancing community-based improvement initiatives.

All of this work is built on the [100MLives Core Principles](#). To make this work possible, 100MLives collaborated with many partners, each of whom brings unique expertise and knowledge. These partners include but are not limited to:

- SCALE Communities
- SCALE-Up Communities
- SCALE Coaches
- SCALE Implementation Team
- SCALE Evaluation Team
- Institute for Healthcare Improvement
- Georgia Health Policy Center
- Heluna Health



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Overview

What is a driver diagram and why is it helpful?

Simply put, a driver diagram takes a clear goal (or aim) and visually explains your theory of how you can achieve it. A driver diagram breaks down this theory into manageable pieces: *primary drivers* are the major factors driving you toward your goal, and *secondary drivers* are the activities, processes, and structures that make up the primary drivers.

A driver diagram helps map out ideas in order to create a theory about how to make changes that will result in an improvement. It visually represents the connections and levers that help drive a goal or aim. It can be a tool to address equity by focusing on improving outcomes for those who aren't thriving, and in turn improving the system for everyone.

The process of developing a driver diagram can be just as important as the product, as it allows an individual or group to document their ideas. During this process, those involved will inevitably end up discussing their ideas about the importance of certain factors, their assumptions, relevant data or background context, and so on. A successful process can result in a strong plan to reach a goal, a well-defined area of focus, and a plan for how to work together on attaining that goal.

A driver diagram shows the relationship between the overall aim of the project, the primary drivers (sometimes called "key drivers") that contribute directly to achieving the aim, the secondary drivers that are components of the primary drivers, and specific change ideas to test for each secondary driver. Figure 1 shows an example of a driver diagram developed by Healthy Monadnock, a coalition in central New Hampshire that participated in the SCALE initiative. In the following sections of this guide, we will discuss each part of the driver diagram, explaining step by step how each element is developed, how they fit together, and considerations for building your own driver diagrams.

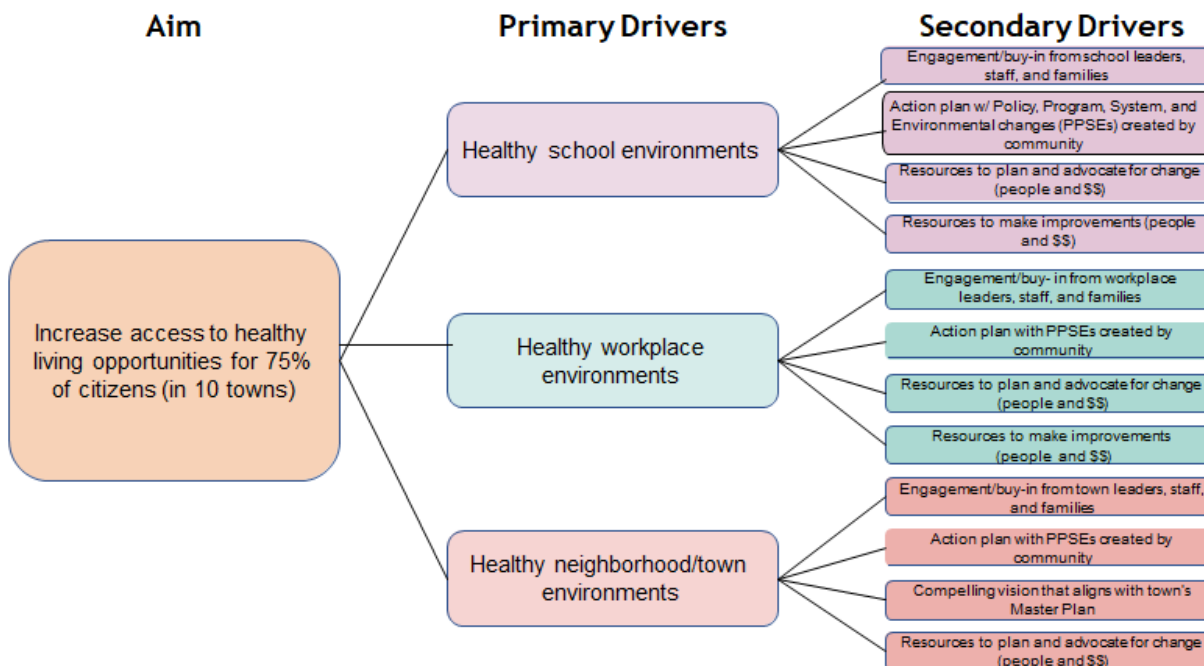


Figure 1: Healthy Monadnock Driver Diagram

Key Elements of a Driver Diagram

Aim

An aim is a statement of the goal you want to reach. A great aim answers the questions, “What do you want to accomplish, whose lives will be affected, how much improvement do you expect to achieve, and by when?” It’s important to be as specific as possible in stating your aim, including putting a number in the aim (can be a percentage or a real number) in order to track progress and know when you’ve reached your goal.

The specific measurable aim for the Healthy Monadnock coalition, shown in **Figure 1**, is:

Increase access to healthy living opportunities for 75% of citizens (in 10 towns) by supporting leaders and community members to transform their town, neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools, so better health flourishes for everyone by December 30, 2020.

Notice that the aim doesn’t fully define what access to health living opportunities means. Sometimes it can be hard to define a specific, measurable target from the outset, but don’t let that be an obstacle to developing your driver diagram. Keep in mind that aim statements are often modified over time to be more specific and quantifiable after some initial testing and learning. In a quality improvement process, data and measures are to be used for improvement rather than judgment.

This aim also illustrates another issue that often arises as groups begin to create their aim statements, namely the scope of the aim. Should the aim for the driver diagram address the overall aim(s) for their coalition or community partnership, or should it reflect a specific project or program? In the example above, the Healthy Monadnock team created a broad aim that encompassed their overall work with 10 partner towns. Each town then identified its own specific aims for healthy living opportunities — e.g., food vouchers for local farmers’ markets, bike-share programs, community garden beds — and defined measurable improvements for their specific initiatives.

The following aim is from one of the towns that worked with Healthy Monadnock:

Increase access to active transportation of active New London residents from 0% to 10% through the Gotcha Bike Ride share in the first year of operation (Spring 2019).

The full driver diagram for this town is shown in [Appendix A: Lake Sunapee Driver Diagram](#).

In summary, driver diagrams can be useful for setting aims and plotting a course of action at various levels; there is not one “right” answer to the question of the scope or specificity of the aim. The level or scope of the aim depends on the intent of the group at the time, whether it’s to define its overall purpose and goals, or to focus on a specific project or program. Driver diagrams, regardless of the scope or their aim, can help the group see the connections and interrelated parts of their coalition’s or partnership’s work.

In creating your aim, you may want to consider the following questions:

- Can I clarify the aim enough to know when it’s been reached? Is it measurable and time-based?
- What’s the current outlook? Are things getting better? Worse? Why might that be?
- In order to make an impact, consider a focus on equity by answering the questions “Who isn’t thriving?” and “What would it take to change that?”

- A strong aim can take a while to craft, so sometimes it's easier to start with something that's good enough: it's clear, there is agreement, and it inspires action.
- Keep in mind that the aim starts to create guideposts. Too bold or big, and it may take years to accomplish. Too small, and you may not make real improvement. The exciting part is that this is your tool, so you decide!
- Even if you don't reach your aim in your stated time period, that's OK! The point is to learn as you go, track improvements along the way, and to get better about making a prediction and developing a strategy around it.

Primary Drivers

What core elements (generally 2-4) do you need to do to achieve this aim? Primary drivers are the major ideas or elements that you believe contribute to reaching your aim. For identifying both the primary and secondary drivers, it is often helpful to consider:

- **Structures** that make up the system, such as physical space or the surrounding environment in the community; resources such as technology or equipment; and any agencies, organizations, or groups within the community that might impact the aim;
- **Processes** such as how people work together and what steps they take to accomplish something; and
- **Norms or rules** that govern factors such as eligibility for social services or access to programs¹.

Figure 2 below shows the aim and the primary drivers for the overall Healthy Monadnock driver diagram. The community developed these primary drivers to reflect their theory. Other communities with the same aim may identify different primary drivers. Please see the Lake Sunapee driver diagram in [Appendix A](#) to see what primary drivers look like for a project-level driver diagram.

¹ [What's Your Theory? Retrieved from http://www.apiweb.org/QP_whats-your-theory_201507.pdf](http://www.apiweb.org/QP_whats-your-theory_201507.pdf)

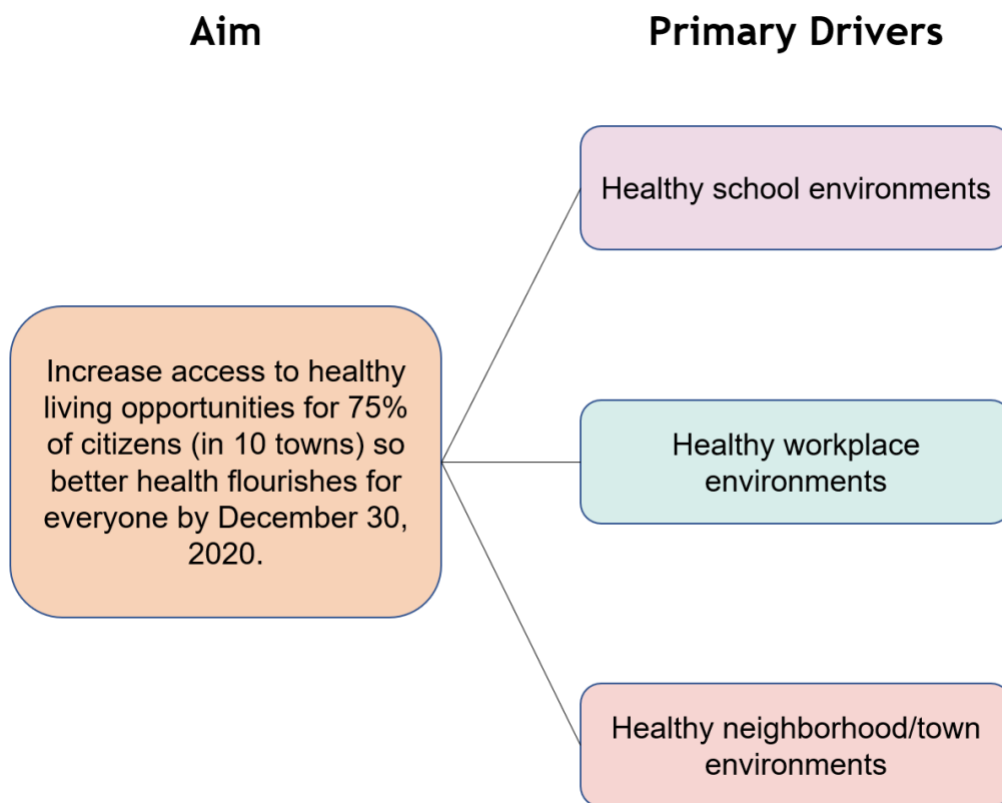


Figure 2: Aim and Primary Drivers of the Healthy Monadnock Driver Diagram

In identifying primary drivers, you may want to consider the following questions:

- What do we know about this topic already? What have we tried in the past, and did it work?
- Who else is working on similar aims? What are their theories for how to improve their work?
- What are the physical assets, barriers, and cultural norms that exist in the community?
- Can we simplify by focusing on the top three or four drivers?
- If the conditions in these drivers are met (e.g., in the example of Figure 2, if the community has healthy school environments, health workplace environments and healthy neighborhood environments), will this allow us to achieve or make measurable progress toward our aim?
- Might some of the ideas we've identified work better as secondary drivers?

Secondary Drivers

The secondary drivers are the elements necessary to impact the primary drivers. To generate ideas for secondary drivers, a community considers ways that they might approach the issues related to the aim (i.e., important areas that they will want to work on), or they may think of places or opportunities within the community or system where a change can be made related to the primary drivers. What are the actions or components that are most likely to contribute to those primary drivers that you just identified?

Figure 3 below shows the aim, primary drivers, and secondary drivers for the Healthy Monadnock driver diagram. Notice that the secondary drivers are ideas that can lead to actions that will impact a primary driver, and ultimately contribute toward reaching the overall aim. For example, engagement and buy-in from school leaders, staff, and families will be needed in order to build healthy school environments.

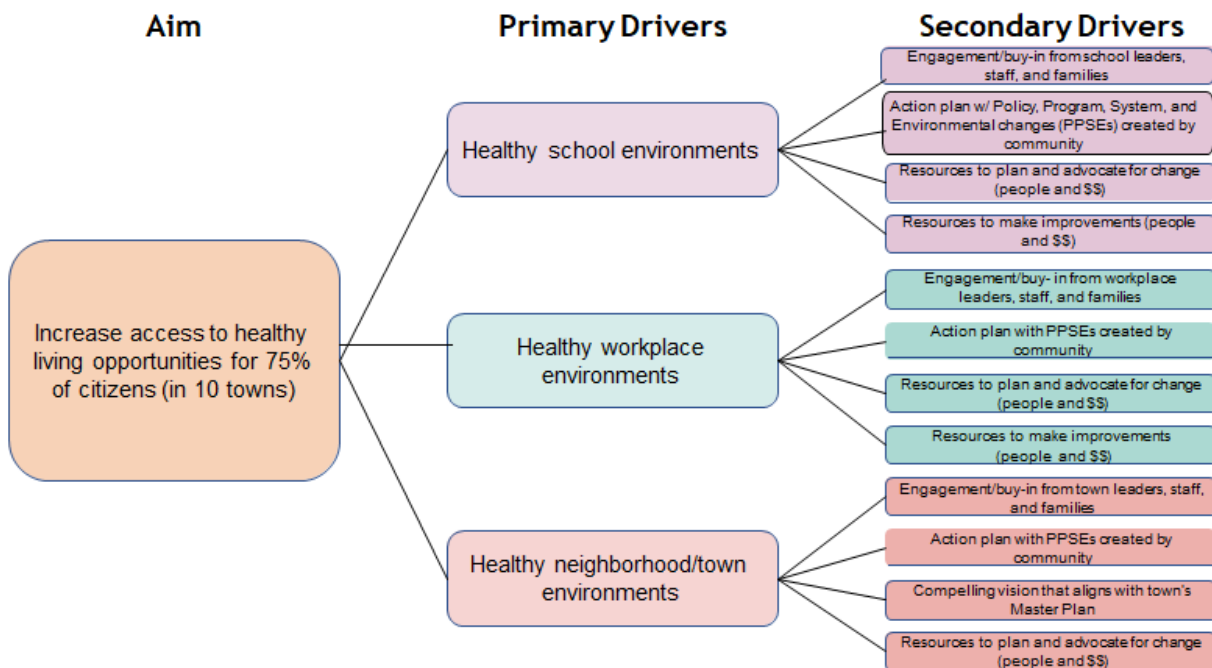


Figure 3: Aim, Primary Drivers, and Secondary Drivers of the Healthy Monadnock Driver Diagram

For an example of a secondary driver at a project level, please see the driver diagram in [Appendix A](#).

In identifying secondary drivers, you may want to consider the following:

- These drivers are often closest to actions and testable ideas. Do you have, or could you develop, testable ideas from each of your secondary drivers?
- Refining the ideas to select the 3-5 best ones can help make the model easier to read and understand.
- Make sure to save all the ideas you've generated even if you decide not to include them in your initial driver diagram. As you use and test your driver diagram, you may change or edit your drivers, and these initial ideas may still come in handy.
- Sometimes a secondary driver can help move forward more than one primary driver.

Using Driver Diagrams to Guide Action

A driver diagram is intended as a framework for action. To support action, it is helpful to: (1) develop a set of measures that will show whether a community or team is making progress toward their aim; and (2) identify specific actions (also called change ideas) that a community or team can take based on the theory in their driver diagram.

Develop a Set of Measures to Track Progress

Measures help a team guide their work so that they know whether they are making progress toward milestones along the way as well as reaching their overall aim during the time period of the project or initiative. It's often helpful to think of measures at three levels (i.e., corresponding to the three levels in the driver diagram).

Measures at the Overall Aim Level

What is the big aim that you are trying to accomplish? In the Healthy Monadnock example, the team wants to ultimately ensure that health is flourishing for the citizens in 10 towns. Their intermediate (and perhaps more easily measurable) goal, however, is to increase access to healthy living opportunities, since their theory is that access to these opportunities will lead to better health.

Measures at the Primary Driver Level

While measures at the overall aim level will help you know if you have reached your overall goal, measures at the primary driver level will help you to track your progress along the way. In the Healthy Monadnock example, how will they know they are increasing access to healthy living opportunities? A key for this team lies in their primary drivers. Healthy environments in schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods/towns involve creating healthy living opportunities in those places.

The measures for the primary drivers might therefore include:

- Healthy school environments: Percentage of schools where fresh fruits and vegetables make up at least 50 percent of the daily menu in the cafeteria; or the percentage of schools where children have at least 30 minutes of vigorous exercise each day.
- Healthy workplace environments: Percentage of workplaces where fresh fruits and vegetables make up at least 50 percent of the daily menu in the cafeteria; or the percentage of workplaces where at least 30 percent of employees participate in a walking program, etc.
- Healthy neighborhoods: Percentage of neighborhoods where there are at least 3 miles of safe paths or sidewalks for people to use for walking or biking; or the percentage of neighborhoods where there is a bike program providing free access to bikes.

Secondary Drivers and Change Ideas

Secondary drivers help to generate ideas for specific actions that can potentially change things for the better. These actions or interventions are known in Improvement Science as “change ideas.” These change ideas are turned into action by testing and measuring their impact.

A team working on the secondary driver from the Healthy Monadnock driver diagram in Figure 3 above, *Engagement/buy-in from school leaders, staff, and families*, could discuss what they can do to build engagement and buy-in from the various stakeholders. For example, a specific change idea for engaging families about how to build healthy school environments might be to solicit ideas directly from families themselves. There are many ways to do this, such as holding a focus group or doing a survey. Another idea might be to create a large wall chart at the next school event and invite students and families to write or draw their ideas for improving the school environment. Students and families who participate could then be invited to join a group to plan how to test the ideas from the wall chart. There is no one right idea — the community or team should decide for themselves. Learn more about how to test ideas from our PDSA guide.²

² Hayes H, Howard P, Schall M, Canedy C, Boynton-Jarrett, R, Budnik A, Douglas W, Munene E, Wadleigh T. *Using PDSA Cycles in Community-Based Collaboratives*. Boston: 100 Million Healthier Lives, convened by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement; 2019. (Available at www.ihl.org/100MLives)

Who should be involved?

When teaching and developing a driver diagram for a project, it's helpful to consider who should be included in the process. While there are no hard and fast rules here, it's important to consider the benefits of including a diverse set of perspectives.

A diverse team will include a range of experience, skills, views, and cultural perspectives. A key insight from the SCALE Community of Solutions model is to include and share vision, leadership, design and implementation with individuals who have lived experience of the issue you are attempting to address.

Lived experience is the expertise that comes from someone who is directly affected by the challenge or issue addressed in the driver diagram, rather than solely from education or research. For more information on effectively working with people with lived experience, please see our [Engaging People with Lived Experience Toolkit](#). A diverse team can help to ensure a more representative driver diagram, one that considers those most affected by an issue. Without diversity on the team, it's unlikely that there will be real progress on achieving an equitable result.

To ensure a diverse team, you may want to consider the following:

- Who has experience or expertise on these issues? Engaging them early will benefit the process.
- It can be helpful to identify and collect research, data, or information that's already available and handy to review beforehand. If there are topic experts who've done the research, engaging them would be beneficial.
- Who will be using the driver diagram? People will be more likely to use a driver diagram if they participated in developing it, since it would then include their ideas and perspective on the topic. Application will be more seamless.
- It can be unwieldy to facilitate a large group (more than 8-10 people). It may be easier to divide the group into two, facilitate them separately, and then try to merge the two resulting versions by bringing the full group back together to see each other's diagrams and work through them.

Steps for Teaching Driver Diagrams

Assuming you have (mostly) the right group assembled, and have had a chance to consider relevant research, data, stories, etc., you are ready to teach and develop a driver diagram! Teaching driver diagrams is a fun, interactive opportunity. It can be done in groups of all sizes, or even one-on-one.

Driver diagrams can take anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours to craft. It's fine to start with a rough version and plan to revise it as you and your group move into trying out ideas based on the driver diagram you are building together.

It may help to have a few choice examples of driver diagrams to share, so that participants understand what they're working toward. See the [Appendix](#) for additional examples.

We recommend the following steps as a potential process for teaching driver diagrams.

Step 1: Introduce the Terminology

Because some of the terminology is new, it's useful to define the terms. It will help simplify the actual development because participants will understand terms such as *aim* and *drivers*.

Step 2: Brainstorm Ideas

Sometimes it's useful to start with a draft aim, to create a focus for the group. Other groups might find it useful to start with what's already being done (usually secondary drivers or primary drivers), and then move on to crafting an aim. Either way, the aim helps set the boundaries and is typically an important part to clarify before brainstorming new ideas and approaches.

Whatever your approach, this early stage is a great opportunity for generative, creative brainstorming. Usually this works best when there's a session to produce lots of ideas and then group them based on similarity or whittle them down based on another prioritization process. A great option is to use the [Affinity Diagram](#) method. Another approach is to use or modify the [Brainswarming](#) technique, which can help facilitate a discussion of how to get from assets or existing projects to an aim.

Step 3: Arrange the Drivers

Driver diagrams require a structure or flow, so now it's time to determine which factors are the primary drivers to achieve the aim. Sometimes the initial brainstorming process and affinity grouping may naturally lead to identifying both primary and secondary drivers. Other times, you may find that after you've defined your primary drivers, you need a brainstorming session focused on secondary drivers.

Step 4: Edit

You may find that the ideas you've generated go well beyond what's feasible. It's time to edit down your drivers to focus on those that seem most meaningful. Remember, you're in the process of creating a theory that will need to be evaluated through experience, testing, and "failing forward." Do your best to find focus. If you can't do it through consensus, try using a [prioritization method](#).

Step 5: Validate

Now that you've developed a driver diagram, you can begin to test your theory. Share it with others and ask for their feedback, and make sure you are asking folks with experience and expertise, including those who may be most affected by the issue. Their questions and feedback can strengthen a driver diagram.

Step 6: Update

Driver diagrams are evolving, living documents and are meant to represent only your current theory. As you use your driver diagram to take action, you can (and should) refine it based on what you learn: "That secondary driver, does it seem to make a difference? What does the data say? What might be a better secondary driver?" Keep refining the driver diagram until the users agree about what is most accurate and useful. Be sure to include a version number or revision date so that you can keep your different versions distinct. At some point, you may want to look back at earlier versions to see what you tried and how your learning evolved.

Approaches and Techniques

Break It into Smaller Pieces

At times, it can be a challenge to start with a blank page. Focusing attention at the outset on a single aim, or on just primary or secondary drivers, can help make the task seem less daunting. Just know that driver diagrams can be inspiring for some and overwhelming for others, so keep that in mind as you choose an approach or technique below.

Group Facilitation

One approach to teaching the development of a driver diagram is to facilitate the process through verbal instruction for the full group. This works best in groups of 8-10.

In this approach, a lead facilitator will provide the context and define the terms. Then, using flip charts or a whiteboard, the facilitator can ask participants to share suggestions for an aim. This can be done in a traditional brainstorming fashion or by asking participants to use sticky notes to jot ideas. Using techniques referenced above, the group will collectively create the diagram.

Design principles for effective teaching suggest framing questions in an open-ended way that promotes creativity. One possible way to phrase the prompt is “How might we...?” For example: “How might we phrase our physical activity goal for 2020?”

Small Group Driver Diagrams

Another approach is for the larger group to first come to some initial agreement about a working aim. Then the group can divide into smaller subgroups (typically 3-4 people) that can work together to identify primary and secondary drivers for that aim. The ideas from all the subgroups can then be shared across the entire group.

Personal Driver Diagrams

Another approach is to teach the concept by making it personal — a great way to see the value of a driver diagram. Using a personal goal and turning it into an aim can help people understand the process without needing to consult research or assemble a team. An example of a prompt is: “What’s your New Year’s resolution?” Or, “What are your personal goals this year?” Folks can use the prompt to build a strategy for their own personal journey.

Metaphors

Another technique is to skip all the “theory of change” language and create a metaphor. A recommendation for this approach is to think of a driver diagram as a pair of “DD” batteries. Without the DD batteries, your engine has no power to go! The DD batteries are how you ensure you have the energy to make it to your destination.

Examples

Many communities find completed examples a great way to show what driver diagrams can look like, and also the variation between them. A couple of handpicked examples that are relevant to your context or

that resonate with your team can go a long way to make the task seem doable. See the [Appendix](#) for some driver diagram examples to choose from.

One-on-One Coaching

Many communities find it valuable to sit with a coach to refine and improve a driver diagram. Improvement coaches, or anyone with relevant experience, can provide a different perspective, ask prompting questions, and point out strengths and potential weaknesses in an initial theory.

Iteration and Refining

Another approach used in many communities and partnerships is to start with a core group to develop a driver diagram. Then, take the draft diagram to small groups within the community or partnership. This is a great way to collect feedback, make changes and edits, and involve more stakeholders in creating and refining the final product.

Create an Action Plan

In some cases, the development of a driver diagram can include action planning in order to consolidate efforts. Take the time to consider what will be done, by whom, and by when to develop an action plan based on the brainstormed change ideas and strategies from above.

Refine and Update

Remember to continuously return to the driver diagram as your place to record your most successful ideas. The process of testing and experimenting with change ideas and drivers may lead to new ideas and insights, so be sure to incorporate those into your driver diagram.

Advice and Quick Tips

Going Deep – or Not!

Referencing the Model for Improvement³ when teaching driver diagrams can help people broaden their understanding of what lies behind the structure of the driver diagram. It can help people understand that identifying an aim for your driver diagram is a way of answering the first question in the Model for Improvement, i.e., “What are we trying to accomplish?”

Generating ideas for your primary and secondary drivers helps to answer the third question in the model — i.e., “What change can we make that will result in improvement?” The driver diagram can also help to identify measures related to the aim and the drivers so that the group will know whether they are making progress — i.e., answering the second question in the model: “How will we know that a change is an improvement?” The driver diagram, as discussed above, becomes the framework for generating ideas that can be tested using PDSA cycles. The Model for Improvement is really embedded in the process of creating and using a driver diagram.

Use your judgment, however, to determine how much detail about the Model for Improvement you think people need to know as you are teaching driver diagrams. One approach is to look for opportunities to

³ Langley GL, Moen R, Nolan KM, Nolan TW, Norman CL, Provost LP. *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance* (2nd edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers; 2009.

reinforce the questions in the Model for Improvement as the group creates their driver diagram. For example, using the structure of PDSA cycles can be helpful as the group moves on to what ideas they want to try and test. If you do decide to offer a fuller explanation of the Model for Improvement, be sure to allot enough time in your training/facilitation session. An alternative approach is to follow up the driver diagram discussion with an additional session for delving more deeply into the Model for Improvement.

Avoiding Writer's Block

It can be very daunting to stare at an empty driver diagram or a blank page. Encourage folks to write something to start filling it out. It's much easier to refine and improve than to pick the perfect ideas out of thin air. Some of the approaches listed above promote idea generation and can be a good antidote to a blank page.

Our Work Is Too Complex!

Often, in social services and community improvement work, neighborhoods and the “system” can get very complex. Sometimes individuals feel that a linear model doesn't cleanly lend itself to that complexity. While that may be true to a degree, driver diagrams also provide a tool to manage that complexity. They offer a way to find focus in a world with competing priorities.

Technology: Where and How to Save a Driver Diagram

The process of developing a driver diagram can involve as much or as little technology as you and participants are comfortable with. Driver diagrams can be handwritten on paper or entered into a spreadsheet online. Either way, they should be accessible to those involved. To start, it's recommended to use very little technology: this removes any barriers and promotes starting quickly to get something on paper. It can be formatted and developed into a digital/online version using tools from Microsoft (i.e. PowerPoint), Google (i.e. Slides), or a tool like <https://www.draw.io/>.

Share It!

Be sure to bring a copy of your driver diagram when you meet with partners, coalition members, and organizations. The driver diagram can show what you are planning in a single page and will certainly prompt discussion. It can help you point to areas that you're focused on and where others can potentially fit into the work.

Practice

Both teaching and creating driver diagrams take practice. Teaching them can be a daunting task at first, but refining your approach based on what works and who the learners are will help. Remember to embrace failing forward! It gets easier!

Conclusion

We hope this guide is helpful to you as an improvement leader and to your communities as you make plans and take action to improve health, well-being, and equity. This guide was created by communities who participated in 100MLives as SCALE Communities in the spirit of teaching and learning. As you apply the guidance given here and learn from your own experience, we hope that you will share what you are doing and what you have learned with others. Please consider sharing your work in the [100 Million Healthier Lives Change Library](#) on Community Commons.

Glossary

For definitions of commonly used terms in this guide and other publications related to SCALE and 100 Million Healthier Lives, please refer to our [100MLives Glossary of Terms](#).

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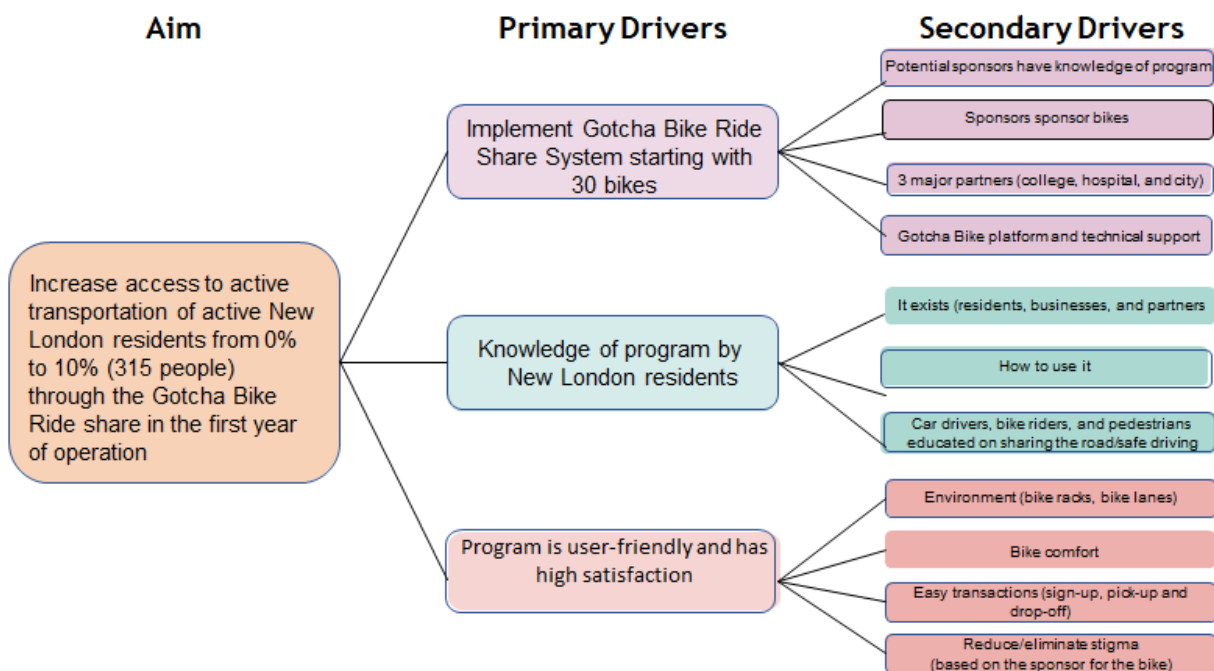
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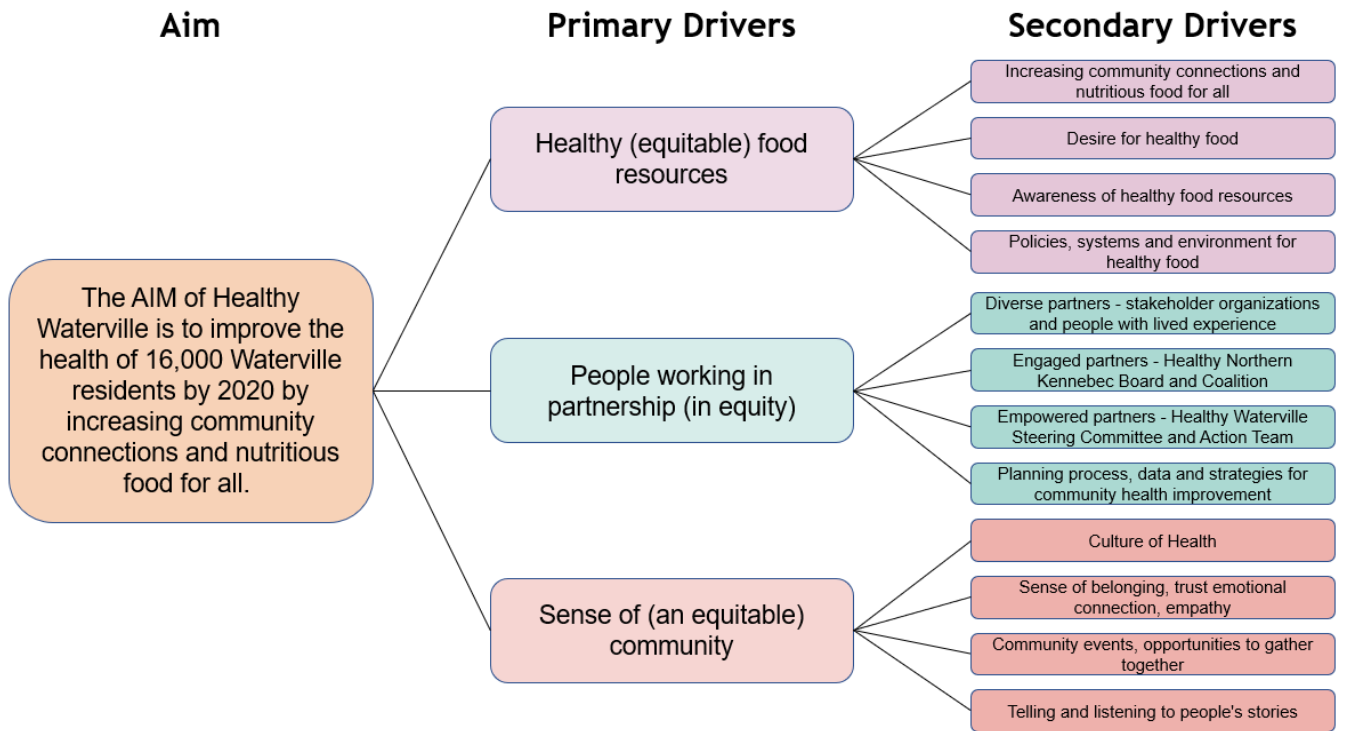
Appendix: Driver Diagram Examples

The following are examples of driver diagrams developed by several SCALE Communities as part of the 100MLives movement. As with all driver diagrams, these examples were created at one point in time, and have since continued to evolve as these communities continue in their efforts to improve health, well-being, and equity.

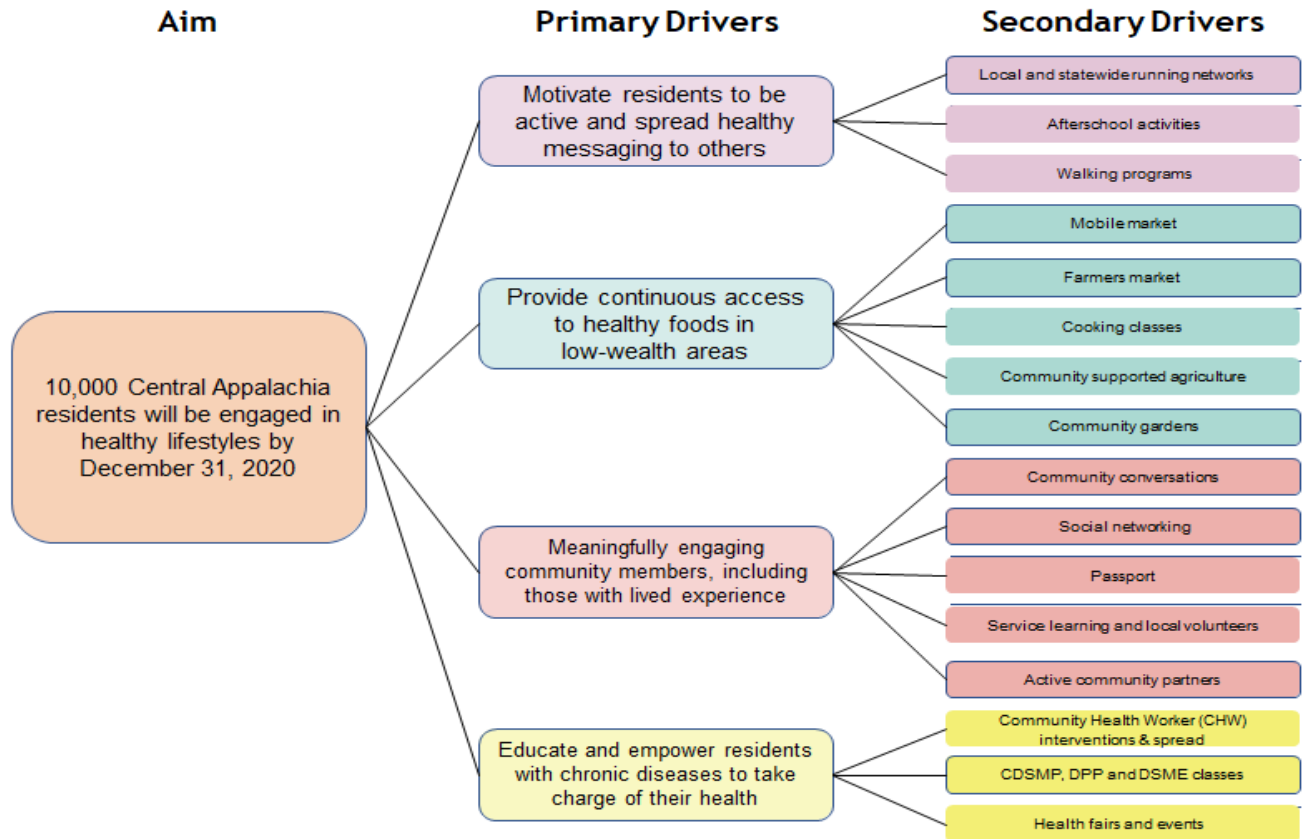
Appendix A: Lake Sunapee, NH Driver Diagram



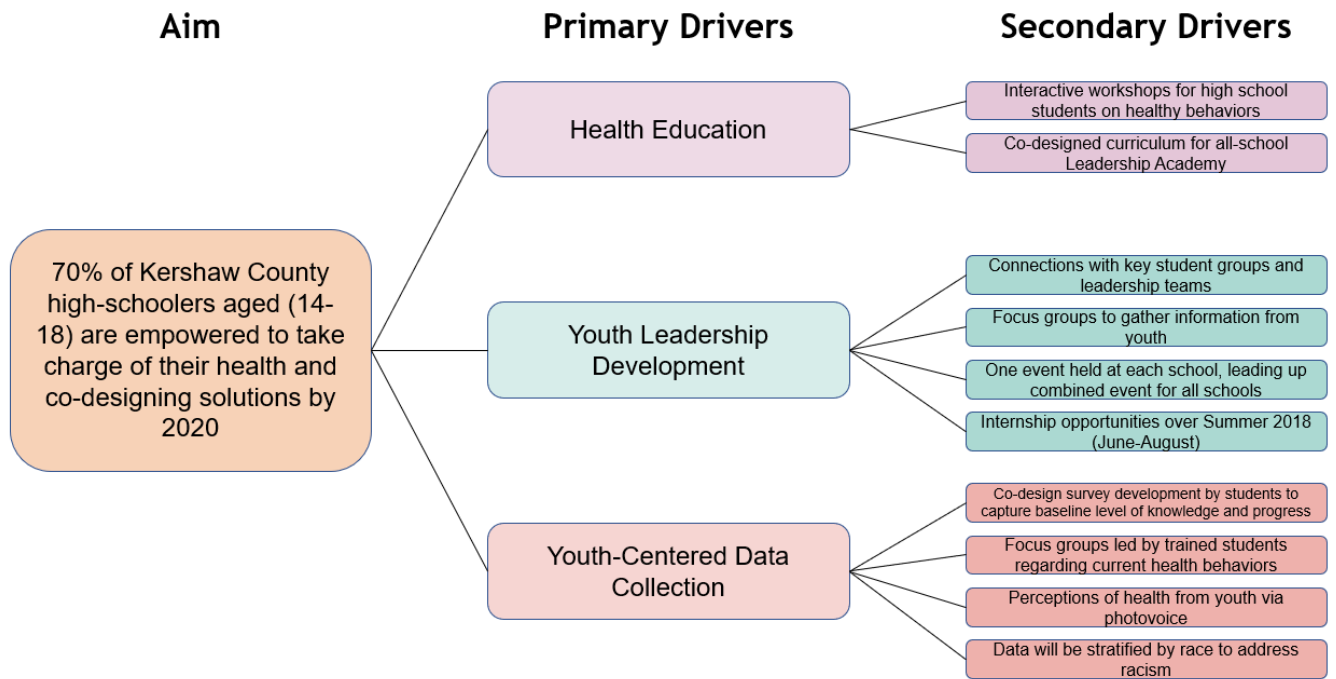
Appendix B: Healthy Waterville, ME Driver Diagram



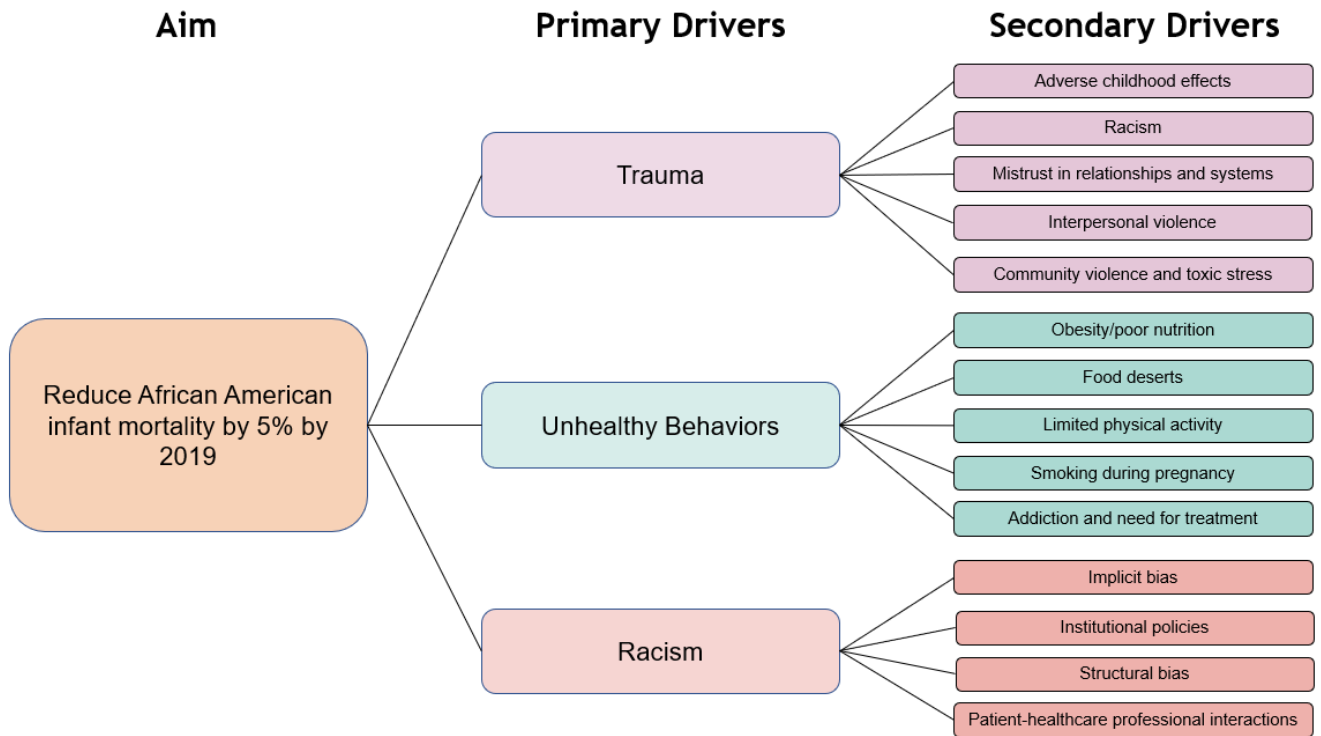
Appendix C: Healthy in the Hills, Williamson, WV Driver Diagram



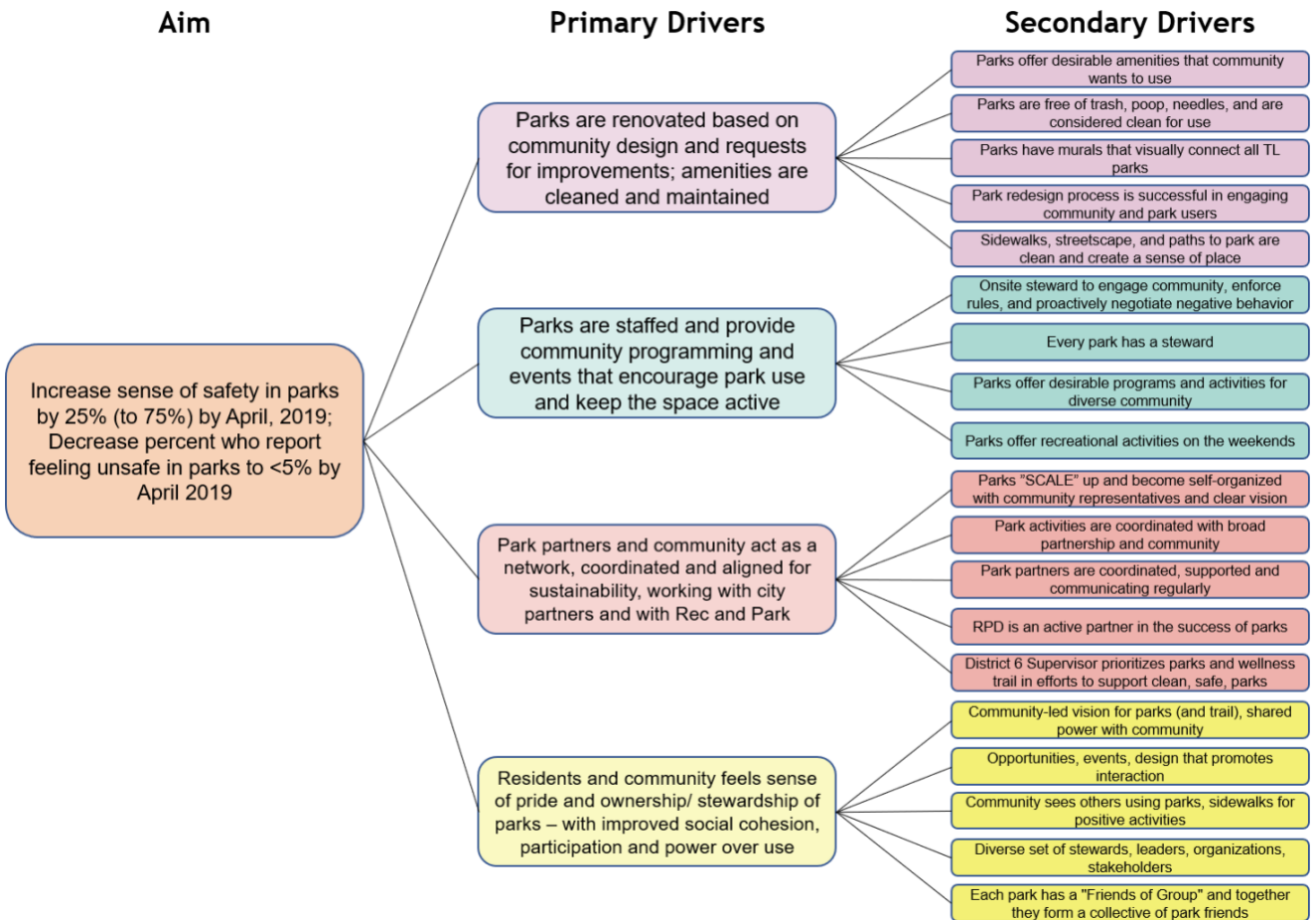
Appendix D: Live Well Kershaw, Kershaw County, SC Driver Diagram



Appendix E: Summit County, Akron, OH Driver Diagram



Appendix F: Tenderloin Health Improvement Partnership, San Francisco, CA Driver Diagram



Appendix G: Women of Skid Row, Los Angeles, CA Driver Diagram

