

# Fresno GROWS (Growing Real Opportunity in West Fresno): A Best Babies Zone

## Final Strategic Framework

May 21, 2020

### A. Background

To address persistent disparities in preterm birth and infant mortality in the African American community of West Fresno, our Fresno GROWS Best Babies Zone (BBZ), holds that racism is a root, structural cause. At the core, **we seek to implement an anti-racism agenda that has the potential to achieve community transformation and improve birth outcomes.** The Zone will prioritize interventions that address a wide range of upstream and downstream social determinants and that improve the care and support of African American women and families across the reproductive life course.

### B. Core Principles and Approach

We uphold that civic engagement and community mobilization are necessary to improve birth outcomes in the African American community of West Fresno—a top down approach is insufficient to achieve community transformation. Thus, **Fresno GROWS will support and sustain an African American-led, community-centered hub at the West Fresno Family Resource Center (WFFRC)**, a 501(c)(3) non-profit that has served residents that live in the Zone since 2001. Its mission is to empower and support the West Fresno community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. Serving more than 5,000 persons annually, WFFRC stands on a long legacy of grassroots advocacy and is trusted source of neighborhood services, making it the ideal host for the community hub, or Center for Civic Engagement (the Center). Supported by the Zone’s anchor institutions, the Center will:

- Sustain an infrastructure to 1) communicate regularly with Fresno GROWS residents; 2) devise a policy and systems change agenda, grounded in research; 3) build the capacity of the West Fresno workforce, and 4) and organize community members to advance the work
- Foster innovation and program improvements informed by community wisdom
- Advocate for interventions across the life course that build upon intergenerational connections and increase social capital in the communities of West Fresno.

To ensure that proposed interventions align with our anti-racism agenda, we will use the following questions to guide the selection of interventions:

1. Does the intervention address racism as a root cause?
  - a. *Long term/Sustainable*: need to be thinking about this from the start, and the intervention, if successful, should have a path to sustainable funding/implementation
  - b. *Systems Change*: focus on policies/systems/environments; there should be a pathway to an upstream solution
  - c. *Precise Impact*: focused efforts to meet the needs of and tailored for the African American community
  - d. *Reparations*: seeks to repair historical injustices
2. Is the intervention strength-based/ asset-based, building on existing or planned resources within the community?
3. Is there a community co-design phase of implementation where the design and/or implementation of the intervention can be driven by community input?

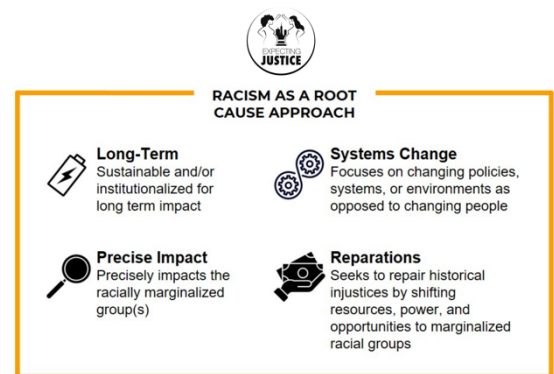


Figure 1: Racism as Root Cause Approach; Malawa, Z, Spellen S, Gaarde, J. San Francisco Dept. of Public Health

**A Hub for Civic Engagement at the West Fresno Family Resource Center**

Community listening sessions conducted in 2019 have revealed several priorities for new interventions. Each of these areas address structural level drivers of high preterm birth and infant mortality in West Fresno’s African American community. These include:

- 1) Increasing economic opportunity through job training and educational attainment
- 2) Advancing environmental justice, including securing more green space in the Zone
- 3) Creating new models of care and support within the Zone that deliver culturally responsive care and support to African American residents

Ultimately, to make real change in these areas, affected community members must be involved to frame the problems and devise the solutions. **While many Fresno organizations are already dedicating resources to increase economic opportunity or improve perinatal care, few have trusted, reliable ways to convene the African American community in West Fresno to gather insights and mobilize community partners to achieve collective impact.** To address this important gap, Fresno GROWS will be a hub for civic engagement to advance its birth equity work in the African American community. This Hub for Civic Engagement (the Hub) will be based in the Zone at the West Fresno Family Resource Center and will create the necessary infrastructure to support community-driven initiatives to improve birth outcomes.

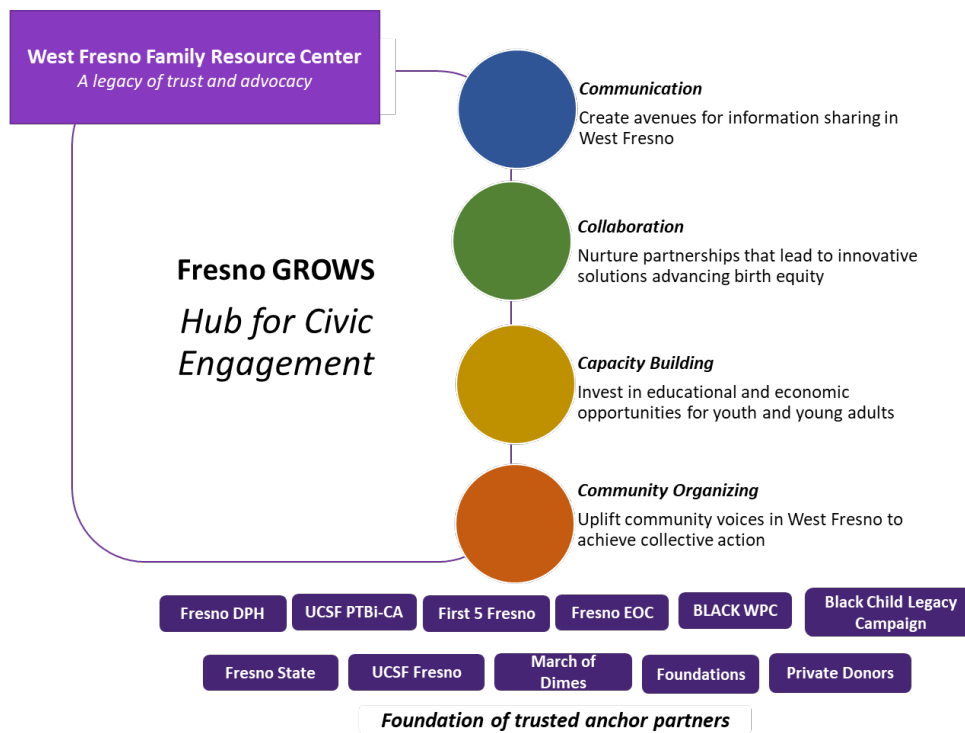


Figure 2: Concept map of Fresno GROWS and its Hub for Civic Engagement

The Hub’s activities will be organized around four key pillars (4C):

**Communication:** Having a strong bi-directional communications platform is critical to the success of Fresno GROWS. During the formative phase of Fresno GROWS, we learned that many community members were unaware of existing resources—a key gap in the way that information is being disseminated. A Fresno GROWS Communications coordinator will maintain the Zone’s brand identity, a website, an active social media presence, and resource repository. The Hub will work with graphic

designers and videographers to create compelling digital and print assets to share Fresno GROWS successes and those of its partners focused on improving the lives of African American residents of the Zone. Fresno GROWS will be able to leverage the joint Fresno DPH/UCSF California Preterm Birth Initiative- supported [Voices For Birth Justice](#) platform which is closely aligned with the goals of the Zone.

**Collaboration:** Community-academic partnership is a hallmark of Fresno GROWS. Community-driven implementation research will develop and test interventions that address Zone priorities and may be advanced by community researchers in partnership with UCSF, Fresno State, UC Merced, and other investigators. This will be instrumental in driving policy-work and improvements in perinatal and post-partum care and support delivered in the Zone. Examples include the Safe Sleep campaign supported by the Black Child Legacy Campaign, fatherhood-focused projects, perinatal wellness programs, as well as novel research programs. If new programs are conceived, a “design thinking” approach will keep the residents at the center of the process. Strong research and evaluation capacity in the Zone will increase competitiveness for external funding, a key to the Zone’s sustainability. A Director for Research and Evaluation will work with partners to spearhead proposals and monitor progress toward agreed-upon metrics of success.

**Capacity Building:** The Hub will prioritize the creation of meaningful paid internships and learning opportunities for students that will fulfill course requirements. These learning opportunities will support the work of the Zone and position interns and fellows for advanced studies or jobs in the community. A new City College campus slated to open in 2023 offers an excellent opportunity to help Fresno shape pathway programs to train the next generation of health care and social service providers who are dedicated to improving the care and support of African American residents of the Zone. An Internship Coordinator will oversee the capacity building work of the Center.

**Community Organizing:** Organized community action is needed to advance policy, structural, and environmental change. As such, the Zone will be charged with identifying community members and training them to participate in civic engagement activities. This provides an excellent opportunity to engage youth and encourage their active involvement in Zone-related work. In addition, a Fresno GROWS community advisory board (CAB) will be formed to provide oversight of the Zone’s activities and offer guidance. A Community Organizing Coordinator will lead a robust community education and canvassing program and serve as the primary liaison to the Fresno GROWS CAB.

### **C. Sustainability**

The UCSF California Preterm Birth Initiative provided catalytic funding for Fresno GROWS in partnership with Fresno DPH which allows the BBZ to capture state matching funds, and First 5 Fresno and Fresno EOC have been key donors supporting community outreach efforts. Sustainability of the Fresno GROWS and of the proposed model require all anchor partners (and new ones, including philanthropy) to contribute resources to ensure the Zone’s success. Sustainable funding will be needed to support the goals of each of the pillars. Anchor partners are also well positioned to leverage their own staff and resources to move the work of the Zone forward (e.g., graphic design, grant writing, costs associated with community convening, etc.).

### **D. Summary**

West Fresno has successfully competed to become one of only a handful of communities around the country to be named a Best Babies Zone. We see the Zone as a vital platform for change to improve birth outcomes for the African American community, and the infrastructure proposed is poised to galvanize our community in new and exciting ways to support its optimal health and wellbeing.