

Policy Analysis to Support Informal Workers in Greater Lawndale

September 10, 2021

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Center for Healthy Work

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Foreword



Richard Wallace

FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EQUITY AND TRANSFORMATION

“ I am the founding executive director of Equity and Transformation (EAT). Our mission is to build social and economic equity for Black informal workers. For years, I worked as a labor organizer and watched intervention after intervention fail to reduce the racial wealth gap or the unemployment gap for Black workers in Chicago. Persistent inequality, fueled by racist policy development, led me to seek answers about how Black people in Chicago were surviving, even in the absence of an essential resource—regular, full-time employment.

According to our *Survival Economies* report, high rates of joblessness result in spotty employment histories, which include working temporary jobs or being hired off the books. When the economy enters a downturn, this underemployment too often becomes unemployment, and one's position in the labor market erodes further. What I found was that Black people face systemic challenges. Their earnings are low. Their work is often criminalized. And as a result, the lives of Black informal workers are inherently at risk.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, even more individuals have been pushed out of work and forced to find alternative sources of income. The basis for this research report stems from the desire to understand how high unemployment rates and increased regulation around home-based businesses affect the Black and Latino population in Greater Lawndale. This question leads us to try to better understand informality and the survival economies that have been created in cities like Chicago. There is a broad understanding of what formally employed workers need in times of crisis, but little or no information about what Black informal workers require.

EAT's mission is to not only identify racial inequities but to right them. Racial inequity is when two or more racial groups are not standing on equal footing. A racist policy is a policy that produces or sustains racial inequity between two racial groups. To address racial inequities, we must undo anti-black racist policies; one of the many racist policies is the home-based business policy. The question that must be answered is whether the home-based business policy produces equitable outcomes for Black people in Chicago. If it isn't building equity and it is creating inequity, then it is a racist policy that must be righted.

I would love to live in a world where all people have equal access to labor and the economy, but we are not there in the U.S., and it's painfully evident in every employment and economics statistic. Until that happens, work must be done to understand how racist policy development is producing or sustaining these inequities and to move that understanding toward concrete solutions that repair Black communities.

Martin Unzueta

ADVISOR, STREET VENDORS ASSOCIATION OF CHICAGO

“ The mission of the Street Vendors Association of Chicago (SVAC) is to support a network of food vendors in order to improve the quality of life as street vendors, focusing on obtaining better jobs and developing economic potential.

Street vendors face challenges including fear of police harassment, excessive fines, and discrimination. To address these concerns and improve our members' economic potential, we have successfully advocated for policy changes including Chicago's legalization of street vending in 2015 and the ability of worker-owned cooperatives to register as business organizations in Illinois.

This project adds an important aspect to these efforts: A partnership with UIC to increase the understanding of best practice policy changes and how they might work in our community. This group's work over the past months has pointed to further policy paths that can ultimately help to improve street vendor health and quality of life in Chicago.



Acknowledgements



Thank you to our community partners, Equity and Transformation and Street Vendors Association of Chicago, for their radical insight and direction on this project. Thank you to all Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Project team members, especially Susan Kaplan, Jamal McPherson, Martin Unzueta, Richard Wallace, Sara Izquierdo, Rolando Favela, Candace Clark, Virgilio Hernández, Leonarda Rosendo, Susan Zoheri-Chopra, and Sylvia González.

Thank you to the rest of our community partners. This policy analysis is the result of years of partnership with North Lawndale and Little Village community organizations and the following individuals:

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About the Project



Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Project

The Greater Lawndale Healthy Work (GLHW) Project, part of the University of Illinois Chicago Center for Healthy Work, is a community-based participatory research project that works in partnership with North Lawndale and Little Village (together forming the Greater Lawndale area) and the UIC School of Public Health. The GLHW Project was formed to better understand how work impacts community health and to identify community solutions to promote worker health.

Center for Healthy Work

The UIC Center for Healthy Work (CHW) is a research and education center established in 2016 to advance the health and wellbeing of workers in Chicago, the state of Illinois, and the nation. Funded by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the Center for Healthy Work aims to identify and promote employment programs, practices, and policies that will improve the health of workers and the communities they live in. The UIC center is one of ten NIOSH Centers of Excellence for Total Worker Health (TWH) that advances knowledge by building the scientific evidence through research and practice.

For more information



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Center for Healthy Work



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Our Partners



Equity and Transformation (EAT)

EAT was founded in 2018 by post-incarcerated Black people from Chicago to uplift the voices and power of Black informal workers in the U.S. The informal economy is the diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs, and workers that are not regulated or protected by the state. The mission of EAT is to build social and economic equity for Black workers engaged in the informal economy. To achieve its mission, EAT builds comprehensive campaigns (community organizing, research, advocacy, and policy development) with Black informal workers that increase economic equity for historically unemployed Black people and dismantle anti-Black racism.

For more information



<https://www.eatchicago.org>



info@eatchicago.org

Street Vendors Association of Chicago (SVAC)

SVAC fights for an inclusive economy by organizing street vendors to build political and economic power without fear of police harassment, excessive fines, and discrimination. SVAC led the campaign to push Chicago's City Council to legalize street vending in 2015. SVAC played a crucial role in the passing of the Limited Worker Cooperative Association Act, which enables worker-owned cooperatives to register as business organizations in Illinois. SVAC provides a sustainable model and structures for an equitable economy and development in communities experiencing racial wealth divides and active disinvestment.

For more information

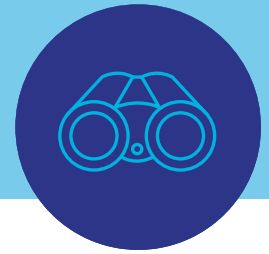


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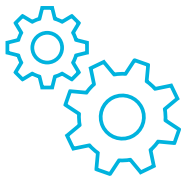


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Executive Summary



Our group, composed of a partnership between university researchers and community organization staff, **undertook a policy analysis** to identify policies that could support informal workers in the Greater Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago.



We started by taking a broad look at policies around the country; when we realized we needed a more narrow target, **we developed criteria** by which to choose a policy on which to focus. Applying those criteria, we decided to concentrate on policies that could make it easier to establish and operate home-based businesses in Greater Lawndale.



We studied a recent ordinance change, spoke with advocates and legislators involved in that change and in this area of effort overall, and continue to hone in on what further policy actions can help informal workers in Greater Lawndale successfully start and grow home-based businesses.



Lessons learned include the critical importance of community members providing input from the beginning, based on their on-the-ground experience; the need to sufficiently narrow the focus of the policy analysis; and the importance of speaking with a range of policymakers and advocates who are involved in the issue, in addition to reviewing online materials.

Background



Through our academic-community partnership, we have engaged in two main phases with our partners: data collection and intervention development. These have informed the policy analysis project that is the subject of this report.

Data collection phase: As a team, we used mixed-methods tools such as surveys, interviews, concept mapping, focus groups, and secondary data analysis to understand how work affects health, characterize what healthy and precarious work looks like, and to inform the development of our community initiatives.

Initiative development phase: We added two worker-center type partners to our project to assist us with informing the development of our community initiatives. With the addition of such critical, on-the-ground voices, we developed a GLHW Roadmap ([see GLHW Roadmap, Appendix A](#)) as a team to guide what our community initiatives would look like.

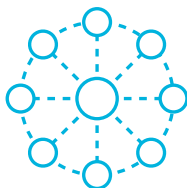
Using our shared understanding of precarious work in Greater Lawndale (GL) from our findings, we identified strategies, goals, and key outcomes in our Roadmap to guide us to collective action at the community level. In the text below, the stars next to the strategies and goals signifies where in the Roadmap we are intervening with our policy report.

GLHW Roadmap Strategies



1

Communicating and messaging on healthy work to make healthy work a shared value



2

Fostering cross-sector collaboration to build networks and partnerships



3

Investing in advocacy and policy enforcement for healthy work



GLHW Roadmap Goals and Key Outcomes

1

Build Power

Shifting perceptions and beliefs related to work and health in GL among community members, workers, employers, policy makers, and youth

KEY OUTCOME:

Developing a shared understanding of gaps in service and resources needed to support HW in GL



2

Build Capacity

Enhancing the ability of systems in GL to collaborate, act and grow to support healthy work

KEY OUTCOME:

Increasing the ability to work with community partners to address historical injustices in access to basic community resources through inclusive community programming



3

Build Equity

Assuring healthy work for all community members in GL

KEY OUTCOME:

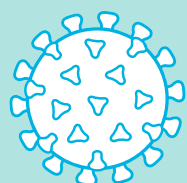
Increasing accountability for local policy makers and leaders to advocate for more healthy jobs



We decided to carry out a policy analysis regarding policies that have potential to improve the health of informal workers in GL, for the following reasons:



Given the high levels of unemployment in GL, and given the results of our surveys, interviews, and other data collection efforts, we know that GL community members are engaged in informal work. We also know that they face major obstacles to making a living via informal work. We know from our previous work that some of the obstacles are created or exacerbated by policies and can potentially be addressed through policy changes.



The COVID-19 pandemic forced many individuals out of work, forcing those to seek other, entrepreneurial means to make a living. Amid the closure of schools and childcare centers, the shortage of childcare services complicated a return to workplace and left many, especially working parents, out of work or with reduced hours as a result of the pandemic (Dickson, et al., 2021).



This policy analysis focus can address the concerns of both the Latinx and African-American communities in Greater Lawndale.

The goal of the policy analysis to support informal workers is to advance policy level change and inform future advocacy efforts around informal workers in GL.

Why Policy Analysis?



Interest in public health policy analysis is growing. Several law schools and schools of public health around the U.S. now have projects that focus on this area. These efforts are based on the recognition that while policies that affect health are a critical type of health data, they are not routinely collected or organized as other data are. A 2016 article in the *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* (Burris, Hitchcock, et al, 2016) notes that government agencies and private organizations create a broad range of policies that affect health – yet “little of this activity is systematically tracked. Even as the rest of the health system is working to build, share, and use a wide range of health and social data, legal information largely remains trapped in text files and pdfs, excluded from the universe of usable data.”

Knowing what public health policies exist, how they were developed, and how they are working in practice can help in identifying those that are most effective in improving public health outcomes. They can also provide information about best practices for agencies and organizations that are exploring public health policies for possible adoption.

Several guidance documents provide roadmaps for these efforts. For example, Drexel University’s public health school developed a policy surveillance methodology for systematically tracking information about public health policies. They emphasize the importance of tracking not only enacted policies, but also preliminary steps that could influence and lead to policy development, such as initiatives and programs.

Additionally, once a policy is enacted, its implementation can be analyzed. For example, are there staff assigned to implement or enforce it? What is the funding level? What about education and outreach about the policy?

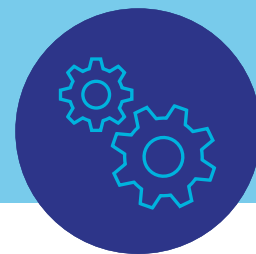
The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information about policy analysis. Its “policy analytical framework” identifies the following key steps:



Our group aimed to follow the general policy analysis guidance outlined above. However, as discussed in further detail below, the GLHW Project policy analysis was not as smooth and streamlined as the CDC’s three-step process, leading to several lessons learned that we will apply in the future.

We carried out our policy analysis process from February to August 2021.

Process



Problem identification

Our first step, problem identification, was relatively straightforward since we had already collected considerable information about this. Data collection previously undertaken by our group found that many workers who live in GL are taken advantage of by employers – for example, through wage theft. Many of the jobs that are available have unpredictable schedules, are dangerous, don't pay enough to live on, or don't offer benefits.

Therefore, many residents turn to the “informal” economy. According to a recent Chicago-focused report, “Working ‘off the books’ as street vendors, childcare providers, auto mechanics, movers, and range of other activities, including participating in the drug trade, growing numbers of African Americans who are unable to find standard employment are relying on the city’s burgeoning survival economies”

(Theodore, 2021). The GLHW Project Community Health Survey from 2018-2019 found that out of 479 respondents, approximately 33% of respondents were paid for their work largely in cash – an indicator of informal work (Rospenda, 2020).

Many challenges are associated with informal work. For example, according to a UIC student research poster, street vendors face a range of health stressors, including concerns about interactions with the police or immigration agencies, toxins, violence, and exposure to weather extremes. They lack the job protections and benefits that are associated with the formal economy, like unemployment or disability insurance. Their income can be unpredictable (Castañeda, 2019).

With a fairly comprehensive understanding of the problem, we turned next to policy analysis.

Policy analysis

1

Building a team

Our policy analysis team began with GLHW Project staff, a research assistant, and GLHW subcommittee council members. Susan Kaplan JD, a UIC faculty member with extensive policy analysis experience, led the process. In order to establish a team representative of the GL area, we prioritized connecting with community-based organizations that were:

- Representative of GL, and;
- Had extensive experience in grassroots advocacy in the informal economy.

We established partnerships with Policy Coordinator Jamal McPherson, Director of Development Candace Clark, and Executive Director Richard Wallace from EAT, and Advisor Martin Unzueta from SVAC. Both organizations have a long history of grassroots work within and outside of GL and advocate for informal workers, contributing invaluable input and guidance during the analysis process. Their knowledge of local and contemporary issues within the informal economy was essential.

Our team met every two to three weeks over the course of the project.

2

Getting started; developing criteria

Initially, we planned to make a decision about either undertaking a deep dive on a few specific issues affecting the health of informal workers in GL, or carrying out a broad analysis of about 30 policies. We planned to:

- Research policies in other localities in order to identify best practices that could serve as a model for GL;

- Research current local policies to understand whether best practice policies have been implemented locally;
- Research any past efforts to develop or implement such policies, and;
- Identify which new policy or policies are priorities for GL.

This information would help us determine what policies to advocate for in the future.

We carried out a broad surveillance of policies – both U.S. and international – to support informal workers. We carried this out both with broad Google searches, and by looking at reports of specific organizations that address these issues. This culminated in a long list of policies to support informal workers, ranging from increasing the number of permits and reducing licensing fees for street vendors, to mandating days off and meal breaks for domestic workers.

At that point, we realized we needed a mechanism to enable us to narrow our focus. The question was, how best to do that?

At our next meeting, we discussed criteria to narrow our focus. The resulting table, entitled “Criteria for prioritizing potential policies to support informal workers in Greater Lawndale,” is included as [Appendix B](#) to this report. It identified the following criteria:

- Whether the potential policy change aligns with the GLHW Project’s “Building the Road Map to Healthy Work in Our Neighborhoods”
- Whether the potential policy change is feasible. This has two parts:
 - Examples of other jurisdictions where the policy change has been made
 - The feasibility of the GLHW Project accomplishing this policy change
- The impacts of this policy change on equity
 - within GL
 - within Chicago
- The (projected) economic impacts of the policy

3

Applying the criteria

The criteria greatly assisted us to narrow our policy focus. For example, federal tax policy was identified as a very important policy factor, but one that was beyond the ability of our group to address, short of national level partnerships with similar organizations.

In focusing in on a topic that was within our expertise and reach to address, knowledge of local important and contemporary issues within the informal economy was essential. Community partners EAT and SVAC were our resident experts in this area, and after multiple discussion sessions and rounds of problem identification, we settled our focus on recent changes to a home-based business (HBB) ordinance, which falls under the City of Chicago’s regulated business licensure code: Home Occupation (4-6-270).

Our community partners noted that Latinxs in GL are more likely to be street vendors, while African-

Americans in GL are more likely to operate as informal home-based businesses. We discussed that impediments to operating HBBs have equity impacts on both groups, since Latinx community members who operate pushcarts or food trucks often face obstacles to indoor preparation of the food. A policy change in this area could have both equity and economic benefits for both groups within GL. Additionally, with the growth in HBBs during Covid, this issue was timely.

While we had looked at the HBB ordinance before, it had previously been only one item on a long list of policy barriers. Now we looked at it carefully, section by section and line by line. We identified ways in which it could pose challenges for informal workers and discussed ways it could be improved. Then we noticed that the ordinance had, in fact, been revised in April 2021, and we began working to understand those changes.

4

Understanding the HBB ordinance – and remaining gaps

We aimed to understand the ordinance changes by researching online documents, including City Council meeting minutes and news articles. We read Council minutes to gather context about ordinance amendments and to identify ordinance sponsors and authors.

We realized that it was critical to talk with key officials and advocates who were involved in the ordinance changes. Based on the online research,

we developed a list of people to speak with and divided it among our group. These included key alders, as well as staff of organizations that news articles identified as being involved with the April 2021 revised ordinance – which had initially been proposed in January 2021 and then changed prior to final adoption.

We reached out to and spoke with these contacts in the early part of summer 2021. They included four alders; a university contact; and a non-profit contact.

Findings



Findings/identification of Priority Policies

As described above, our group decided to focus on Chicago's HBB ordinance, which in its original form had been interpreted by stakeholders as restrictive and posing obstacles to development of HBBs. The April 2021 revised ordinance aimed to address these concerns. The new ordinance includes these changes:

As a group, we considered the likely impact of the amendment ordinance given the priorities and necessities of the GL neighborhood, with its high hardship index and unemployment rates. While the current amendment ordinance was a step in the right direction, our team saw the potential to continue identifying areas of improvement within the HBB ordinance as a pathway to increase wealth generation and access to healthy jobs.

For example, the HBB still prohibits or restricts many activities in which GL community members are involved, such as:

- Nail and hair services;
- Catering and some other food-related businesses, and;
- Repairing or painting of motorized vehicles, trailers, boats, and lawn equipment.

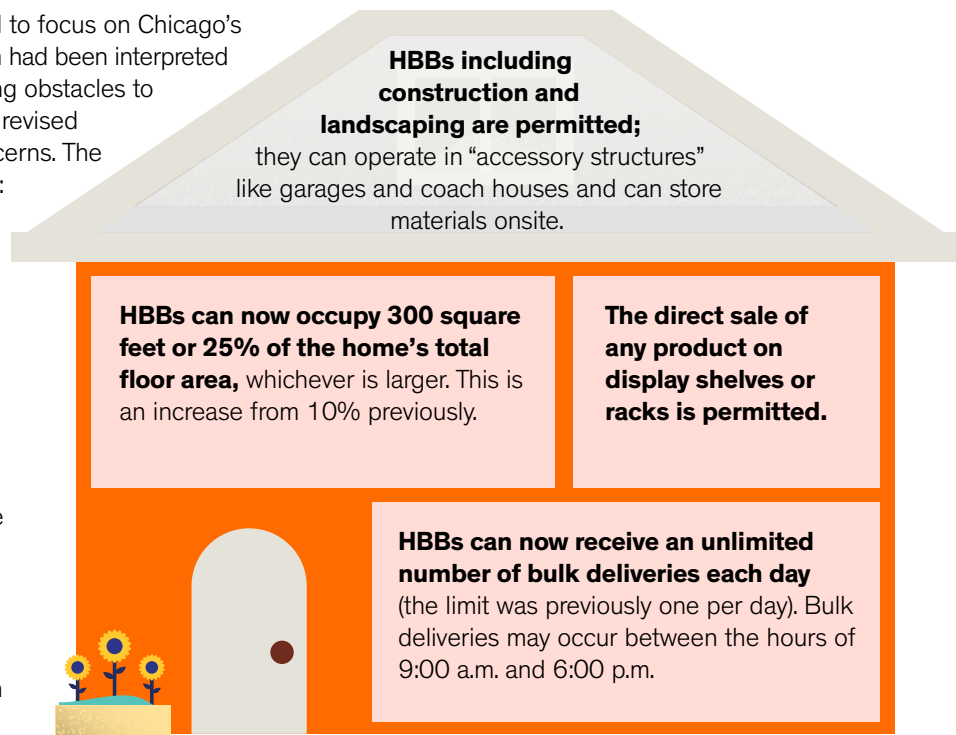
Our questions about the revised ordinance included the following:

The HBB ordinance revisions were meant to “primarily help minority owned and female owned businesses in Chicago,” according to ordinance sponsor Alderman Gilbert Villegas. A number of news articles have noted the growth of small businesses in Black communities during the pandemic. Since we can expect that some of the remaining HBB restrictions, such as those on home-based nail and hair services, will disproportionately affect the Black and Latinx communities in Chicago, given their higher levels of participation in the informal economy, what would it mean to view these restrictions through a racial equity lens?

What would it mean to even further view potential policy changes in the context of reparations to the African-American community? This question is increasingly a topic of discussion nationally since Evanston, IL became the first municipality in the country to develop a slavery reparations plan.

What is the interplay of housing types and HBBs? For example, what about apartment leases or condominium agreements – do they restrict HBBs, and if so, what is their impact and how can they be addressed? What about those living in public or affordable housing – do they face restrictions on HBBs or raise related concerns? If so, how could they be addressed?

We also considered the number of entrepreneurs who would be impacted by the HBB ordinance. We engaged in a mapping exercise in an effort to determine the number of HBBs in GL. The City of Chicago Data Portal provides a



comprehensive listing in CSV file form of licensed businesses. The CSV file was converted into a shapefile which created a visualization of the locations of businesses in GL in ArcMap. The group looked at businesses that were in areas zoned as residential and not on major roads, as this would suggest that these may be HBBs. A hotspot map was then created to identify concentrations of businesses. The resulting map, entitled “Map of Businesses in Greater Lawndale Residential Zones Using ArcMap,” is included as [Appendix C](#) to this report. More research and outreach is necessary to explore this map-based information and to determine how to assess which of the businesses identified are HBBs.

We would also like to better understand the public health reasons for the HBB restrictions. For example, we understand from stakeholder conversations that one concern in terms of HBBs is that residential establishments must maintain quiet and privacy. We would like to further explore potential options for how public health protections can be maintained while also not unduly limiting HBBs in GL.

Therefore, our next steps include exploring the following questions and related activities:

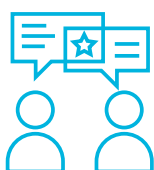


- **How can further HBB changes improve the situations of the Black and Latinx communities in GL?** How can these issues be viewed and analyzed through a racial equity lens or even a reparations lens? What can Evanston’s reparation program and other existing programs and policies tell us about what this might look like in GL?
- **Are there restrictions on whether people with criminal records can operate HBBs?** What is the interplay of these two issues, if any?
- **How does type of housing and type of lease or condominium agreement relate to the ability of GL residents to establish and operate HBBs?**
- We will undertake business and data mapping to understand the current locations of HBBs, in order to better understand the size and location of these establishments and their needs.
How could the results of this exercise inform HBB priorities for policy change?
- **What are the City’s health and safety concerns that underlie continuing limits on HBBs?**
- **How can future investment by the City prompt the transition of HBBs into brick-and-mortar establishments** - for example, exploring the potential role of small business incubators in addressing some of the obstacles to HBBs in GL?

Lessons Learned



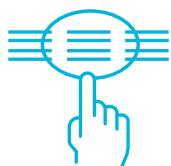
The process in hindsight was not as streamlined or linear as we had expected. This resulted in lessons learned that can be applied in the future:



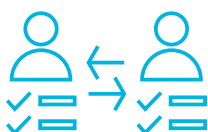
Our group's focus became clearer once representatives of EAT and SVAC became regularly involved. They had an understanding of the experiences of GL residents and workers that was critical in helping our group knowledgeably move forward. This reinforces what we already know – **the importance of involving those with on-the-ground experience from the start.**



Identify a sufficiently narrow focus. We started with a broad focus – identifying policies to support informal workers in GL. This was too broad, and we undertook a process of narrowing it down by developing and applying criteria to guide our decision-making.



The end goal of our policy analysis is to decide what policy we want to advocate for, even if we don't know exactly what that will involve. **Aim to identify broad goals – not necessarily come up with concrete solutions.**



Our process was not rigidly defined from the beginning as some policy analyses processes are defined. Ours was an iterative process that involved many meetings with our external partners to identify the direction of the policy analysis.



There were levels of policies that we didn't consider but that may be significant, such as residential lease agreements that can determine whether someone living in an apartment or condo building is allowed to operate a HBB in their residence. Both public sector and private sector policies may be important.

Template for Future Policy Analyses



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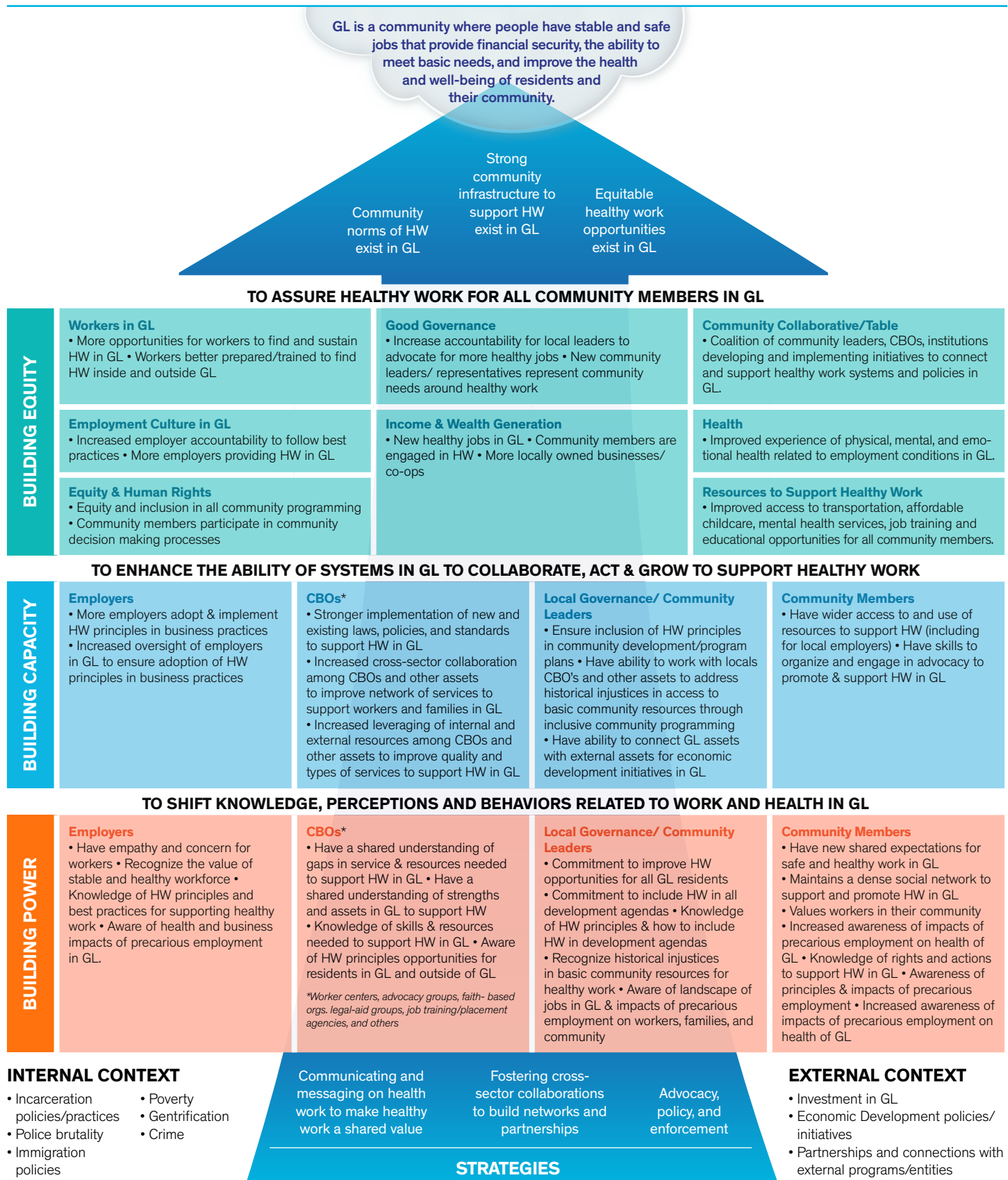
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Appendices

Appendix A: Roadmap



Appendix B:

Criteria for Prioritizing Potential Policies to Support Informal Workers in Greater Lawndale

NEED/BARRIER	MATCH UP WITH ROAD MAP?	FEASIBILITY		IMPACTS: EQUITY		IMPACTS: ECONOMIC
		Examples of other jurisdictions where this has been done	How feasible for GL to accomplish	Within GL	Within Chicago	
STREET VENDORS						
The City of Chicago prohibits food trucks from operating within 200 feet of brick-and-mortar restaurants, known as a "proximity" ban.	More opportunities for workers to find and sustain HW in GL	Food truck location. Washington, DC proposed law would create formalized zones for sidewalk sellers. Includes a specific zone with 6 vending spaces for 57 vendors. Creates two licenses - one for an individual vendor, another that can be obtained by non-profits and cooperatives that manage sidewalk sellers.				
In Chicago, getting a permit is complicated – it is impossible for one person to have a food truck and must cook and cut food in kitchen with license. Fines are high. Vendors get hassled by police.		Food trucks – permits and enforcement. Jan 2021 NYC law aims to give vendors entree into the formal economy. Provisions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• issuing more permits• reducing the cost of permits• establishing a new office to coordinate enforcement by city agencies, including health and sanitation; police dept will no longer oversee enforcement. LA does not limit the number of food truck permits.				
A 193 Chicago ordinance prohibits selling flowers on the street.		Flower sellers. Examples: Santa Rosa, CA allows flower sellers to set up carts in certain spots as long as they obtain a vendor permit; to sell flowers outdoors in Bakersfield, CA, a business tax certificate is \$30 and a transit outdoor permit is \$29.				
HOME-BASED BUSINESSES						
Chicago does not allow home-based occupations for personal services such as hair or nails.		Home salons. No best practice policies identified. Florida allows, but requires separate bathroom and separate entrance.				
Illinois has rules for "home kitchen operations" that allow people to sell homemade food directly to consumers. But the law applies only to jurisdictions that opt in and adopt their own ordinances; it appears that Chicago has not. Other restrictions include monthly gross sales limit of \$1,000, and can sell only baked goods and fruit pies.		Home kitchen operations. The Institute of Justice has developed a model law, the "Model Food Freedom Act" It allows the unrestricted sale of "not potentially hazardous foods" (shelf stable and don't require refrigeration). It allows the sale of some foods classified as "potentially hazardous homemade foods"; to address health and safety concerns, the producer must sell such foods directly to the consumer and deliver the foods to the consumer in person.				
BAN The BOX						
Continued discrimination against those with records		Proactive policies/programs to encourage hiring from the neighborhood				

