From Policy to Possibility:
A Framework for Strengthening Ecosystems to Deliver Community Benefits and Build Community Power

Designed for philanthropy, government agencies, and practitioners, this document translates the longer report's lessons into a practical framework to turn public investment into tangible community benefits, while also translating that success into greater power to shape what comes next.

The longer report and this framework draw on lessons from BuildUS, a three-year, pooled philanthropic fund created in 2023 to help leverage the landmark Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (BIL), the CHIPS and Science Act (CHIPS), and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) by investing in the community and worker capacity, networks, and engagement needed to accelerate their implementation. Our experience reinforced a central thesis of our work: equitable implementation can do two things at once—deliver tangible results for multi-racial working-class communities and strengthen their power to shape future decisions and investments. Because inequitable outcomes are often embedded in the systems and structures that shape public investment, equity requires addressing not only what gets built and who benefits, but also how those systems work and who has the power to shape them.

The framework focuses on nine interconnected implementation capacities, outlined on the following page and covered in more detail in the longer report. When these capacities are present, they help communities translate public investment into economic and climate benefits, while building power to shape future opportunities and broader change. As a *working tool*, we encourage users to adapt it based on their own knowledge, experience, and local context.

How to Use the Framework

Use this framework to identify capacity strengths and gaps in an implementation ecosystem, as well as opportunities for investment, coordination, and partnership. Assess each dimension separately, although they inherently intersect.

Assess the ecosystem, not individual organizations. No single organization is expected to hold every capacity. The key question is whether needed capacities are present, adequately resourced, connected, and accessible to the communities and projects that need them.

Consider the ecosystem's stage of development. Capacities develop over time, and may range from emerging or informal, to being actively built, to well-established and durable. The bullets under each question generally describe capacities that are relatively robust and mature; use them to surface strengths and areas for development.

Treat gaps as investment opportunities and growth areas. Missing or underdeveloped capacities can point to where additional resources, relationships, expertise, or infrastructure are needed.

Nurture and protect mature ecosystems to expand impact. Mature ecosystems still require support to sustain results, deepen community power and public legitimacy, and create opportunities for greater scale and systems change.

Use this framework at different times. Funders, public agencies, and practitioners can use the framework when entering a place or issue, developing a strategy, or revisiting an existing ecosystem as conditions change.

Recognize that policy conditions differ by place. These conditions shape what an ecosystem can assemble and accomplish; this tool largely does not assess those enabling conditions.

This framework builds on the analysis and lessons in the accompanying report, *From Policy to Possibility: Strategies and Case Studies for Building Ecosystems That Deliver Community Benefits and Build Community Power*. The key takeaways and ecosystem capacities below provide the foundation for the framework that follows. To better understand the connection points that lead to stronger outcomes for working people and communities, we encourage readers to review the full report.

Key Report Takeaways

Implementation of BIL, CHIPS, and IRA is still unfolding.

Implementation ecosystems require sustained support.

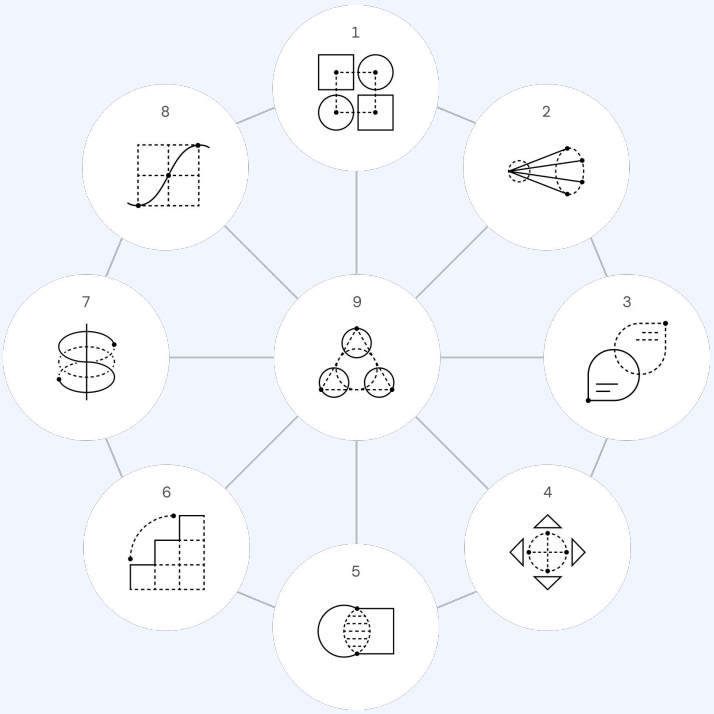
The capacities and relationships built through implementation are delivering tangible results.

Implementation that connects community power and project development expertise is vital civic infrastructure.

Ongoing public investments, including at the state and local level, create regular opportunities to flex implementation muscle.

Ecosystem Capacities

1	Organizing Infrastructure and Community Engagement
2	Advocacy
3	Communications
4	Technical Assistance, Navigation, and Project Development
5	Government–Community Partnerships
6	Workforce Development
7	Capital and Financing
8	Research and Data Tracking
9	Ecosystem Builders



1 Is the ecosystem **connected and aligned?**

- Strong working relationships across sectors and capacities that go beyond a single organizational representative.
- Written agreements between organizations or similar structures that define roles, responsibilities, decision-making, as well as accountability mechanisms.
- Dedicated coordination capacity, including an ecosystem builder[1] or intermediary, regular touchpoints, shared tools, and mechanisms for resolving problems.
- Community-government and labor-community partnerships that connect institutional authority, support cross-agency coordination, and combine implementation expertise with community and worker lived experience and knowledge.
- Shared goals and narrative alignment around what implementation is intended to accomplish, with different partners able to adapt strategies and messages for their constituencies.
- Working relationships that go beyond individual projects to enable peer learning, resource sharing, replication, and rapid access to specialized expertise.

2 Is the ecosystem **ready to deliver and communicate?**

- Full-lifecycle technical assistance and project-development capacity, from project conception and funding through implementation, operations, maintenance, and stewardship.
- Trusted navigators and community-based delivery partners that make support accessible and provide multiple entry points for communities with different levels of readiness.
- Accessible capital and financial expertise, including capital structuring, bridge and concessionary financing, shared procurement, financial modeling, and project bundling.
- Legal, regulatory, compliance, and government capacity to navigate requirements, manage risk, coordinate agencies, and move projects through public processes.
- Workforce systems anchored by organizations trusted by communities that connect workers to quality jobs and provide the recruitment, training, placement, retention, and supports needed to reach and serve diverse communities.
- Communications planned alongside implementation, including outreach mechanisms, story collection, and trusted messengers that can make tangible benefits visible.
- Shared tools and infrastructure that make delivery easier and scalable, including digital tools with human support and trusted hubs that broker expertise, relationships, capital, and replication.

1. Ecosystem builders are organizations that intentionally connect, coordinate, and strengthen the capabilities needed for successful implementation. See section nine in the longer report for more detail.

3 Is the ecosystem **representative and positioned to build power?**

- Organizing and base-building groups (e.g., labor unions, tenant unions, community organizing groups) that organize within historically disinvested communities and have leadership that is representative of and accountable to those constituencies.
- Community-labor coalition agreements or practices that support the groups in operating as co-designers, strategy partners, and decision-makers.
- Advocacy skills and access to identify consequential decision points, develop actionable proposals, and influence government and industry decisions.
- Formal mechanisms for community and worker authority in government and industry projects, such as community and worker representation on governing bodies, shared governance, and other structures that shift decision-making power.
- Mechanisms for community control over economic value, including ownership, local revenue retention, and other approaches that allow communities to capture lasting benefits from investment.
- Organized constituencies and negotiating capacity that position communities and workers to exercise leverage, negotiate concrete commitments (e.g., community benefits agreements, labor and procurement standards), and hold decision-makers accountable.
- Narrative and community storytelling capacity, so workers and residents are supported with training, coaching, editorial assistance, and agency over their stories to define what successful implementation means, communicate tangible impacts, and shape the public narrative.

4 Is the ecosystem **adaptive, learning, and publicly responsive?**

- Publicly accessible and timely implementation-related data tracking infrastructure.
- Shared measures of success along with processes for continuous feedback and learning.
- Research and evaluation designed for action, including community-informed research, real-time evaluation, and peer learning and synthesis across projects and places.
- Early-warning and defensive capacity, including legal, regulatory, funding, governance, and project-defense infrastructure that identifies internal and external risks/threats before they become crises.
- Adaptive resources and decision-making, including flexible grants, bridge funding, contingency planning, and the ability to redirect strategy as conditions change.
- Responsive communications capacity to explain changing conditions, counter misinformation, communicate setbacks, and keep communities and partners informed.
- Preservation and transfer of knowledge, including data, guidance, stories, lessons, and institutional memory that can survive organizational and political transitions.

5 Is the ecosystem **durable and publicly legitimate?**

- Capacity and relationships that persist beyond individual projects or funding cycles, rather than being rebuilt for each new opportunity.
- Successful practices that become standard ways of working; commitments embedded in budgets, policies, procurement, contracts, and governance structures that continue to be upheld.
- Community and worker gains that endure beyond individual projects, including stronger leadership and organizations, greater authority, and economic benefits that are sustained and applied to future work.
- Public visibility and understanding of tangible benefits from implementation, connected to the projects, policies, and public investments that produced them.
- Positive experiences of implementation that translate into support for continued or expanded action, reflected in increased community participation, demand for similar projects, or support for local champions.
- An ecosystem that builds on successful implementation to advance new projects, replicate effective approaches, and shape future public investments and decisions.