

Livability Lab: A Community-Driven 100-Day Challenge

At the heart of the Livability Lab is a shared **Vision**—a commitment to fostering a healthier, more thriving community. This vision is shaped by the voices of community members and driven by data gathered from hundreds of surveys, focus groups, and both local and national reports.

Surrounding this vision are the **Livability Elements**—key areas identified by the community as essential for well-being and stability. These elements represent the priorities that must be addressed to improve overall Livability and ensure that those most in need have access to meaningful opportunities and resources.

The foundation of the Livability Lab is **community voice and empowerment**, which guide collective action. This yearly event is more than a plan; it is action, it is a movement led by those who understand the challenges firsthand and are committed to making real, lasting change. Through the 100-Day Challenge, we translate data into action, leveraging local insights and partnerships to implement solutions that create tangible impact.

By focusing on the areas that matter most and engaging the community at every level, the Livability Lab fosters innovation, accountability, and collaboration—ensuring that Livability is not just a concept, but a lived reality for all.

Lab 1.0

TEAM 1 & 2 Neighborhood Association Council & Partnership Charter

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

Increase resident voice in local decision-making through neighborhood associations and establish

a Muskegon Heights Neighborhood Council. Develop a Resident Partnership Charter to improve partnerships between residents and local organizations.

What did we accomplish?

- Met with neighborhood leaders; creation of Crescent and West Side Neighborhood Associations.
- Obtained neighborhood and council organization information from other cities.
- Drafted Neighborhood Council Partnership Standards.

TEAM 3 Muskegon Heights Youth Initiative

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

Create a Mentorship Network to increase youth academic and cultural leadership skills.

What did we accomplish?

- Held focus group sessions with youth to determine how our youth initiative should be structured.
- Planning an open house in January to recruit mentor or community leaders to be a part of our mentorship network (Muskegon Heights Youth Initiative).
- Designed a one-pager, flyer, logo, and Facebook page for the mentorship network.
- Determined the demographic of youth (grades 6-9) our network should target.

TEAM 4 Aligning Economic Opportunity Resources and Supports

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- To align economic resources and supports with the articulated needs of residents living in Muskegon Heights. This objective initially targeted the CHIR's Resilience Zone where resident interviews found that the work of local non-profits and employers must be better aligned to accelerate community and individual well-being.

What did we accomplish?

- To better identify specific barriers and opportunities to individual success, the Team reviewed data from the Mercy Health Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and Social Determinants of Health data shared by the Livability Lab. Interviews were also conducted with two regional organizations - Black Wall Street and Muskegon Young Black Professionals. These interviews solicited input and recommendations for change. Examples offered included sponsoring "listening nights" where local entrepreneurs can learn from business leaders about the struggles of starting a business, toolbox items, and how experiencing failure can turn into a learning opportunity.
- Based upon this input along with review of source material and the identification of root cause barriers, the Economic Opportunity Team believes it now has a much greater understanding of structural impediments to resident economic success.

TEAM 5 Coordinating Local Food Advocacy and Access Efforts

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Organize and mobilize existing food efforts in Muskegon County. Determine the needs of the Muskegon County Food System and help create access and education for good food for everyone. Create a one-stop place for resources, policies, questions, and projects.

What did we accomplish?

- Created a governance structure for the Muskegon Food Alliance, submitted for 501c3 non-profit status.
- Had discussions with potential organizations to foster the growth of the Alliance.
- Created structure of membership and sub-committee working groups: Healthy and Local, Green and Fair, Affordable and Accessible.
- Created a membership database that will continue to be updated, held the first kickoff meeting and board meeting, membership list expanded to over 150 members.
- Holding community convening event on January 29th.
- Working with MCC (college) students to develop logo and marketing materials.

TEAM 6 Strengthening Childcare Opportunities

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Create a cross-sector community team to address the community-wide challenges of affordable childcare in Muskegon County. Develop a business plan for a new childcare center.

What did we accomplish?

- Identified a critical need for childcare, and current challenges and a deficit of resources to address it.
- Childcare Action Team has been formed as a subcommittee of the Great Start Collaborative, to increase alignment and coordination with all birth to kindergarten efforts in the community.
- Childcare development coordinator, Kathy Sayles, was hired by United Way and will continue to drive the team's work.
- Learned about the process of designing and starting a childcare center from LARA staff and another recently opened community based childcare center.
- Researched shared services models and reviewed recent needs assessments to identify potential services to be offered locally.
- Identified likely location to host childcare center and developed business plan.

TEAM 7 Improving Intergenerational Literacy

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Create the conditions for initial, sustainable and dramatic improvements in the literacy of all people, birth through adulthood, who live in Muskegon County through the development of a Literacy Coalition.

What did we accomplish?

- Convened over 100 community members from diverse sectors to discuss newly collected data from both clients and agencies and review Read Muskegon's role as the convening agency for the coalition.
- Formed the Muskegon County Literacy Collaborative compiled of cross-sector membership from individuals/organizations who all face the barriers of literacy.
- Formed and convened the first two Action Teams: Public Awareness and Integrated Continuum of Services.
- Solidified the collaborative's mission and vision statement:
 - o Mission - The mission of the Muskegon County Literacy Collaborative is to identify, convene, align and build capacity with partners who improve the lives of individuals, children and families of Muskegon County to radically raise literacy levels.
 - o Vision - We envision a thriving, healthy, safe Muskegon County where low literacy barriers are overcome, enabling children to enter Kindergarten ready to learn, students to be successful in school, and adults to be prepared for post-secondary success and able to achieve a stable and enriched life.

TEAM 8 Assess Housing Stock/Needs To Identify And Address Gaps

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Assess the current housing stock to identify the number and type of housing actually needed in Muskegon County to end homelessness. Create maps and visual presentations to tell the story.

What did we accomplish?

- Identified available housing and types and found gaps.
- Identified the # of homeless students.
- Create maps and visual aids to share information.
- Created a list of all the meeting times and locations of local government units (upload on Community Encompass website and available for sharing).

TEAM 9 Increase Financial Literacy to Promote Homeownership

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Develop the network of individuals and organizations that will form the foundation of support/training operations concerning financial literacy and home maintenance. The intention is to put people on the path to financial sustainability and obtaining/maintaining homeownership.

What did we accomplish?

- We convened representatives from housing, financial institutions, local landlords and housing advocacy groups. We collected local information on current resources that address financial literacy. We found that consumers are often unaware of resources.

TEAM 10 Identify, Promote, and Support Minority-Owned Businesses

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

Identify, Connect and Support Minority-Owned Businesses throughout Muskegon County.

Overview of Initial Project & Goals:

- Create a complete list of minority-owned businesses.
- Identify ways to connect minority-owned businesses with resources and with others.
- Promote minority-owned businesses in the community.
- Connect with aligned partners and organizations to refine and strengthen the work.

What did we accomplish?

- Began with an initial survey and outreach to local organizations. Our initial list was over 600 businesses that included people of color, women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities. After further discussion with the group, we decided to focus on specific minority businesses owned by people of color. The final list ended up with 160 businesses.
- We surveyed the businesses to identify ways to support them. We had about 14 businesses respond.
- We connected with aligned partners and organizations to refine and strengthen their work.

TEAM 11 Foster Unity and Literacy with a New Reading Buddy Program

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Investigate the need for reading buddy volunteers in afterschool and early care programs.
- Recruit participation from interested high school student groups.
- Design a Reading Buddy Program that provides more read-aloud opportunities for young children,

meets community needs for volunteers AND fosters unity and relationships among students across

school districts.

What did we accomplish?

- Engaged a diverse group of student leaders.
- Identified after school sites for reading buddy volunteers.
- Involved leadership from other organizations including Pathfinders, Rotary, Muskegon Heights Academy, MAISD, United Way.
- Trained 17 students so that they can train their peers and be the first set of volunteers.
- Sent 6 volunteers to 3 sites (Paula Addison's Home Day Care, Nelson Elementary Afterschool Impact Club, and Kingdom Embassy Homework Club) for a Pilot Volunteer Week--December 13-19.
- Designed logo and identified United Way as a likely home for this initiative long term.

TEAM 12 Understand And Address Local Workforce Development Gaps

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

Identify and Address gaps in workforce development and have an implementation plan by January of 2020.

What did we accomplish?

- Took inventory of existing workforce development programs and identified local job seeking resources in Muskegon.
- Some root causes are still unknown (mental health, substance use, hidden job requirements).

TEAM 13 Create Affordable Transit with Wheels to Work program

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

• Create affordable transit by engaging local businesses in the Wheels to Work program, contact businesses and demonstrate value to get their buy-in to the program. Bring program to Muskegon where

employees experience a barrier to work due to transportation issues; make transportation to and from work available through Wheels to Work 24/7 and 365 days a year.

What did we accomplish?

- Accomplished our goal of bringing Wheels to Work to Muskegon workers. On December 16th, the Muskegon hub launched and took its first ride! Our team recruited Tyson Foods and made

contact with potential/future businesses. Hired two local Muskegon drivers and are holding a bi-weekly hiring event in Muskegon will hire a minimum of six drivers and a site supervisor.

TEAM 14 Prenatal Support

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Increase access and awareness to prenatal care.

What did we accomplish?

- By distributing a community survey, we learned about what barriers mothers face when accessing prenatal care. Learned more about what prenatal services are available in Muskegon, and our team worked with provider offices to get a better insight of what barriers their patients face.

TEAM 15 Create a Safe Space for Youth in Muskegon Heights

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- To create a safe space for kids at Muskegon Heights Academy (High School).

What did we accomplish?

- Worked to determine what “safe space” meant: what we viewed versus how the students viewed it.
- Worked to gather input from the students by going into the school and conducting focus groups.
- Worked to identify areas where there could possibly be a duplication of efforts.
- Brought in other human assets that would be helpful in reaching the stated goal.

TEAM 16 Increase Employment Opportunities via Expungement

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Create a public event that would provide an opportunity for individuals to have their convictions set aside with support along the many steps of the process. A longer-term goal was the creation of an expungement court for Muskegon County.
- Increase awareness of the impact a person’s criminal history has on increasing their equity i.e. wages, housing, well-being. Increase awareness of what the expungement process requires for individuals needing expungement, and for those human service agencies that support them.
- Examining Root Causes: The team recognizes there are many societal causes for the numbers of people in the criminal justice system, our focus was on the small numbers of individuals who access the expungement system, estimated at only 6-7% of those eligible.

What did we accomplish?

- Creation of an event in January that will increase awareness, enter people into the expungement process, strengthen agency partnerships that support individuals and build trust in those systems.
- Increased awareness by partners of the need for advocacy at the individual level, to understand they have a role in helping individuals access the system, and the barriers that are placed in the way of those seeking expungement.

TEAM 17 Align Efforts and Increase Access to Local Resource Information

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Help reduce the resource guide and community calendar fatigue that is shared by area organizations. Further, the team wanted to develop a collaborative strategy that made sharing event and resource information and accessing event and resource information more streamlined.
- The team's original goal was to catalog all resource guides and calendars currently distributed in the community and to convene those making these documents. The goal of the convening is to develop a plan to meet everyone's needs around creating and disseminating this information.

What did we accomplish?

- Through the team process our plan changed and evolved. We surveyed over 140 community partners to learn how organizations currently share and access information about events and programs that benefit those in need in Muskegon County.
- We learned that many organizations shared the same frustrations regarding a centralized system for information sharing and many were familiar with 2-1-1 and expressed desire to partner with 2-1-1 to better incorporate event and time limited programs into the existing resource database.
- The team worked with 2-1-1 to make a recommendation to build a database of flyers that will be housed on the 2-1-1 website. The flyers will be downloadable, searchable and upload able by organizations.

Design for this database is already underway.

TEAM 18 Discharge Procedures to Reduce Release into Homelessness

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- Develop and implement discharge procedures to reduce release from the hospital emergency department into homelessness.

What did we accomplish?

- Present plan to hospital leadership to get buy-in for changing procedures and request membership in or collaboration with this committee.
- Identify and onboard additional individuals to be on this action team, including members familiar with Muskegon's coordinated entry and members of the hospital and/or local PCMHs

including, but not limited to, Dan Skoklund of Muskegon Rescue Mission and Shelly Evans of HealthWest.

- Review the hospital and PCMHs' current intake and discharge procedures.
- Meet with members of the Northern CHIR's housing team to review the intake/discharge procedures that were implemented in their pilot site.
- Identify procedures that could be implemented in Muskegon.
- Develop and present intake/discharge policies to the hospital, these will include Social Determinants of Health screening and referral to the hub.

TEAM 19 Reduce Inequities in the Distribution of K-12 Funding

What did we set out to do in these 100 Days?

- We set out to create more equitable K-12 education on a State level.
- Define a proposal to submit to Legislators to that end.
- Gather businesses, community leaders, and residents behind the proposal.

What did we accomplish?

- We have defined what type of proposal we want to create through a pilot program utilizing the School Finance Research Collaborative's funding model created through evidence-based research. We will work to build a campaign to gain support of this proposed program.