

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Trenton Health Team, Trenton, N.J.

Funded by Trinity Health, the four-year Transforming Communities Initiative (TCI) supported eight communities to build capacity for — and successfully implement — policy, system, and environmental (PSE) change strategies. Each collaboration — involving a lead community organization with a full-time TCI-funded program director, the local Trinity Health hospital, and other partners — received grant funding and technical assistance and participated in peer learning opportunities. This site profile, prepared by the cross-site evaluation team at the Georgia Health Policy Center in partnership with the local partners, outlines the work and impact supported by TCI between 2016 and 2020.

The Partnership

Trenton Health Team (THT) is dedicated to improving the well-being of greater Trenton by partnering with the community to expand access to high-quality, coordinated, cost-effective health care and addressing housing quality, food security, neighborhood safety, education, and social inequities inextricably linked to poor health outcomes.

THT is an innovative, multisector partnership serving residents of the Trenton, N.J., area, with a particular emphasis on the vulnerable and under-resourced. THT originally formed as a membership corporation consisting of THT's four founding institutions: Saint Francis Medical Center, Capital Health, Henry J. Austin Health Center (Trenton's only Federally Qualified Health Center), and the City of Trenton Department of Health and Human Services. THT now is governed by a 15-member board of directors, led by an executive committee. In July 2019, THT was designated as a Regional Health Hub (RHH) by the state of New Jersey, providing official status and sustainable funding as a backbone/integrator for health in Trenton.

THT's Community Advisory Board (CAB) represents more than 107 organizations and 250 individuals. THT's CAB has become a reliable and trusted network that brings people together in a flexible and action-oriented way — organizations and individuals participate when and in the ways that make sense for them and best maximize their resources and ability to contribute to building a culture of health in Trenton. The CAB convenes quarterly to share information, brainstorm solutions, and codesign interventions enhancing health and well-being. CAB work groups focus on specific topics, such as access to healthy food and maternal health, while affinity groups encourage partnerships among colleagues such as community health workers. THT facilitates the CAB as a neutral convener by providing thought leadership, connections between organizations, administrative support, and data/analytics capacity.

Approach

THT's approach to TCI combined (1) program director or THT staff leading several strategies, (2) supporting other organizations through sharing expertise and providing funding, (3) creating the conditions through convening and capacity building for stakeholders to implement strategies, and (4) blending multiple funding sources to accelerate ongoing work.

- THT used about **60%** of their TCI funds to support program director and other staff time across multiple TCI strategies.
- THT issued subawards with **21%** of funds to partner organizations.
- THT tracked close to **\$2.8 million** in matching funds through June 2020, including foundation and state health department complimentary grants.

Areas of Impact

THT worked in seven different domains across TCI. Most work extended through three to four years of TCI, while some of the strategies or smaller investments within these areas were of a shorter duration and evolved over time.

DOMAIN	YEARS	PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES INFLUENCED BY TCI-SUPPORTED WORK
 <p>Tobacco Prevention</p>	1–4	Advocated for Tobacco 21 municipal and state legislation, and municipal vaping ordinance — benefiting 8,800 Trenton and 1.15 million New Jersey youth 15-24 years. THT’s anti-tobacco social media campaign developed with PGP reached over 23,000 users.
 <p>Early Care Education</p>	1–4	THT awarded six centers with grants to enhance playgrounds, reaching 740 children. With TCI support from Isles Inc., two centers developed school gardens benefiting 300 children.
 <p>Public School Wellness Policy</p>	1–4	Trenton School District’s Wellness Council has strengthened the wellness policies, which were recently adopted by the Board of Education. They would benefit 12,500 students in Trenton’s 21 schools.
 <p>Physical Activity Opportunities</p>	1–4	THT supported the expansion of recreational soccer with Play Soccer Nonprofit International, supported family bike rides with Trenton Cycling Revolution, installed high school circuit training equipment, and installed public housing soccer field lights.
 <p>Built Environment</p>	2–4	TCI funded an existing conditions survey with Rutgers University’ Voorhees Transportation Center — key for grant applications and planning. THT convened the Complete Streets Steering Committee with municipal leaders and community organizations. THT also funded tactical urbanism projects at two key intersections and Artworks to revitalize a key pedestrian corridor.
 <p>Community Food Access</p>	2–4	THT convened cross-sector partners to address food system needs, supported a summer farmers market reaching 232 customers, and created seven videos for a social media campaign on limiting sugar-sweetened beverage consumption.



Breastfeeding

2–4

THT participated in advocacy for state-level breastfeeding legislation, affecting 75,000 New Jersey mothers. In years 3-4, TCI funded a breastfeeding pod (Mamava unit) at Trenton Public Library and a breastfeeding support program.



Advocacy for Youth Tobacco Use Prevention

THT worked collaboratively with a coalition of advocates, including the Trenton Department of Health and Human Services; other community-based organizations on the local, state, and national level; and the Trenton City Council, to pass a Tobacco 21 policy ordinance in early 2017. The statewide ban was passed in July 2017, and THT has had representation on the New Jersey Strategic Advisory Group on Tobacco Prevention. To increase public awareness and support for anti-tobacco efforts, THT:

- Worked with the Public Good Projects (PGP) (using TCI funds) and their local social media influencers to develop a series of three anti-tobacco videos that were posted starting in 2018. Each video has reached over 23,000 social media users and a combined number of 870,000 impressions.
- Commissioned an anti-tobacco, exercise-promoting mural at a local community center from a local artist and influencer.
- Partnered with the school district, city Department of Health and Human Services, and a local community college to raise awareness on the policy and detrimental effects of tobacco use at school events.

In 2019, THT responded to the electronic cigarette epidemic and outbreak of lung injury associated with electronic cigarette products by enabling partners across multiple sectors in Trenton to advocate for an ordinance requiring that electronic cigarette retailers obtain a license in an otherwise largely unregulated market. Through effective hotspotting, they discovered a disproportionately high number of vape products in Trenton compared with other communities in New Jersey. THT supported the city's director of health and human services in introducing legislation for licensing and more effective monitoring of the location and number of retailers. The ordinance's provisions generate revenue to support the city of Trenton to cover the costs of implementation, enforcement, and education about vaping. The required annual licensing fee of \$750 goes entirely to the Trenton Department of Health and Human Services. After passing the local vape-licensing policy, THT continued to support the community and environment by advocating for further regulation above the retailer to include the manufacturer and distributor.

The TCI-funded work in tobacco will have a lasting impact on THT and Trenton beyond tobacco control:

- THT has built on the social media expertise developed with PGP and relationships with local social media to focus on other public health issues, such as sugar-sweetened beverages and COVID-19 prevention messaging. This has opened up a new world of social media and influencers and shaped THT's communications strategy to more authentically include community voices and perspectives.
- The success of the TCI social media campaigns, which were able to generate over a million impressions, also contributed positively to THT's ability to secure support for other projects that have a marketing or social media requirement, such as the AARP Livable Communities Challenge.



Improving the Nutrition and Physical Activity Environments in Early Care Centers

Through TCI, THT developed several strategies to support early care centers (ECCs) in Trenton:

- THT funded Rutgers Cooperative Extension to conduct a menu analysis of 19 of 32 ECCs and provide feedback and an action plan. These preschools — receiving district funding — reach about 85% of 3- to 4-year-olds enrolled in Trenton preschools.
- While centers were interested in the assessments and concerned about childhood obesity, most were satisfied with their menu offerings. THT developed an alternative plan for engagement. Based on site visits to several centers, THT identified playground equipment as a structural need to improve physical activity.
- THT developed a simple application process and awarded six centers grants to improve their environments to promote physical activity. Recommendations of these grants included participation in TCI nutrition education, adoption of a wellness policy, establishment of a wellness council, and work with THT technical assistance to improve physical activity and nutrition.
- THT also built a relationship with the largest food vendor for ECC centers in Trenton and established additional healthier menu options within federal guidelines and costs.
- Isles Inc., a community development and environmental organization based in Trenton, received TCI funding to install gardens at two TCI-funded ECCs. Isles worked directly with teachers to ensure the gardens were used to their fullest extent as teaching tools for students.
- THT facilitated bimonthly stakeholder meetings at Catholic Youth Organization’s ECC wellness council through which they strengthened menu offerings, coordinated a healthy food carnival, and developed a healthy vending policy.

- ECCs participating in menu reviews: **8** ECCs, **1,150** children
- Playground enhancements: **6** ECCs, **740** children
- School gardens: **2** ECCs, **300** children

“TCI forced us to pay attention to the things we had always said we wanted to do, but that kept being put off as the day-to-day needs of operating the center filled our time. Having a regular meeting where we would talk about progress on these objectives made us find ties to get things accomplished. We wouldn’t have done it without the nudge from TCI.”



Supporting Healthy Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Wellness in and Beyond the Public School System

THT worked to improve nutrition and physical activity for Trenton’s school-age youth at the district policy level, through individual schools, and through environmental and programming changes. This includes:

District-level Policies

When TCI began, awareness and implementation of the Trenton School District’s wellness policy was limited both within and outside the district. Through sustained participation, engagement, and over time taking a leadership role, THT worked with the district wellness council to review and strengthen the wellness policy. The council raised awareness of the wellness policy with the Board of Education and advocated successfully for the board to conduct a formal review of the policy. A revised wellness policy incorporating virtually all of the changes proposed by the THT-led review committee was adopted by the board in September 2020. THT also participated in four local school wellness committees. THT used TCI funds to purchase and install a set of

circuit training stations available to all students at the newly opened Trenton Central High School campus. THT also influenced the district's athletic director to implement state-mandated daily recess for elementary schools a year earlier than required.

School-based Gardens

Isles Inc. expanded efforts to increase school-based gardens and teacher training at Trenton's public schools with support from TCI subawards.

Improving Infrastructure and Opportunities for Youth Soccer

With financial and strategic advice from THT, Play Soccer Nonprofit International (PSNI) expanded opportunities for youth soccer and established a partnership with the Trenton Public School District and Division of Recreation to use public facilities for their programming, expanding the reach of the Trenton Youth Soccer League to close to 600 kids in the last two years of TCI.

THT co-coordinated and cosponsored a soccer tournament as a healthy fundraiser pilot at a high school. The team developed a corporate sponsorship form and conducted outreach to obtain funding for the event. The fundraiser raised \$3,000 and brought together four teams and 60 students.

With PSNI, THT applied for and received a U.S. Soccer Foundation Safe Places to Play grant to install stadium-quality lighting for an outdoor recreation field at Donnelly Homes (a Trenton public housing development) to expand soccer programming there, as well as other recreation activities.

Supporting New Opportunities to Increase Community Biking

In Year 4, THT supported Trenton Cycling Revolution, a local advocacy and ride organizing group, to design and execute a set of ward-based family bike rides through investing in bicycles and safety gear and events. With COVID-19, efforts shifted to create an online map application that individuals and families can download to plan and guide their own rides along safe, easy-to-ride bikeways. The reach of the route postings on Facebook was estimated to be 6,303 individuals, and they garnered 262 Facebook reactions. Because this partnership was established, THT was able to apply — and has been awarded out of 2,800-plus applicants nationally — to be one of 20 communities participating in the AARP Livable Communities Challenge. The Livable Communities project will enable THT to work with Bike Arts, Trenton Cycling Revolution, the Boys & Girls Club Bike Exchange, and other partners to create a community bikeshare at three community sites in Trenton's West Ward.



Built Environment

Through TCI, THT's work in the built environment often blended different grants to support:

- Efforts to help frame and implement municipal and state policies as they relate to making the design, maintenance, and use of Trenton streets, sidewalks, and parks more responsive to the needs of all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, runners, those with disabilities, and children.
- Efforts to create improved opportunities for safe and attractive recreation for citizens.

Municipal and State Policy Work

- In Year 2, THT commissioned Rutgers University's Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy-Voorhees Transportation Center to conduct an "existing conditions survey" report for seven key travel corridors, assessing all related streets and sidewalks. This report has informed multiple grant applications.

- Engaging Trenton’s Public Works Department and their Division of Planning unit was central to THT’s approach to addressing the built environment and Complete Streets topics. The effort began at the start of TCI, with THT advocating for use of the Complete Streets checklist developed by the state. The city’s adoption of this approach began to pay substantial benefits in Year 4 with the launch of four major road projects, each of which was guided by Complete Streets principles as appropriate.
- In early 2017, THT convened the Trenton Complete Streets Steering Committee, which quickly gained the attention (and active participation) of representatives of the Department of Public Works, Division of Planning, and city engineer, as well as numerous organizations and individuals concerned with traffic, cyclist and pedestrian safety, and wayfinding signage.
- The steering committee provided a forum for city staff to talk about some of their challenges and objectives as well as to be asked about the status of various projects and priorities. Staff expressed gratitude for these gatherings because it gave an informal space to talk about challenges and issues and solicit insights and opinions from “civilians” interested and versed in the topics.
- Because of THT’s advocacy, New Jersey’s Department of Transportation is reviewing the state policy concerning the beautification and safety through art installations on major thoroughfares that are state property. One of the streetscaping projects funded by TCI may serve as a pilot in the review process (Artwalk project described below).

Revitalization Efforts

- In Year 2, THT received a BUILD Health Challenge grant to revitalize and develop an area in the North Ward of Trenton. Coordinated BUILD and TCI efforts included completing a community survey as well as a property-conditions survey along one of the seven corridors noted above. Community partners also completed streetscape improvements.
- In Years 3 and 4, THT garnered the support of the mayor’s office for tactical urbanism projects — low-cost and temporary changes to improve neighborhoods and places where people gather. THT — with many volunteers — painted crosswalks and bump-outs at two intersections designed to improve safety for pedestrians and motorists near two schools.
- THT awarded grant funds to Artworks, Trenton’s local leading arts promotion and production organization, to use public art, creative lighting, wayfinding, and other measures to improve the safety and experience of pedestrian commuters and community members traveling between Trenton’s Transit Center and downtown. This initial TCI investment directly influenced other funders to support the effort. With TCI funding in place, Artworks and their partners have been able to secure over \$27,000 in additional funding for the project in its first year.
- Because the state Department of Transportation has jurisdiction, THT and partners have educated and advocated locally and at the state level. Although it was an unanticipated benefit when Artworks embarked on the Artwalk project, the project looks like it will result in the Department of Transportation developing a statewide policy for the installation of public art along its roadways and structures (see above).
- THT provided staff support and funding to revive a running trail in the city’s Cadwalader Park.
- In September 2019, THT supported the city’s first Ciclovía event. The city administration closed approximately a three-quarter mile stretch of road in the center of the city limiting cross traffic substantially for more than six hours. Numerous organizations and vendors — primarily focused on health and exercise — set up tables and activities for families, children, and youth along the

Freedom Skate Park

Vans shoe company donated an entire professionally designed and constructed skate park they had commissioned for a weekend-long “pop-up” installation in Philadelphia — worth roughly \$50,000 — to Trenton’s Freedom Skate Park on the condition that Freedom pay to transport the equipment to Trenton. THT provided funding through TCI to finance the move. Freedom Skate Park provides free space and equipment for anyone who needs it. The equipment Freedom brought to Trenton using TCI funding greatly expanded the organization’s capacity while making the park significantly safer and more durable.

route for the day. Approximately 600 people attended the event, with a second event scheduled in September 2020.

- In a continuation of its efforts to promote a more Complete Streets–informed perspective in the city, THT also supported several outreach projects to help reimagine what Trenton’s city streets and its visual display might become.
- Revitalization efforts started under TCI are continuing. Trinity Health’s low-interest loan made RPM Development’s Low-Income Housing Tax Credit application more competitive, and they were funded to transform a vacant lot into a four-story building with 72 residential units and a small retail space. THT also helped the city secure a \$500,000 grant from Mercer County to rehabilitate three parks and a recreation center.



Community Food Access

Similar to THT’s TCI work in the built environment, THT combined their convening role with small investments in programs and infrastructure, and policy work to improve the nutrition environment and access to healthy foods:

Trenton Food Stakeholders

- Since early 2019, THT has convened the Trenton Food Stakeholders as a subcommittee of its CAB to drive collaboration toward addressing food system issues facing the region. More than 35 organizations participate, including the city of Trenton’s Department of Health and Human Services, SNAP-Ed, Rider University, Hunger Free New Jersey, a local family farm, a small regional food distributor, Mercer County’s food bank food pantries, and organizations that provide regular and emergency food services for different populations. Participants have self-organized into four work groups focusing on economic development, policy and advocacy, coordinated food banks and pantries, and cooking and nutrition education.
- Over the last year of TCI, Trenton food stakeholders participants have effectively worked together on a number of projects to identify and address food access issues, including a food asset map, preliminary market studies for a nonprofit co-op grocery store, building an understanding of residents’ challenges in getting food through individual diaries, and developing an organizational survey to assess the range and reach of food- and nutrition-related programs serving Trenton. THT has submitted five grant applications to support these strategies.

In 2019 the Battle Monument Farmers Market:

- Ran for **8** weeks
- Served **232** customers (**30** per market day)
- Redeemed **20** produce prescriptions

Farmers Market

- The Battle Monument Farmers Market ran for two seasons (2018-2019) with TCI support. The market was THT’s first major foray into improving healthy food access. In addition to the fresh produce, partners offered nutrition education, food demos, and health screenings at the market each week and piloted a produce prescription program.

Sugar-sweetened Beverages

- When state-level advocacy for a sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) tax was paused in 2018, THT focused its efforts on creating a social media campaign designed to raise awareness of the risks associated with consumption of SSBs.

- Modeled after THT’s anti-tobacco campaign from Year 2, the PGP-developed campaign, including partnering with local social media influencers, launched in August 2019.
- PGP produced seven distinct videos for the campaign as well as a set of entertaining and engaging memes about SSBs and alternatives to them. Several of the videos and memes were produced in Spanish to increase their appeal and visibility to an important population within the community.



Breastfeeding

Policy

THT’s program director participated in advocacy for three state breastfeeding bills requiring that employers provide accommodations for breastfeeding employees to express milk (passed), exempt breastfeeding mothers from jury duty (in committee), and implement lactation consultant certification (not yet enacted).

Statewide legislation:

- **75,000** women of reproductive age working in New Jersey;
- two trainers and **25** women in peer-to-peer breastfeeding class
- **11** Mamava visits

Environment

In Year 3, THT partnered with the Trenton Free Public Library to install a Mamava unit for breastfeeding patrons and employees. By placing a Mamava lactation suite in the Trenton Free Public Library, THT was able to jump-start the library’s efforts to offer maternal and other health-based instruction and information as a regular feature of its community education offerings.

Programs

THT launched a peer-to-peer Breastfeeding and Baby Care Group intended to increase breastfeeding duration and exclusivity. Despite low initial participation, attendance increased over time, and anecdotally participants expressed intention to breastfeed exclusively and for longer based on the class.

COVID-19

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, THT shifted much of its TCI efforts to addressing food access through the Trenton Food Stakeholders group. These partners collaborated and shared resources, identified gaps in food access and information, created new connections between different parts of the food supply and distribution network to fill those gaps, mobilized resources to fill immediate supply and capacity needs, and coordinated information between organizations and the public. TCI funds were redeployed to support produce box distribution and produce pickup through free farm markets.

“In response to COVID, THT – using TCI and other funding — became the public health organization backbone for the city of Trenton, so having that flexibility [to shift priorities to COVID] was pretty impressive.”

Beyond addressing food insecurity and access, THT has taken an active role in bringing together partners to address specific needs and communicating with different parts of the Trenton community.

Key Insights from TCI

THT focused the vast majority of its TCI resources on actions to change policies, systems, and environments. THT also supported several programmatic activities (for example, soccer and breastfeeding support classes). These tangible activities were helpful in making TCI more visible and advanced a particular objective in the focus area, but often were time-intensive with limited recruitment and reach. THT's role in convening and coordination was central to its success. Building on the existing CAB model already in place within THT, TCI-Trenton radically expanded the range and type of partners and collaborations. TCI was the genesis for the creation of several task forces/working groups that became housed within THT.

TCI changed the course of THT in many ways:

- Shifted THT's work into public health and addressing upstream, social determinants of health
- Provided credibility to THT's work
- Built capacity in communications and social media
- Forced a substantial expansion of THT's areas of focus in a short time frame — including tobacco and the built environment

Several factors supported THT's progress and accomplishments in TCI:

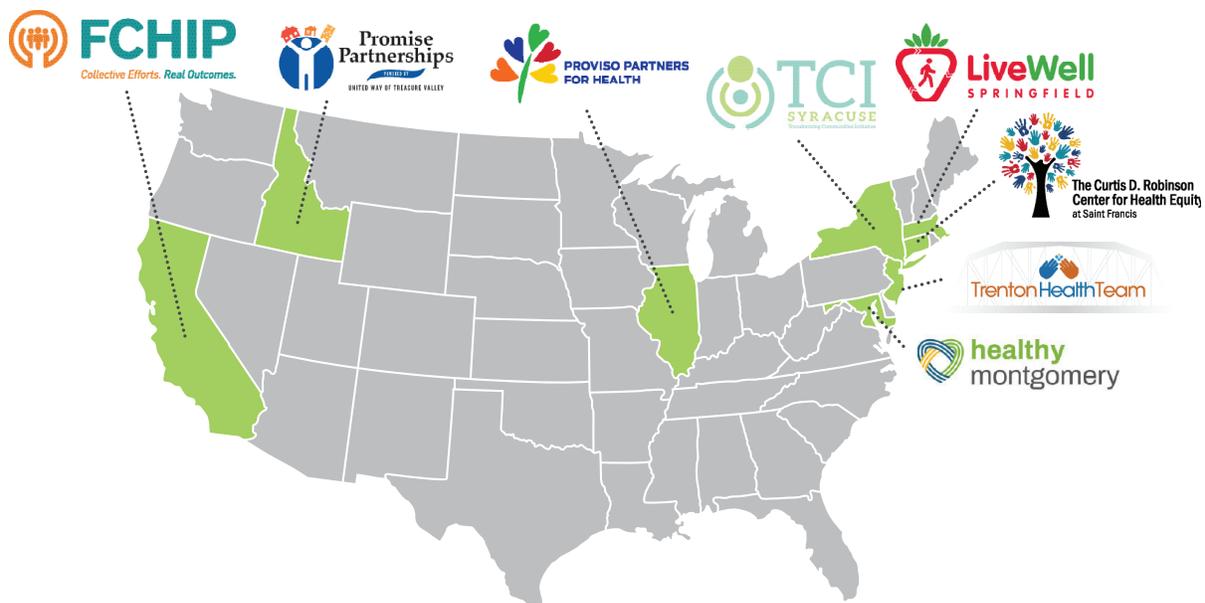
- THT's institutional maturity and reputation in the community. Close links with the hospitals and city helped with recruiting new partners. However, expanding into new areas like tobacco and childhood obesity required a learning curve and establishing trust with those who had been doing similar work.
- The support provided by national technical assistance organizations proved very helpful to TCI-Trenton, which made early and extensive use of some of the services, including:
- PGP's expertise in media campaigns and working with social media influencers.
- ChangeLab Solutions was instrumental in finding examples of policy, legislation, and regulations on a host of topics and issues that emerged during the course of TCI (for example, district wellness policies, shared use policies).
- The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids offered strategic advice and policy-related data, and connected THT with advocacy efforts.
- With Community Catalyst, THT developed a better understanding of how they might begin to look at community engagement and equity more broadly as an organization. That work began to be reflected not only in THT's TCI work, but throughout THT's other programmatic areas and into its updated strategic plan.
- Competent, willing partners in the community that were prepared to help define and lead the way in some of the focus areas.
- The close and expanding relationship between THT and the city administration. While work with municipal and state-level government can be slow and impacted by turnover, elections, and lack of investment, these relationships are critical for moving work forward.
- Being part of a multicity, national initiative provided opportunity to build relationships and learn through annual convenings.

Looking Ahead

THT began TCI as a collaborative entity, and that has grown and expanded from one that was grounded in the health care system to one that includes the social, political, environmental, and structural factors affecting health and well-being. In the last year of TCI, THT continued efforts to grow the organization and align their work across program areas (from 16 areas in 2016 to 33 areas presently). They used this integrated approach to blend funding streams in further grants development, planning for a strong future.

"Comparing this project to a lot of other grant-funded work, so much of what we did has really taken hold and kept going. Whereas in many grant programs, you start programs [that] tend to sunset when the grant sunsets, but I think that especially given the duration of funding and then the nature of how Trinity [Health] structured the program has really allowed the work to have built momentum, which is such a huge part of sustainability."

About the Transforming Communities Initiative



Trinity Health launched the Transforming Communities Initiative (TCI) in 2016 to provide grant funding and technical assistance to hospital-community partnerships. Between July 2016 and June 2020, these partnerships worked on a range of initiatives including tobacco prevention and reduction, public school wellness, early care centers' policies and practices, community food access and nutrition, built environment policies and infrastructure to improve walkability and safety (Complete Streets), breastfeeding policies, and economic development. Partnerships also built community capacity and strengthened local coalitions.

TCI technical assistance was provided by [ChangeLab Solutions](#), [Community Catalyst](#), [Public Good Projects](#), [Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids](#), and the [Georgia Health Policy Center \(GHPC\)](#).

GHPC — in close collaboration with local evaluators — conducted the TCI cross-site evaluation to assess partnership development and collaboration, as well as policy, systems, and environmental change reach, implementation, and impact. Data sources included key stakeholder interviews, TCI partner collaboration surveys, and project documents including site annual reports, meeting notes, site visits, and observations. Quotations in this profile are from stakeholder interviews and partner surveys.