

# Ownership Of Change

Development of a new measure of  
community experience and what it  
means for health equity

# Our communities are rapidly gentrifying

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Development is happening, but visions, goals, and decisions are being made **for communities rather than with communities**, especially those that have been disinvested..

Residents know that when it comes to health and wellbeing, it's not just about what is built, it's about:

- who it's built for
- who it is benefitting
- who is involved



Resident Researchers experienced a lack of ownership of change in their own neighborhoods and hypothesized **these experiences could be linked with health.**

# Our Research Question

“How do changes in the structure of a neighborhood impact the health of residents of that neighborhood?”

Resident Researchers understood that community health was not just about building healthy features and amenities in their neighborhoods, alone. Community health also depended on redistributing power over neighborhoods changes to people living there.

HNS partners called this experience of community control over what is built, how it is built, and who it benefits as “**Ownership of Change**” and hypothesized that it directly relates to community health. ?

Once we defined OOC, we sought to learn

- How to measure it
- How is it shaped by lived experiences and community conditions
- How it connected to and shaped health
- Why and how it can shape community development

# Measuring Ownership of Change

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Ownership of change is a measure that expresses a person or community's experience of control over what is built and how it is built.

To measure it, we ask HNS survey respondents whether they:

- notice changes,
- feel like these changes are “for them,”
- feel like the average person in their community has a say in these changes, and
- are personally involved.

## How does “Ownership of Change” happen?

When people see changes, they assess how well the changes align with the neighborhood's needs, what information they have, and how much power they feel over the changes.

*“Decades of research showing that experiences of belonging and being valued and included versus those experiences that leave people feeling powerless over things happening to them, stressed, and excluded have important impacts on our psychological states and physical bodies.”*

- Prof. Mariana Arcaya

# Developing the OOC measure

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Resident Researchers **defined ownership of change** and **developed a strategy to measure** it with surveys and interviews.



Collected **thousands of surveys** and **hundreds of interviews** to understand people's sense of ownership and lived experiences of change in their neighborhoods.



Analyzed data together to **score levels of OOC**, test if the measure is **related to health**, and **interpret interview data** about what shapes people's feelings of OOC.

# OOOC matters for health – both individual and collective

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lower OOC

higher OOC

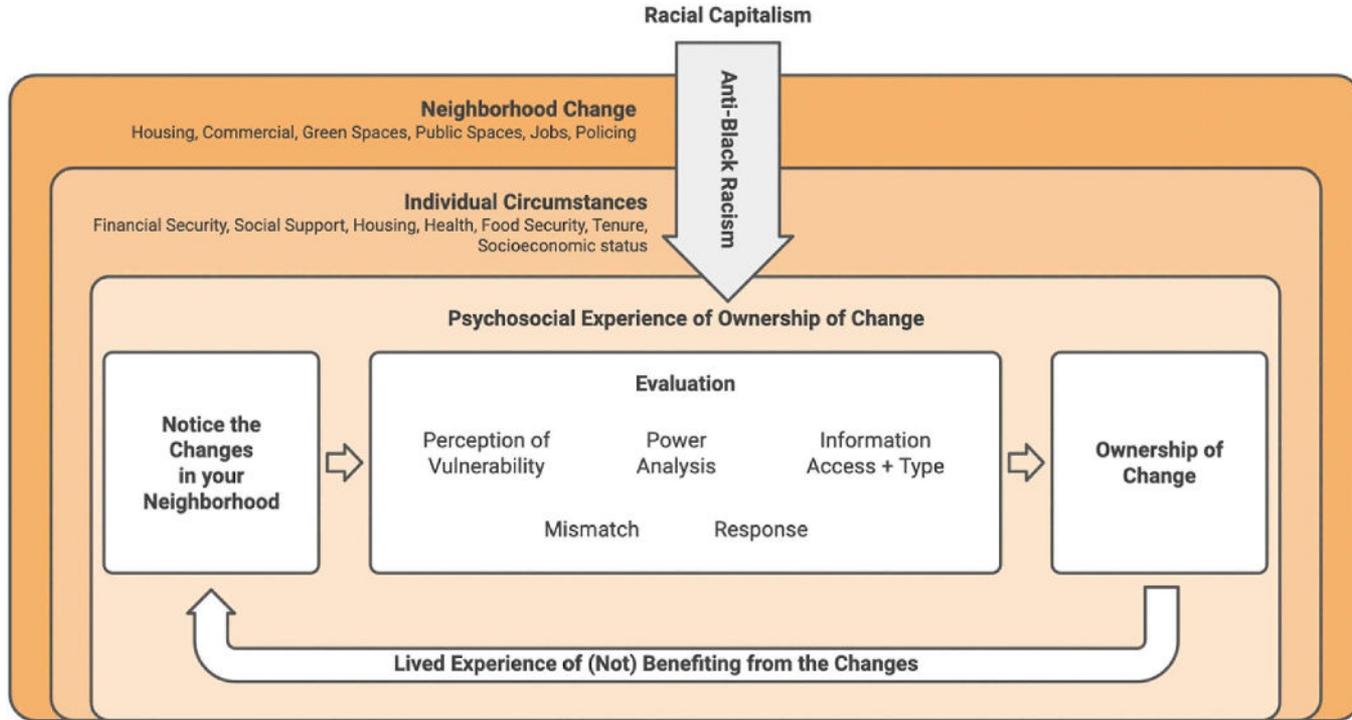
A lack of ownership of change can cause **alienation**.

Changes that happen without community voice can cause feelings of alienation and powerlessness, which can affect collective health and wellbeing.

Having ownership of change is associated with **health**.

People reporting higher levels of ownership of change are more likely to also have higher levels of physical health, mental health, and happiness.

# We found: ownership of change can be shaped by many factors.

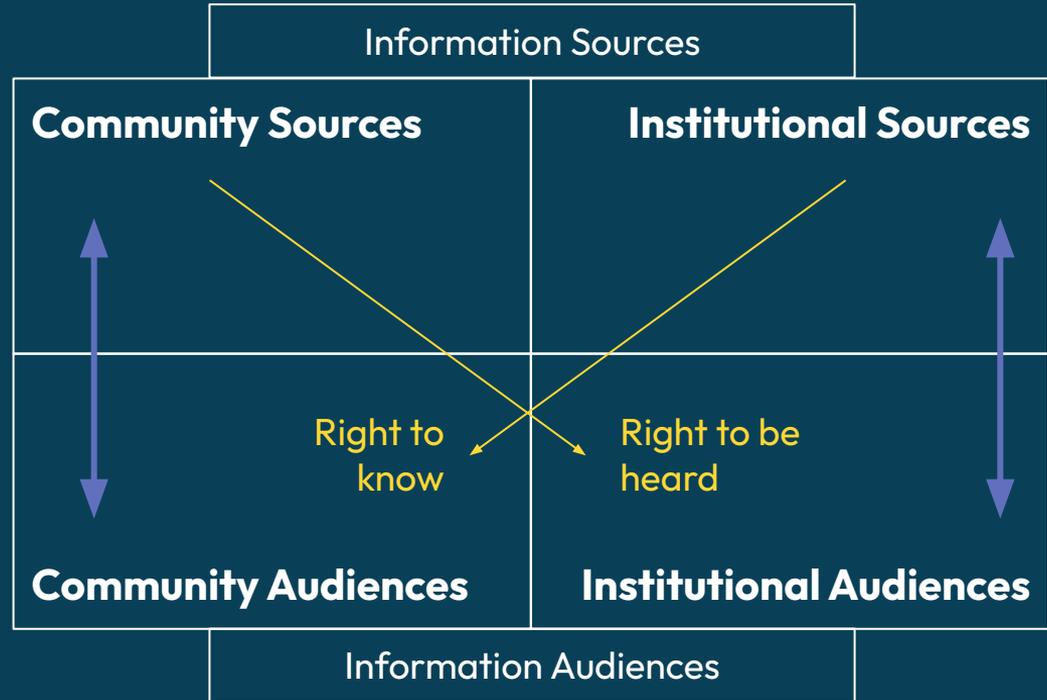


# Why this matters: building community power

**Communities have the right to know and be heard through research!**

Communities need institutional information, but often lack access to it (even when it concerns the community itself)

Communities have valuable information about themselves, but their voices and stories are often dismissed as anecdotal



# Why this matters: building community power

## Andrew Binet, MIT DUSP

“Residents knew that ownership of change was a necessary component of urban development that supports community health but needed more evidence to be heard. Naming it is the first step in moving the needle.”

Right to  
know

Right to be  
heard

## Celinet Sanchez, Lynn

“I don’t see myself purchasing products from these places. I don’t see myself purchasing a condo, and in five years, Lynn may no longer be a place “for us.” Changes as big as a condo development or as small as a little free library mean something. They are signals, of sorts, about who changes are for. OOC affirms that the experiences and related feelings of exclusion are “real” and aren’t good for out health”

# What should we do to ensure ownership over changes?

## Community Control

Advocate for more **community control** of neighborhood development decisions, given its association with health.

## Policy Advocacy

Advocate for policies, programs and processes that **increase ownership of change** for long standing residents.

## Repair Exclusion

Point out how and why **structural racism shapes ownership of change**, and that histories of exclusion must be repaired to increase levels of ownership of change.

# What is HNS?

The Healthy Neighborhoods Study (HNS) is the nation's largest community-based participatory action research study focused on the health impacts of neighborhood change. A goal of the study is to support organizing, advocacy, and planning for healthy and equitable community development that prevents displacement. HNS includes a network of academic researchers, 50 resident researchers, grassroots community organizations, regional planning agencies, and advocacy groups that represent nine communities across Eastern Massachusetts.

Find out more at [hns.mit.edu](https://hns.mit.edu)

