

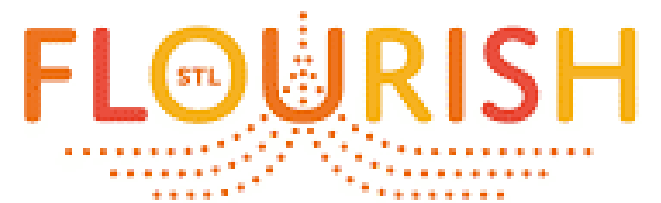


Findings and Learnings from the Fall 2021 FLOURISH Community Reflection Sessions

Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative Evaluation



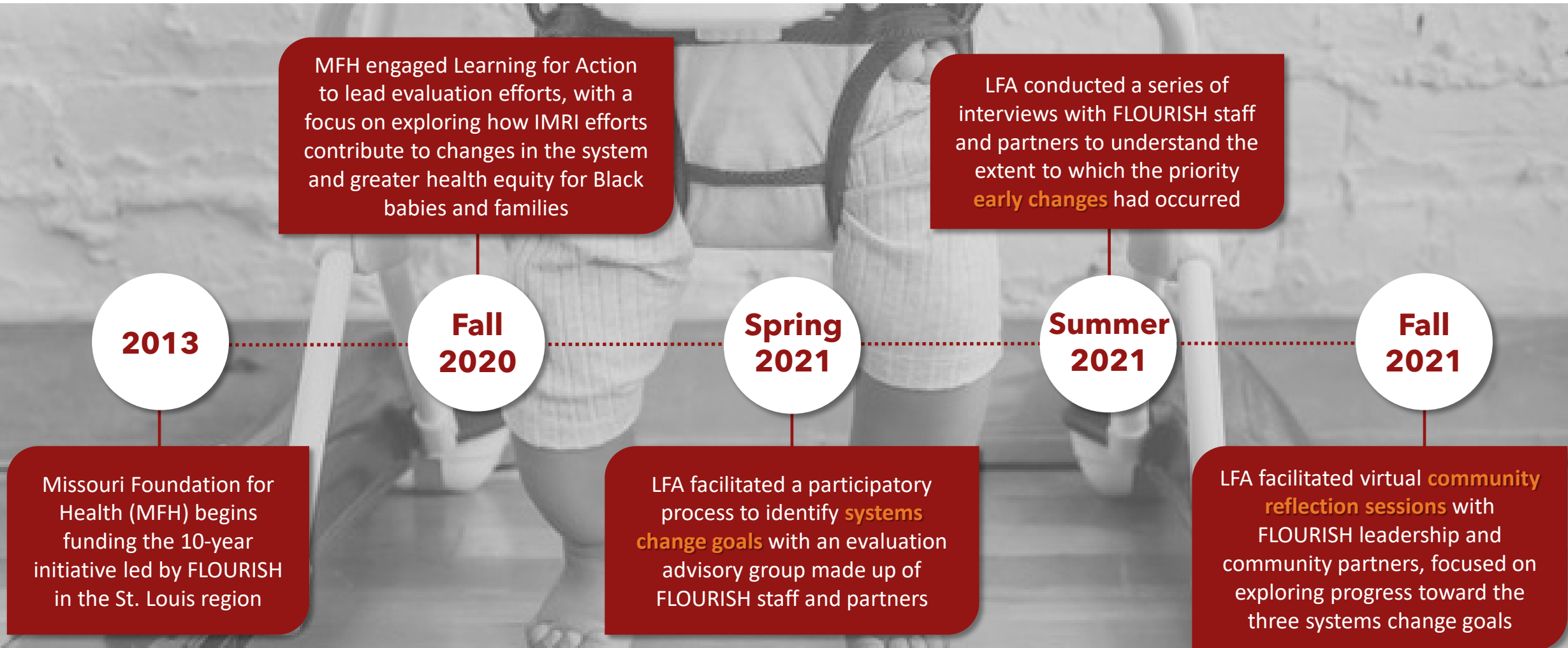
Missouri Foundation
for Health
a catalyst for change





Process

The following outlines the process and timeline for the evaluation of the Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative (IMRI)





Community Reflection Sessions



WHAT: Two 2-hour online sessions conducted in October, engaging approximately 28 participants



WHO: FLOURISH leadership and community partners



WHY: Designed to surface insights on the extent to which partners were seeing the *systems changes* take shape, where they see evidence of change, what barriers lie in the way of achieving those changes, and what it would take to overcome them or initiate progress.

Systems Change Goals Prioritized by FLOURISH

GOAL 1

Policy makers and systems leaders actively listen to and incorporate community voice

GOAL 2

Black providers are elevated as experts

GOAL 3

Entities that work on reducing infant mortality are coordinated and aligned





Goal 1: Policymakers and systems leaders actively listen to and incorporate community voice

How is FLOURISH making progress toward this goal?



Building the community's capacity to be storytellers and advocates for infant mortality

- FLOURISH provides free storytelling workshops to support community in articulating their experiences into compelling narratives for specific audiences like policy makers and leveraging data to **amplify their lived experiences**.



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“For Child Advocacy Day, I shared my story with a Senator, [asking her to] extend a program from 30 days to a year. I was able to **get her attention**, and then **she shared MY story**. And that bill got passed.”

- Community Reflection Session Participant quote



Facilitating new channels of communication between community members and policy and systems leaders

- Facilitating **direct communication chains**, so that community voice more directly informs those in a position to enact change
 - FLOURISH partners connected residents of the Clinton-Peabody Housing Complex with the Housing Authority in St. Louis to address the housing quality issues occurring in the complex that were putting infants at risk. That connection was made possible because the Clinton-Peabody Board President at the time was a member of FLOURISH's Community Leaders Cabinet.

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“For the first time **I felt they were listening**. They Called and followed up. Politicians got involved, other organizations got involved. People started showing up to meetings at Clinton Peabody. Resources started coming in, cleaning supplies, a lot of other things for parents. [Parents told me that it] made them feel that **their voice made a difference** and we can do this. This was like a miracle for me, to see policies and people working together for the community.”

- Community Reflection Session Participant quote

- Hosting **legislative roundtables** where community members can speak directly with local policy makers about issues most important to their community
- Publishing **legislative report cards** as well as an Advocacy Toolkit, which offers practical strategies and resources for community members to use to advocate for greater racial equity, family well-being, and community health.
- Coordinating **transportation support** for community members who need this barrier removed to be able to participate in our initiatives.



Goal 1: Policymakers and systems leaders actively listen to and incorporate community voice

What more is needed to achieve this goal?



Build greater awareness about infant mortality to further activate community engagement and reach the hearts and minds of policymakers

With harmful policies continuing to be introduced at the local and national levels, there is an ongoing pressing need to increase policymaker understanding of the root causes of infant mortality, the impacts of structural racism (such as the impacts of housing on health equity), and why certain policies are harmful to the health and wellbeing of Black families and babies.

- **Leverage the power of social media** to lift up community voice, more widely share stories, build awareness about infant mortality, and provide information about resources available to families.
- **Build off the strength of the storytelling approach** by continuing to offer trainings and further cultivate a culture of storytelling as a way to increase awareness and engagement.
- **Keep educating the community about relevant policies in the works** that could impact the health and wellbeing of Black families and help to mobilize support for or against impending legislation.
- **Consider ways to build the pipeline to policymaker** to nurture future policymakers and ensure that those crafting decisions and enacting policies are representative of the community.



“When we **showcase our stories**, that helps people and empowers them. We were taught to have shame or be embarrassed about these things. Nothing wrong with sharing your story, it is a big way to help people, let them **know they’re not alone**. You don’t know who is watching or listening. I’ve had people come to me to say that I’ve helped them. I was going through it, and hearing what you said really helped me. Being more vulnerable to help people avoid some of the obstacles that we went through.”

- Community Reflection Session Participant quote





Goal 2: Black providers are elevated as experts

How is FLOURISH making progress toward this goal?



FLOURISH assigns true decision-making authority to members of the community through its governing body and grant review committee

- The Community Leaders Cabinet (CLC), the community-based governing body for FLOURISH, **centers the voices and expertise of Black community leaders** and charges them with setting priorities.
- **Funding decisions for FLOURISH are made by the Community Review Committee** which is composed of leaders within the Black community who have been impacted by infant and maternal health challenges.



FLOURISH is putting monetary support in the hands of Black organizations and community members

- As of 2021, **FLOURISH has funded more than 100 organizations** in the region through its grants program, more than 70% of which are Black-led, grassroots organizations.
- Modifying grant requirements has **expanded the types of individuals and organizations able to receive funding** from FLOURISH beyond those that are 501c3s. This has put dollars into the hands of diverse partners with connections to the community supporting Black parents and babies along multiple dimensions.

“FLOURISH is creating more opportunities to **bring resources into the Black community** - making a statement **this is where we believe change can happen** and these are folks we think can do that most effectively.”

- Community Reflection Session Participant quote



Black community leaders and providers feel that their experience and voices are valued

- FLOURISH provides trainings, workshops, resources, and networking opportunities **that support Black community members to further amplify their voice** and collaborate with partners to enhance their impact.
- Another way FLOURISH centers Black expertise is through **engaging Black physicians as speakers.**



FLOURISH is elevating Black doulas and midwives in the maternal and child health community, recognizing their contribution to the health and wellbeing of Black birthing people and babies

- **Expanding support for doulas and organizations like Jamaa Birth Village** in training culturally congruent doulas and integrating doulas into care teams at local hospitals



Goal 2: Black providers are elevated as experts

What more is needed to achieve this goal?



Advocate to address health system hurdles that limit access to doulas and midwives

- **Advocate for doula and midwifery care** to be covered by health plans and adequately reimbursed
- **Address the barriers to doula care** that have been exacerbated in the wake of COVID-19 (e.g., hospital limitations on the number of people allowed in the delivery room)
 - Efforts to legitimize and welcome doulas as an integral part of the professional care team can help promote virtual access and shift hospital practices that are keeping doulas out of delivery rooms.



Support and expand the workforce of Black providers

- **Fortify the workforce pipeline** in nursing, medicine, and related fields among Black community members.
- **Amplify messaging around community resources for birthing people** regarding how to find a Black doula or midwife and how it could support them in their pregnancy, birthing, and postpartum experience.



Increase community awareness and commitment to racial equity across all providers

- **More work is needed** to improve quality of care, including increasing the understanding of implicit bias and systemic racism among all providers who serve pregnant and parenting people.



“We are still a **deeply segregated city** and region, with a **long history of systemic racism** that is pervasive in so many of our institutions. We're still in an early phase of building awareness of what does it mean to advance racial equity. Are the people that are holding up legacies of systemic inequities willing to change and create an equitable future for this region? FLOURISH is bringing voice to this and calling it out, but **we need more loud voices.**”

- *Community Reflection Session Participant quote*



Goal 3: Entities that work on reducing infant mortality are coordinated and aligned

How is FLOURISH making progress toward this goal?



FLOURISH is serving as a powerful convener and connector, building a coalition of allies working toward a similar goal

“Appreciate being able to **find people to connect with resources**. It’s hard because (as social workers) we’re so in the work, we don’t have a chance to pause and find out are we doing the same thing? Are we aligned? This kind of opportunity allows for that.”

- *Community Reflection Session Participant quote*

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- **FLOURISH is enriching the ecosystem of organizations and partners** who play a key role in supporting and strengthening healthy families. Collaborating partners doing similar work in the region include: *Integrated Health Network, the St. Louis Community College Community Health Worker Coalition, Forward through Ferguson, Alive and Well, Nurses for Newborns*, among others.

- This has included engaging with those who may not otherwise be orienting their work to the issue of infant mortality, but whose work is in fact addressing it. E.g, some of the Community Mobilization and Innovation grant dollars have gone to grassroots organizations, to continue doing the work they were already doing, but now as part of a larger initiative



FLOURISH has created opportunities to engage and uplift community voices, which plays a crucial role in alignment of efforts

“**Parent voices and actions are leading the way** for coordination and alignment. When the parents are aligned and have one voice, I see those partners lining up. [...] Systems, partners, and agencies are lining up with **meaningful voices that are making a difference.**”

- *Community Reflection Session Participant quote*

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- Groups such as the Community Advisory Board for home visitation, FLOURISH More (a housing group), and the Community Review Committee that makes decisions about FLOURISH grants **provide forums for parents and community members to share their input, helping to coordinate and improve services for families.**



COVID response grants built new connections and trust with Black-led organizations doing work to support infant mortality in St. Louis

- In response to emerging community needs during COVID, **FLOURISH reoriented some funding and modified grant requirements** to get additional funds out to partners doing critical work on behalf of Black moms and babies. This allowed FLOURISH to expand its lens beyond those organizations whose primary focus is maternal and child health to new organizations not previously in its radar.
- **Creating a grant opportunity with fewer requirements** made those grants accessible to organizations that typically would not be able to apply, resulting in more investments in Black-led organizations and important trust building between FLOURISH and smaller, less-well-known, Black-led organizations doing work related to IMRI in St. Louis.



Goal 3: Entities that work on reducing infant mortality are coordinated and aligned

What more is needed to achieve this goal?



Additional opportunities to convene would support organizations to make collaboration even more robust

- **Virtual engagement taking place due to COVID has been challenging and has disrupted the ability to cultivate deep relationships.** While some connections have formed, there is a need for more partner gatherings (in person if possible) to continue to build connection, collaboration, and momentum.
 - Grantees are asking for more opportunities to connect with each other and with the CLC .
 - Providing childcare and transportation is crucial for in person gatherings.



Critically examine and address the role of funding mechanisms in perpetuating siloes

- **Duplication of efforts can slow and hinder progress rather than collaborating to amplify impact.** For example, without assessing the efforts currently taking place, the state initiated a charge to focus on home visitation services, meanwhile FLOURISH was already two years into establishing the Home Visitation Collaborative.
- Additionally, competition for funding among entities working towards similar goals **creates barriers to greater alignment and coordination.**

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“It would be great if they were to have - not exactly a networking event - but maybe a one-day workshop where everyone who is working on this could work together on how to connect and reduce IM [infant mortality] even more. If we have **everyone in the same room**, that would be a bonus.”

- Community Reflection Session Participant quote

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“While there has been intentional focus on coordination, one of the barriers is that **the funding mechanisms** tend to perpetuate the siloes. Folks get a new grant to do something and we find ourselves reinventing the wheel.”

- Community Reflection Session Participant quote



Closing

The Importance of Evaluation

These findings from the FLOURISH community reflection sessions highlight the progress being made to leverage the work being done by various stakeholders within the community to address infant mortality, and where more change is needed. Evaluation efforts like this are vital to identifying emerging trends across a field that includes many different organizations and leaders dedicated to the complex issue of infant mortality.

Quantitative data, like the rate of infant deaths, only gives us one perspective on the issue. Gathering input from those supporting change-making on the ground and sharing our learnings with community leaders helps to define future priorities for the Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative.

Furthermore, this evaluation process supports FLOURISH, our partners, community members and funders in telling the story of how the St. Louis region is contributing to better health for Black moms and babies.

[Click here](#) to access the complete
FLOURISH Evaluation Learning Memo

Thank You To Our Community Partners!

We would like to express our gratitude to all the community members who took part in this process. **This meaningful work would not be possible without the support and participation from all those involved.**

Thank you for all that you do every day to contribute positively to the overall health of Black moms and babies in this community!

