



Systems Thinking



“Solutions are where the problem isn’t”

- Anne Burrill

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**The Conversation We’ve Been Waiting For:
Talking about shared challenges in a
solutions-focused way**

AVIC Conference 2025

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**Urban Matters co-creates
inclusive communities
where everyone has
opportunity to thrive.**

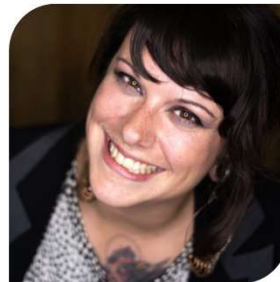
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About Us



Anne Burrill
Systems Analysis and
Collaboration



Isha Matous-Gibbs
Social, Health, and
Wellbeing Planner

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Since 2016, we have contributed over \$1M back into communities.

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What will we do today?

- Overview of Systems Thinking – A Primer
- Applying Systems Thinking through Group Discussion

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Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is a way to approach complexity – messy contexts with lots of diverse parts.

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A system is a set of interacting or connected parts that is organized in such a way that it achieves something – a function or a purpose.



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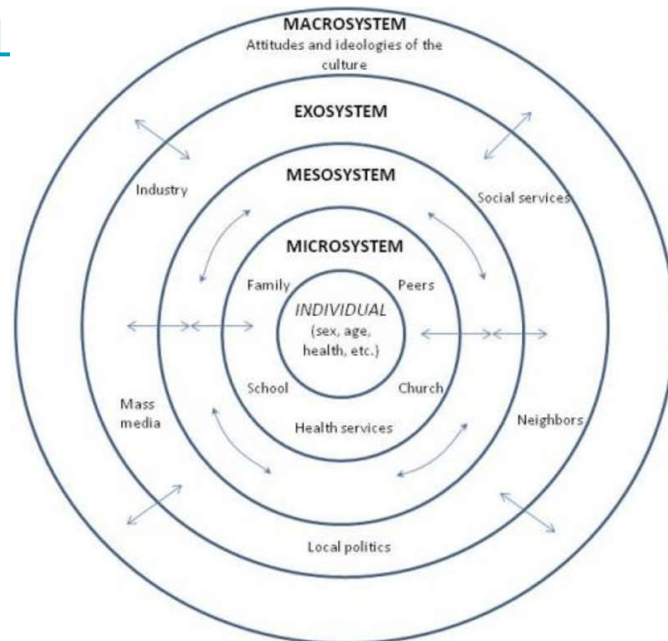
TYPES OF SYSTEMS

There are **four** fundamental types of systems:

- **Natural systems** – e.g., a biological organism – your body is a system
- **Designed Physical Systems** – e.g., a building – your home is a system
- **Designated Abstract Systems** – e.g., mathematical equation – calculus is a system
- **Human Activity Systems** – e.g., a team working on a task – an organization is a human activity system

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ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM THEORY



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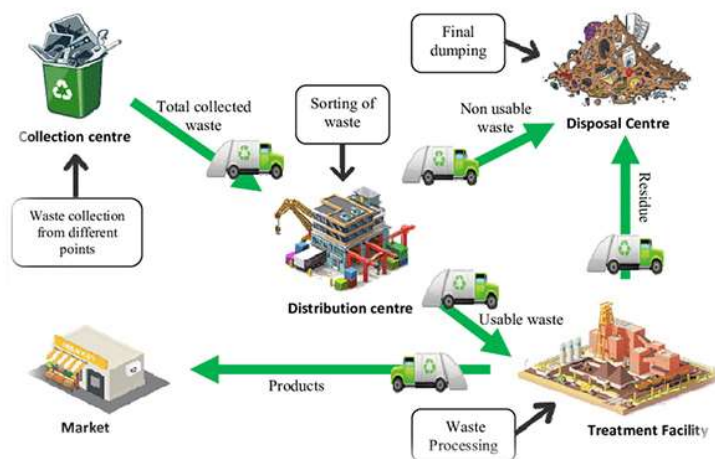
Remember

- You are part of the system – you are part of many systems.
- We can change how we see systems and our place in them by changing our:
 - Boundaries – the scope of what we look at
 - Perspective – the vantage point from which we look.



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SYSTEMS MAPS



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EXERCISE

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ACTIVITY



Cafe Style Organizing



15% Solution Activity & Discussion

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World Café Etiquette

- Follow the times given so everyone has an opportunity to complete the exercise
- Be curious and listen carefully to others
- Challenge yourself to think of the resources you have available to you in new ways – where can something be applied differently, can a relationship you have help you in a different context, what is working well in one area that can be applied to another?

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GROUP FLIP CHARTS

- Around the room there are a variety of flip charts.
- Find a systems map and group of 4 people – friends or new friends, anyone is welcome
- Take a couple minutes to review the complex social system maps that we have included next to your flip chart.



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Questions: Round 1

Personal Reflection

- Choose one node of the system you have in front of you and think about what can be done at that node to improve its function
 - “How might you make a shift in this system?”
 - “What is your 15 percent? Where do you have discretion and freedom to act? What can you do without more resources or authority?”

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Questions: Round 2

Share your idea with the group

- 2 minutes per person

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Questions: Round 3

Discuss and ask clarifying questions of each other

- 5 minutes each
 - “What is your idea and who would action it?”
 - “What level is this action on?”
 - “How will this action impact other nodes?”

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Questions: Round 4

Split into pairs and find a pair from another topic

- Share your ideas/ insights/ actions

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Report Back

Popcorn style sharing

- 3-5 groups share
 - “What insights did you gain from this exercise?”

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THANK YOU!

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