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INTRODUCTION

Communities are increasingly recognizing the urgent need to work collaboratively to achieve ambitious improvements in the lives of children and families. An effective "cradle-to-career" pipeline that provides opportunity and support to children from birth through high school and into college or career, for example, should be in place for all children in the United States, especially given the demands of today's global, high-skilled labor market. Yet, many communities are unable to build the partnerships and collaborations needed; instead they suffer from fragmented leadership and institutions, disconnected programs, and broken pipelines. The result is not surprising – profound disparities of opportunity and inadequate achievement.

Collective impact or multi-sector collaborations hold promise for remedying this situation by providing a civic center of gravity for aligning public, private, and philanthropic resources to improve specific community-wide results – whether it's the number of children born healthy, third-graders who can read well, or high school graduates prepared for college or work. Aligning contributions from a diverse group of partners requires sustained effort and more time than a conventional grant cycle. At its heart, collective impact requires civic leadership to align systems and public and private investments with the goal of achieving important results for children and families – all while engaged in the messy process of continuous improvement.

In some sense, collective impact strategies are not new. Local communities have organized over the years to improve their quality of life and opportunities, whether accomplished by community coalitions, campaigns, or civic agendas. What is different today is that many communities are intentionally coming together to build the civic leadership and infrastructure capable of achieving more-ambitious, longer-term results, such as reducing poverty or increasing college graduation. It is not about starting more programs or launching time-limited campaigns; rather, it is about doing business differently as a community to get long-term results. In this report, we refer to these efforts as multi-sector collaborations because they include a broader range of initiatives than collective-impact campaigns. But they share many common characteristics and lessons.

With so many communities launching new civic collaborations, a "how to" literature on collective impact has developed in the last few years. This literature is quite useful in laying out a theory of change, key building blocks, and exemplary campaigns. We summarize this literature below and hope our research contributes to this knowledge base. However, one national leader cautioned that "we run the risk of saying we know more than we actually do." Our knowledge of what works in what circumstances is still developing.

What is missing in this literature in our view is a sense of how key collaborative ingredients and processes are adapted by local communities. Communities differ and have varying starting points for civic collaborations. Some communities have a lot to build on; others are starting from scratch; and still others are recovering from less than successful efforts in the past. Communities seeking to improve results outside of the education pipeline face the additional challenge of relying on less well-developed indicators of success. The question for all civic leaders is how to make good early-stage decisions in the context of limited resources and time.

This report provides advice to civic collaborations during the early stages as they go through planning, start-up, and taking plans to action. We identify priority steps for this phase but also show how different communities customize their action plans given the assets of their communities. Simply, no one size fits all and there will be trade-offs between what is possible and practical. We hope our discussion assists civic leaders recognize factors they need to take into account when making start-up decisions. It also is clear from our discussions that another document is needed that offers advice for more mature collaborations that are grappling with the rigors and messiness of continuous improvement, policy advocacy and managing such efforts over the longer run.

BACKGROUND

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's mission is to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities. Casey has made numerous investments to improve public and private systems, strengthen data-driven practice and policy, and mobilize civic leadership to improve results. This report reflects on some of these experiences while looking more broadly for lessons and advice. While we include many efforts identified as collective impact, we also draw from civic and philanthropic efforts that diverge from this approach. For example, some campaigns focus on generating innovative solutions for tough social problems without having an evidence-based set of benchmarks.

Our research consisted of two parts. We first reviewed the collective impact and results accountability literature for lessons and advice about early-stage civic decision-making. We then conducted semi-structured interviews with three dozen key informants about early-stage decision-making by multi-sector collaborations. We looked at a number of Casey initiatives as well as collaborations across the country.

In order to ensure a focus on early-stage civic decision-making, we created a hypothetical scenario that portrayed a community ready to take collaborative action. We wanted our prospective interviewees to advise these civic leaders from their own experience with civic collaborations and collective impact:

> *A group of civic leaders has spent a couple of years laying the groundwork for an important "collective action" initiative to improve outcomes for children and young adults in their city. Sponsorship by top-level leaders and the commitment of startup funds has supported background research, buy-in from a larger group of leaders, establishing key results, baseline data analysis and benchmarking, multi-year funding commitments, and the hiring of lead staff. Top leadership now is deciding how to formally launch the initiative and build a backbone organization or affiliate with high-capacity partners. They know they need to cultivate a sense of urgency and community buy-in for the long-term; yet they also know they need some quick wins to show that this ambitious civic effort can produce concrete results.*

> *Start-up has not been without controversy. Some saw the background research as taking too long and costing too much. Some leaders are uncomfortable with a messy civic "process" and prefer identifying a few big solutions. Still others worry that this could be one more civic initiative that fails to deliver because of vague results, lack of long-term commitment, and*

absence of community voices. And, there is no final agreement about whether to affiliate with one of several competing national networks of "collective impact" organizations.

The co-chairs have asked for the best advice about identifying a handful of early steps to get the initiative rolling. They want to learn from what has worked and from what has not worked in similar cities. They hope these early steps can frame a first-year plan of action.

Our interview protocol consisted of twelve questions keyed to the above scenario and to what we learned from the literature review, with one-hour interviews conducted between May and August 2014.

THE LESSONS LITERATURE

The launch and early success of multi-sector collaborations in the 2000s created a swell of interest in new approaches for addressing complex social issues. Communities interested in replicating collective impact models today can learn from abundant written guidance and instruction on building a strong collaborative. Below we summarize some of the key points from the "how to" literature on early-stage collective impact initiatives. The review is organized by what are defined as the "Five Conditions of Collective Success:" a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication, and a backbone organization.[1]

Figures 1 and 2 from the literature portray these "five conditions" and one way to look at the start-up tasks for multi-sector collaboratives.
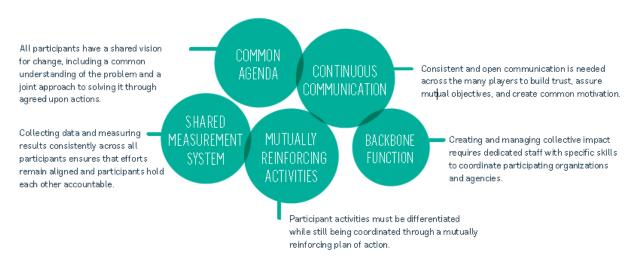

All participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures that efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.

COMMON AGENDA

CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.

SHARED MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

BACKBONE FUNCTION

Creating and managing collective impact requires dedicated staff with specific skills to coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

Figure 1: Source: FSG

Phases of Collective Impact

Components for Success	PHASE I Initiate Action	PHASE II Organize for Impact	PHASE III Sustain Action and Impact
Governance and Infrastructure	Identify champions and form cross-sector group	Create infrastructure (backbone and processes)	Facilitate and refine
Strategic Planning	Map the landscape and use data to make case	Create common agenda (goals and strategy)	Support implementation (alignment to goals and strategies)
Community Involvement	Facilitate community outreach	Engage community and build public will	Continue engagement and conduct advocacy
Evaluation and Improvement	Analyze baseline data to identify key issues and gaps	Establish shared metrics (indicators, measurement, and approach)	Collect, track, and report progress (process to learn and improve)

Figure 2: Source: SSIR

Common Agenda / Rallying Point

Rallying non-profit, government, business, and philanthropic leaders around one community issue is a complex task that often requires its own set of preconditions.[2] A trigger event – whether a community crisis, the release of new data, or a new funding opportunity – can generate a sense of urgency and motivate leaders from multiple sectors to take action.[3] Effective messaging about the issue at stake also is critical; an initiative's mission should never be so big or broad that community partners find it difficult to describe.[4] Rather, the mission should state a strong point of view about a community-wide problem and include an "emotionally accessible" appeal to spur action and a commitment to change.[5] Initiatives utilize a variety of approaches to arrive at a common agenda including conducting community listening tours, focus groups or surveys, and especially by using data to define the most pressing community-wide issues.[6] Finally, a clear roadmap or strategic plan that lays out the collaborative's goals and timeline for achievement is important for mobilizing partners and maintaining group focus throughout the life of the initiative.[7]

Shared Measurement System / Results-Based Accountability

At the core of successful multi-sector collaborations is a set of community-wide indicators driving action and a shared measurement system for tracking progress. Often using a results-based accountability framework, initiatives arrive at short-, mid- and long-term goals and commit to using available data to produce baseline and periodic progress reports.[8] Sharing regular communication about new data and setting aside time for partners to self-reflect and self-correct are frequently recommended; experience shows that continuous improvement and taking a "diagnostic" approach to understanding what the data and indicators reveal is a core value within successful collective impact initiatives.[9]

Mutually Reinforcing Activities / Governance Structure

A key challenge is building a culture of collaboration where partners feel useful, productive, and essential. The most common coordinating approach is to create multiple levels of leadership, including a small steering or executive committee and a larger number of partners organized into subcommittees or workgroups. There is no consensus on the right size or number of committees and subcommittees. Some initiatives have as many as 20 or more subcommittees while others have five or fewer.[10] While executive or steering committees frequently guide the development of a strategic plan and make recommendations on strategy, the "meat and potatoes" of the initiative's work most often happens at the workgroup level.[11] For this reason the literature stresses the importance of creating a sense of empowerment and ownership among workgroup chairs.[12] Once the governance structure is set, leaders in successful collaboratives often will utilize tools such as reviewing "action commitments" within meeting agendas or encouraging the development of partnerships in order to hold one another accountable.[13] Experience has shown that collaborative environments where partners feel a heightened sense of accountability lead to better community-level outcomes.[14]

Continuous Communication

Continuous communication is vital in building trust and transparency among partners. Initiatives use a variety of methods to keep partners updated, including hosting regular in-person meetings and annual retreats, thoughtfully bringing on new members, and launching file-sharing sites or other communications vehicles.[15] Partners need to see that no single organization can solve community-wide issues alone; sharing credit for successes, giving all partners equal voice and value, and building in a feedback loop for learning and improvement enhances overall communication and synergy between partners.[16]

Backbone Organization

Selecting or creating a backbone organization with full-time, independent staff to coordinate the activities is paramount to an initiative's success. Backbone organizations are responsible for key functions including guiding the initiative's overall mission and strategy, building public buy-in, managing data collection and generating funding. It is at once a convener, facilitator, communicator, director, and administrator.[17] With so many roles to fill it is no surprise that the literature includes cautions against selecting a backbone organization that may over-manage or be overly concerned with credit for successes.[18]

ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

This section distills observations and lessons gleaned from our interviews about community readiness and early-stage tactics and opportunities. The overall theme is how collaborations can set goals that are "ambitious, achievable, and accountable." We begin each of the twelve topics by discussing the key issue, how communities differed in approach, and common themes. We then

outline promising community practices and end with a shorter list of early-stage advice for civic leaders. While telling stories and offering examples might have produced a richer, more illustrative narrative, we have refrained from naming sites and leaders for several reasons. Our interviews provided a single perspective on multi-sector collaboratives, not full-blown case studies; their strength is common themes, not in-depth analyses of particular communities. We also wanted to stay away from "calling out" or anointing specific sites.

I. GETTING STARTED

Moving from a good plan to an effective collaborative requires more time and energy than leaders tend to anticipate at the outset. Communities have identified effective early steps as well as some things they would "do over." They also have had to overcome skepticism along the way. While communities had unique experiences during the start-up phase, some important common themes emerged.

Taking action requires resources, preparation, and the ability to take advantage of expected and unexpected opportunities. It would be tempting to pick one or two essential factors that produce early success, but that is not the way things worked. However, five key ingredients came up time and again.

- **Leadership.** Having the right top-level people around the governance table is essential, but entrepreneurial mid-level managers and investors also are important. Pulling together small groups is a critical act of leadership itself. The right group can serve as passionate advocates or a virtuous conspiracy of leaders who want to act together. Ultimately, collaboratives may need a larger set of leaders, including some unlikely partners. Leaders champion the collaboration and lead by using data to change their own institutions and investments.

- **Trusted Relationships.** Creating collaborative leadership requires trust, respect, and aligned values – a "meeting of minds and hearts" – as well as a sense of humility. Trust allows individuals and organizations to build valuable relationships, which must grow and be sustained over time and foster a sense of "reciprocity." Effective collaborations must tap these relationships while creating the space and resources to develop them further. This culture of collaboration should permeate the initiative's governance and workgroups.

- **Rationale and Imperative**. Leaders must agree about the rationale for the collaboration, such as strengthening the educational pipeline or reigniting economic development. Likewise, they must accept that such an effort to make long-term generational change requires urgent action. Some collaborations never provide a convincing purpose and sense of urgency and thus fail to pull in skeptical leaders who fear the distraction or depletion of resources stemming from one more initiative. Communities frame this rationale and imperative in several ways; a collaborative effort, for example, may play a distinct role, fill a specific niche, undertake a focused scope of work, or bring added value to existing efforts. Organizers must be able to answer key questions: With so much else going on in

communities, why is this collaboration important, in everyone's self-interest, and why now? Answering them is not a one-time event. A sense of purpose and urgency must drive the collaboration as the challenging work unfolds.

- **Results and Data.** Collective impact initiatives are built on results, data, and continuous improvement. The fundamental work of multi-sector collaboratives is to help communities set powerful goals and deadlines and build the organizational and data-collection capacity necessary to achieve them. Key goals and long-term outcomes should serve as a "north star" that guides collaboration, investment, and learning and that build on an analysis of baseline data. Collaboratives also should track indicators of progress that form the path to achieving the overarching goals. In this working paper, we consider outcomes to be major, mission-related aspirations, such as "all young people in our community will obtain achieve post-secondary credentials." Goals are major population-level targets related to those outcomes, such as "we will double the number of college graduates by 2020." And indicators are contributing measures of success, such as reading at grade level and high school graduation rates.[19]

- **Opportunity**. Multi-sector collaboratives have different origin stories that infuse urgency into the work. Many of these stories involve unusual acts of leadership, funder gifts and challenges, national requests for proposals, and new governance opportunities. A sense of crisis or an intractable challenge, like poor college completion rates or an increase in the numbers of disconnected youth, shape opportunity moments as well. In several cases, an established collaborative focused on a single outcome realized it could do more, often in the context of a "cradle-to-career" framework. A number of communities were inspired by a visit to the Harlem Children's Zone. But it takes time for a sense of opportunity and crisis to become commitment – and frequently new resources upfront can make things more complicated or slow things down.

Do Overs

Leaders were quick to identify "do overs" for early-stage work. It was surprising how these issues remained top-of-mind and still provided guidance. Collaboratives left out key players or convened prematurely; they didn't spend enough time learning how to use data and defining and measuring results; they should have paid more attention early on to tough conversations about race, community engagement, and geography; they should have focused more on the nuts and bolts of building collaboratives and understanding partners' roles and contributions; they needed more time to discuss their theory of change and the capacities and resources required for achieving results, and several wished they had brought on an executive director sooner.

Skeptics and Tension Points

Multi-sector collaboratives have the power to mobilize and align diverse interests and resources. But collaborations inevitably face skepticism and disagreement. The challenge, of course, is getting to agreement – or friendly disagreement – while keeping the collaborative in place. Strong leadership,

relationships, and facilitation can keep partners in alignment, even skeptics. Sometimes, however, collaboratives just have to move forward and not get stuck.

Below is a list of considerations identified across many communities.

Finding Leaders
- It can be difficult to find a small group of high-level leaders who have enough time, energy, and commitment.
- Some communities have a bounty of social entrepreneurs with their own agendas who require specialized recruitment to get involved.
- Local funders worry about ending up being responsible for national initiatives.
- Public sector leaders worry about the "value add" and reconciling multiple agency agendas.

Willingness to Collaborate
- Some leaders need to always be at the center of things and crowd out other voices.
- Some leaders focus too much on organizational structure rather than on the business of the initiative.
- Some leaders prefer one to two "silver bullet" solutions.
- Other leaders prefer short agendas and staying out of the messy process of change.
- Some community leaders prefer to take the field alone or stand on the sidelines watching for missteps.

The Right Process
- Some leaders are more comfortable with strategic decision-making than with collaborative or consensus-based decision-making.
- Reconciling agendas and avoiding duplication are key.
- All institutions should be responsible for results and making tough choices, but the collaborative should provide a "safe space" for this to happen.
- Sharing credit should be dealt with upfront.

The early steps of multi-sector collaboration carry both high risks and high potential rewards. Success requires time, patience, transparency, and lots of conversation. Shared values, relationships, and a "north star" are fundamental. Mistakes will be made in all communities. The best advice is to learn, question assumptions, and try new approaches.

<u>**Early-Stage Advice for Building Key Capacities**</u>

- Get the right, committed people involved.
- Take time to build trust and relationships.
- Frame a powerful rationale, goals and sense of urgency.
- Build a culture focused on data collection and results.
- Make a long-term commitment of time, capacity, and resources.

Champions bring credibility and momentum needed for collective impact. Having a champion or small group of champions is one of the most critical factors in achieving success. They are leaders who are willing to stake their reputation on the project and who can use their political capital on its behalf. Champions are able to bring together CEO-level cross-sector leaders and keep them actively engaged over time while supporting leadership at all levels. Champions do not replace a broader leadership group, but they do bring and keep people together, ignite action, and help navigate hard times.

Who are the Champions?
- **A special kind of leader – focused on the result or goal and not self-promotion.** Communities identified a diverse roster of champions who played critical roles in forming collaboratives. They included mayors, university presidents, foundation heads and staff, and long-time public sector leaders. They brought credibility and passion but most importantly, modeled the spirit and practice of inclusiveness, learning from mistakes, public accountability, and passion for results. Champions of this kind are especially critical in the start-up phase, but they also are needed to keep collaboratives on track over the long run.
  Not always leaders in the limelight. Champions may be leaders who show up in the headlines and collective impact narratives. But some can be quiet, behind-the-scenes relationship builders and investors. Both roles are important. All champions bring long-term knowledge and credibility to the table, and these attributes are what attract other leaders and keep things moving.
- **Funders as Champions.** "A champion with money and respect is highly desirable," is how one interview subject put it. Many collective impact efforts were seeded by a funder or group of funders passionate about an important community issue. Funders were reported as neutral and respected members of the community who could bring together a diverse cross-section of people. They sometimes functioned as the initial "sparkplugs."
- **Mayors as Champions.** Mayors can use the bully pulpit and rally people around an important issue. Mayors have taken on the role as champion and used their connections to build a coalition around issues. Mayors have been champions, for example, for Promise Neighborhoods initiatives, grade level reading campaigns, and education campaigns. Yet, identifying too closely with a mayor can create challenges when political transitions occur.
- **Unlikely Suspects as Champions.** Do not rely on the same expected leaders to fill the champion's roles. Look for some "unlikely suspects" who will capture a wider group of people's attention. Business leaders can play this role, although not all fresh leaders will be found in board rooms.

Multiple Champions and Multiple Roles
- **"Never doubt the power of a small group of leaders."** A core group of leaders can come together and champion the cause. Collective impact at its best mobilizes partners – linked in a community through a web of relationships and history –for a new purpose. It may be a network of leaders with a history of working together – in a municipal administration, for example; or mid-level organizational leaders involved with a previous community collaborative, or the leaders of an effective regional nonprofit who put a stake in the ground about achieving an important outcome and ask others to join the campaign.

- **Multiple Roles for Champions.** Collaborations require different kinds of leaders as they evolve and take on new areas of work. Different champions are needed for start-up and for launching a major policy campaign. Some leaders can play different roles; some are best in specialized capacities.

<u>**Early-Stage Advice for Identifying Champions**</u>

- Recruit leaders who are long-term champions and can bring others to the table.
- Look for a variety of champions who can work both within and from outside relevant public systems.
- Cultivate a network of champions to ignite the work and keep it going.
- Champions are needed at every level – from governance table to workgroups.

3. IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC PARTNERS

Successful multi-sector collaborations depend on strong participation from agencies within public systems providing significant financial resources to meet many social, educational, and human service goals. They also develop ways to accommodate the objectives, measures, and front-line practices that shape these agencies' service delivery on the ground. Without their buy-in, many initiatives will work on the margins of the existing public systems, with less impact.

Although public-partner relationships take time and connections to form, large-scale change requires them. Yet, many communities face challenges in getting and keeping the public sector involved, especially school-system leaders – for many reasons. An initiative may lack a compelling rationale or doesn't demonstrate the added value it brings to the work of a public system; public leaders may be preoccupied with their own initiatives or fear controversy about competing reform approaches, or they may fear becoming scapegoats for unsuccessful efforts. Communities need to find ways to overcome or mitigate these challenges because the public sector is essential for long-term success.

Communities identified a number of principles and strategies for attracting and sustaining public sector partners.

Public Sector Contribution
- **Public Investment Key.** Large-scale change needs public investment. Having both public and private funders at the table lowers risks for public leaders and can increase overall payoffs. Public sector champions can demonstrate to other agency leaders the value of changing investment strategies. The promise of new resources, such as college scholarship funding, has brought and kept public sector leaders at the table.
- **Public sector data a priority.** Data is at the heart of multi-sector collaborations, and much data is generated by the public sector. Assembling and using public sector data requires agreements and access, which are difficult to achieve without public sector buy-in.

The Case for Public Sector Involvement

- **Strategic Use of Public Partners.** Initiatives must demonstrate a clear rationale to engage public systems. Be clear about the role public partners are being asked to play and how their own initiatives and goals can be furthered. Help them understand that increased public demand for change and aligned investments can help them achieve their own objectives. Public sector leaders need to know what they will get, what they will have to give up, and what they will have to do differently.
- **The Power of Geography.** Geography matters to public sector leaders. Focusing on the right physical or jurisdictional area can lead to additional resources becoming available or show that an agency is part of a larger regional effort. A focus on the city communicates to all public system leaders that the partners are all in it together. Targeting an effort to communities in most need may provide focus but diminish participation by other leaders. Understanding local political geography is key when making the pitch to public sector leaders.

Recruiting the Public Sector

- **Relationships Matter** – Public partners, including mayors, agency heads, and school superintendents, are best cultivated by partners and peers who have strong relationships with them. Former elected or appointed officials can be useful in this as can major funders. It takes a lot of work to stay in touch with and seek ongoing input and advice from public partners.
- **A Secret Weapon: the Mayor.** Mayors are important allies; they can use their considerable leadership to influence others to join and re-direct funds to support change efforts. However, mayors will focus on "political wins" and must have an understanding of when and where they can be most useful.
- **Middle Managers can be Allies.** While senior public officials need to join the governance group, middle managers must buy in to the goals of the collaborative and can play an important role making sure public funds flow appropriately through complex public systems. It is important to connect mid-level managers across agencies so they can help lead the change process collaboratively.

Early-Stage Advice for Recruiting Public Partners

- Create compelling rationale and incentives for public sector participation and investment.
- Identify which public sector leaders are needed and why it is in their self-interest to participate.
- Identify public sector champions who can recruit other public sector partners, model accountability, and facilitate data access.
- Recruit mid-level managers and investors to lead from within.

4. SETTING GOALS

Setting ambitious outcomes and goals mobilizes civic energy, provides a sense of urgency, organizes roles and work plans, directs investments and system changes, and fosters accountability. Setting

long-term outcomes and shorter-term targets is central to collective impact efforts and they should be identified early on. Goals must be audacious – a stretch, but achievable. Big goals, data-driven accountability, and a relentless focus on results and disparities distinguish today's most promising multi-sector collaboratives.

Yet, many communities are reluctant to set ambitious goals, for several reasons. Many community leaders worry they will not be able to achieve bold goals and will therefore suffer politically, especially when these goals address significant racial, ethnic, and geographic inequities. Indeed, there are countless examples of communities setting big goals that have failed to mobilize the action needed to achieve concrete results. Another worry is that the complexity underlying most social and economic goals makes meaningful measurement of progress extremely challenging. Simply, setting ambitious goals means accountability.

This is why setting goals well at the outset is so critical. We are learning a lot about making ambitious goals actionable and measurable and a touchstone for aligning contributions and investments from multiple sectors and partners. Each community needs to decide the appropriate number of goals and indicators to track for progress.

Three general goal-setting approaches are prevalent – population-level goals, emergent goals, and goals developed from community engagement. Most cradle-to-career efforts adopt StriveTogether's six big education pipeline outcomes,[20] extending from school readiness to post-secondary success. Communities may add additional outcomes like healthy births or workforce participation. A second approach focuses on changing systems in areas such as workforce development, poverty reduction, or community transformation, recognizing that these outcomes are less well-defined than education benchmarks and hence are developing and emergent. Finally, several collaborations crafted specific targets that developed from deep engagement with communities about specific educational barriers or challenges.

Many sites choose one big goal to serve as a "north star," which keeps partners at the table, along with specific contributing goals. Those may include reducing poverty by 50 percent, cutting infant deaths in half, or doubling the number of college degrees. Many communities are, for example, adopting a version of the Lumina Foundation's post-secondary goals.[21] It is important to have a compelling storyline illuminating the goal – e.g., it is no longer possible to afford housing in our community without an associate's degree.

Even when no overarching goal is adopted, sites usually pick one or two outcomes as priorities, one that builds on existing momentum and another outcome that addresses pent-up demand and interest. One site has established reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the educational pipeline as a primary goal.

Goal-Setting Practices

Setting the Stage
- Adopt an accountability framework that clearly defines results and outcomes and the actions needed to achieve them.

Analysis for Goal-setting

- Understand the problem and its drivers using baseline data before setting goals.
- Understand community assets that can address specific goals and targets.
- Define target populations and sub-populations. Be aware who gets less attention or left out by the adoption of certain goals, for example, college students failing to graduate.
- Disaggregate data by race and ethnicity and set goals and targets related to closing gaps and promoting equitable opportunities.

Choosing Goals and Metrics

- Consider adopting and expanding an existing community goal that already has traction.
- Expand a focused, single goal of a successful campaign to develop a broader collaboration with multiple goals.
- Deep community ownership of the goal can make the effort more credible.
- Tap governance and workgroup leaders whose work is related to chosen goals.
- Seek feedback from community after establishing goals but before big launch.
- Adopt timeframes for goal achievement that are realistic but motivating.

Taking Action to Meet Goals

- Common messaging is important. All partners should communicate the same vision and results.
- Use the structure of goals to establish workgroups.
- Performance measures for programs related to overall goals can drive change towards big results.
- Set targets for shifting and realigning public, private, and philanthropic investments to help achieve priority results.
- Choose partners with the capacity to handle data across multiple subject areas related to goals.
- Build on results framework and targets to apply for discretionary public funding.

Early-Stage Advice for Goal Setting

- Top leaders must buy into community goal frameworks and their implications for the collaborative.
- Consider goals that hold the promise of transforming a community.
- Create adequate ability to handle data, which will be crucial to making the framework for outcomes and goals a reality.
- Use goals and related data as a "north star" for making decisions about investments, alignment, and policy agendas.

5. BACKBONE ORGANIZATIONS

The notion that a cross-sector collaborative must tap a single organization to serve as the initiative's "backbone" has become a tenet of collective impact orthodoxy that probably does more harm than good. The race for a backbone is an unneeded distraction. However, it is critical to develop a system to handle "backbone functions" – to serve as a center of gravity, provide implementation capacity, manage relationships, and collect data. In other words, it's not the form but the function that is important. And such backbone functions are absolutely critical. The reality is that all communities, in the end, have used partnerships to handle the complete set of backbone functions.

Communities have used different approaches in this regard – turning to new or existing organizations, tapping a combination of new staff or loaned staff, developing partnerships among stakeholder organizations, building a staff reporting to a key leader, or relying upon the key partners within a governance structure. Rarely can one organization perform all the needed functions. Whatever the form, backbone staffers have to be separate and independent from any one set of partners, focused intently on achieving results, and willing to invest the time and energy needed to build cross-system relationships that can lead to systemic realignment. Having a top-notch leader is step one.

Backbone partnerships are costly, require time to develop, and must have reliable support to sustain them for the long haul. Key leaders need to understand the importance of the backbone role early and recognize that it cannot be done on the cheap. Over time, collaboratives need to make sure that backbone power and influence does not eclipse the role and credibility of the collaborative itself. At the same time, additional investments will be needed in new backbone capacities and partners.

The race for a backbone can be minimized by leaders making it clear that choosing backbone partners is not a "win or walk away" proposition. Multiple partners are needed with a high-capacity center of gravity. Sometimes local factors will make it easy to decide on how to organize the backbone function. In those cases, leaders must communicate clearly about how they made the decision. In other communities, the backbone function can be built by choosing key partners to focus on each broad goal, whether school readiness or college access. Finally, if staffers from several organizations are assigned to a collaborative, they must be full-time and clearly delegated to work on the project under collaborative leadership.

Interviewees described exemplary backbone roles, capacities, and people skills, summarized here.

Backbone Roles
- Provides a center of gravity.
- Holds fidelity to goals and principles.
- Fosters civic collaborations.
- Convenes partners.
- Plays a "buck stops here" role.
- Organizes work at multiple levels.

- Coordinates data development.

Organizational Capacities
- Able and unafraid to work with strong partners.
- Has a deep bench of high-performing staff with relevant expertise.
- Offers strong facilitation skills.
- Maintains discipline and the ability to execute.
- Serves as "glue" for disparate activities.
- Is nimble.
- Serves as a "neutral" party without an agenda or negative "baggage."

People skills
- Able to act as "servant leaders."
- Has a broad set of contacts and a deep knowledge of the community.
- Knows how things are done.
- Knows when to act and when to get others to act.
- Knows when to stay behind the scenes.
- Committed to relationship building.

Early-Stage Advice for Backbone Partnerships

- Have a deep discussion and reach agreement about the expectations for the backbone function and partners.
- Build or enhance a backbone function that fits your community. Start early but set a high bar for capacity and performance.
- Have multi-year funding in place.
- Ensure that backbone function is separate and independent from any one set of partners.

6. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA PARTNERS

Multi-sector collaboratives need data to establish goals and targets, create community report cards, design and improve interventions, engage the community, and communicate progress and challenges. This is an ongoing process that includes demonstrating a new form of data-driven leadership, investment, and continuous improvement. Data reveals disparities and gaps, good and mediocre performance, bright spots to build on, and whether collective action is moving the needle on results. But this will only happen if there is the leadership and organizational capacity to collect data and turn it into useful, actionable information. Some leaders, surprisingly, need to be convinced that an ongoing data focus is essential for achieving results.

Two general types of data and information are needed, each including descriptive and analytic components. The first concerns population-level indicators about community results related to such things as poverty, grade-level reading, and high school graduation. For each, communities

would be advised to disaggregate data by race and ethnicity, geography, and other factors. Developing the right data is more complicated than it may seem. For example, many indicators are relevant for understanding an outcome such as the number of children reading at grade level by third grade. And obtaining high-quality and consistent data frequently requires formal data-sharing agreements among public agencies or primary data collection. Getting this type of data requires time and relationships.

The second type of data and information is related to performance accountability and continuous improvement. This requires collecting and aggregating data about each program, system, and funding stream. But data challenges are inevitable, as on-the-ground organizations will have varying capacities to generate and assess data, and the quality of data will vary. It's important for these initiatives to be able to use data to compare the performance of similar programs and draw on other contextual information to identify program improvement opportunities.

Collective impact efforts will rely on backbone organizations that must have the capacity and knowledge to manage various data partners and develop working data agreements. Some backbone organizations go further and are themselves the primary data partners and analysts. Universities can play an important role regarding the first type of data about population-level indicators. But great concern was expressed regarding the timeliness and credibility problems that universities can bring with them. Other communities build on the capacities of the National Neighborhood Indicators Project and its affiliates or the data offices of public sector partners like school districts.

Finding data partners for continuous improvement is even more challenging. Universities rarely can make the leap from broader indicator research to the real-time examination of program information for accountability and improvement. Some communities are turning to the private sector for assistance with this type of data collection and use, especially the health and finance sectors. At the aggregate performance level, however, there may be room for assistance from more traditional evaluation researchers to help identify cross-cutting themes.

Communities do not get this completely right the first time around, meaning they must establish a continuous improvement cycle for collecting and analyzing data and communicating about its implications. Too much data is likely to be collected for early report cards and deliberations about goals and outcomes. And communities should focus on securing data that captures how many people are "better off" in various measures, as opposed to data that measures "how many" and "how much" aspects of service delivery. And decisions about frequency and scope of continuous improvement data will be made along the way. Communities must retain their focus on the key role of data in achieving results and the requisite investments in data infrastructure.

Early-Stage Advice for Data Collection and Partners

- Start early on collecting the right outcomes data for report cards and continuous improvement.
- Support backbone data capacity and find data partners for indicator research and continuous improvement.

- Use credible service or programmatic data to identify bright spots of performance related to key results.
- Engage data providers as partners in a data development agenda.
- Bring in private sector firms to assist in developing continuous improvement capacity.
- Connect to integrated data discussions already happening in many cities.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is vital to multi-sector collaborations for three reasons. First, experience has bolstered the widely held belief that involving communities makes for better outcomes. Second, it is a pragmatic recognition that long-term collaborations must have credibility and support in the community if they are to change systems. And third, many of today's social, economic, and educational goals require parents and communities to serve as "co-creators," whether improving attendance or reading at home.

In practice, however, community engagement takes many forms, ranging from broad and ongoing to the episodic involvement of a few grassroots leaders. Most broadly, community engagement refers to a wide range of stakeholders deliberating about outcomes, interventions, and accountability. In a narrower but equally important sense, community engagement is a process to hear the voices of residents. Community engagement may not be the starting point for multi-sector collaborations, but it becomes more important as the change process unfolds; indeed community voice often prompts and supports change.

One strongly held perspective is that multi-sector collaborations are grass-tops campaigns that mobilize top-level civic leadership to guide the messy process of change. They are not community organizers and must rely on participating organizations to bring the grassroots community into the collaboration when appropriate, usually at the workgroup or network level. Grassroots perspectives are important for discussing outcomes and accountability but participation is viewed as less important for program design and continuous improvement. One collaboration admitted it had no community engagement at the outset but embraced it over time.

A different perspective suggests that successful multi-sector collaborations must build on substantial community engagement both at the outset and along the way. In one community, thousands of neighborhood residents and school parents endorsed school readiness as an outcome. Another community surveyed 1,000 mothers of young children to understand their needs and aspirations. Another effort built on an in-depth survey of parents and children to identify the most important challenges facing children in schools. They saw that community engagement would build the demand for change and increase community participation in new programs. Other communities conducted listening campaigns involving hundreds of people before starting down the path of setting outcomes. Several collaborations likened their efforts to mobilizing a social movement for change.

Community Engagement Practices

Why Engage
- To elevate the role of parents and communities as integral partners in their children's success.
- New perspectives on community results and programs can help collaboratives move forward.
- Performance indicators for robust parent engagement in schools show why this involvement makes a difference for student and school performance.
- Targeted populations or geographic areas will be left out without deeper community engagement and organizing.
- Authentic engagement prepares collaborative leaders to recognize and address community challenges.

How to Engage
- Link to other civic processes to gather community input and engagement.
- Work with partners who involve the community in authentic ways.
- Devote adequate time and work to build trust to tap into the living experience and aspirations of parents and students.
- Hire parents and residents as organizers and interviewers for community outreach.
- Do not go to the community with either a blank slate or a fully baked set of ideas.
- Involve community representatives at the workgroup level and find the most effective ongoing roles for parent and student voices.

When to Engage
- Engage the community in outcomes discussion, review of data, and reporting back about progress and challenges.
- Repeat community forums and surveys regularly for accountability and learning.

Early-Stage Advice for Community Engagement

- Engage the community in a reflective conversation about harnessing the different sectors to achieve big results.
- Find ways to anchor the collaborative in the authentic voices and aspirations of the community.
- Do not settle for a symbolic community voice or the "usual suspects;" partner with stakeholders who can bring the community to the table.
- Deepen community engagement and sustain it over time.

Promoting equity is at the heart of most multi-sector collaboratives whether explicitly stated or not. A racial lens, in particular, is important for understanding issues such as poverty, healthy births, school success, and career advancement. Racial disparities, however, are hard to discuss and harder to address, but if disparities are left unacknowledged civic collaboratives will not be successful in the long run.

The most common starting point is disaggregating data by race and ethnicity. What are the racial and ethnic disparities within each outcome? Disaggregating by race and ethnicity not only shines a light on population differences but also enables focused discussion as to what accounts for these differences and what are promising interventions for promoting opportunities. Aside from data disaggregation, ethnic differences are especially important to consider in some communities. That is, there are differences of experience between Cuban Americans and Puerto Ricans, Chinese Americans and Pacific Islanders.

In one community, data showed the re-segregation of schools over the years. While this trend was well known, having civic leaders acknowledge the data and its implications was an important first step and set the stage for taking action. But discussing data broken out by race and ethnicity requires care. Grappling with racial and ethnic disparities and opportunities highlights the need to have a diverse group of leaders. Without that diversity at both the top of the collaborative and in its workgroups, the collaboration will not be taken seriously. Finally, discussing racial and ethnic disparities is not a one-time event; it should be part of an ongoing dialogue throughout the initiative.

A first step may be to set an overall equity goal that cuts across all the outcomes. It is a visible, concrete commitment to promoting equitable opportunity. Another approach is to set targets – by race – for specific outcomes along with overall targets. For example, communities might set a target for increasing college completion by race as well as for the overall population. Other communities have chosen to focus on specific groups, such as men and boys of color. The point is to be explicit and not allow racial equity to be a hidden, unspoken assumption.

Understanding disaggregated racial and ethnic data can help communities adapt or redesign interventions to fit local conditions. Few evidence-based practices are contextualized to specific ethnic communities – and this is not just about the use of language that is accessible to targeted racial and ethnic groups. Cultural norms, for example, about parenting or parent engagement, should be taken into account as interventions are designed.

In sum, focusing on racial and ethnic disparities will vary widely in each community – reflecting the history and culture of each area – and will stretch the capacities of most collaboratives. Collaboratives should identify partners with the background to assist in these efforts who can move beyond words to sustained action to promote racial equity.

<u>**Early-Stage Advice for Promoting Equitable Opportunity**</u>

- Leaders should agree to have ongoing conversations about racial and ethnic equity.
- Assemble a diverse set of leaders at the governance and workgroup levels to reflect the community make-up.
- Disaggregate data by race and ethnicity, shine a light on differences, and set targets.
- Give leaders and workgroups the skills and opportunity to discuss disparities, targets, and interventions.
- Use data to report on progress and challenges for promoting equitable opportunities.

9. ALIGNING MULTIPLE COLLABORATIONS

Most communities are busy, complex places with multiple efforts underway to address specific social and economic issues. Many communities also have collaborations that are winding down or dormant but continue to shape attitudes about the possibility of change. Some communities are simply fatigued from supporting multiple efforts that generate competition and excessive "noise" that can have a negative impact on multiple sectors. The challenge of competing efforts is especially relevant to cradle-to-career collaboratives that span a wide array of age groups, outcomes, and interventions. Fragmentation of focus is harmful in all communities and at the national level, but diluting civic and financial resources is especially worrisome in communities facing deep social and economic challenges.

Many multi-sector collaboratives originated by knitting together individual campaigns that were formerly separate. Many cradle-to-career efforts have branched out from a single-outcome focused campaign, such as fostering high school completion, to other parts of the education pipeline. Other campaigns joined existing collaborations and backbone organizations to take advantage of existing civic momentum and capacity on the ground. Still other efforts seek out campaigns or organizations to take on the work of achieving specific outcomes.

Coordinating multiple efforts and joining forces is a good idea and can allow multiple stakeholders to align their work for broader collective impact. But collaboratives need to examine how these efforts can fit together and what each offers. In determining those things, collaborative leaders should keep in mind three simple words: "turf, turf, turf." Ceding leadership or authority never happens easily.[22]

There is no payoff in seeking a partnership with a mediocre effort unless its scope and performance can be stretched and its leaders are willing to change. And some efforts simply do not fit into a collaborative focused on results and partnership. In these cases, it makes sense to pass on partnering for the moment. It falls to top civic leaders to convince other campaign leaders that they will all achieve greater outcomes by working together. There is no need necessarily for other campaigns to give up their brand and identity; the key is alignment and working together for results.

The costs of not aligning collaborative efforts can be high. It's not just a loss of positive synergy but the diffusion of community effort in terms of leaders, resources, and community credibility. In fact,

poor coordination can reinforce the "siloed," competitive behaviors that contribute to poor community outcomes. For many communities with modest resources and big challenges, multiple, competing efforts may yield mediocre results across the board.

Funders have an important role in encouraging coordination and the productive alignment of various community collaborations. Too often, funders support individual efforts rather than recognizing their potential to help achieve larger goals. Funders need to be flexible in their processes and reporting requirements to support civic alignment of this kind.

Sensible Practices for Joining Forces
- Map existing campaigns and capacities and see where there is potential for productive overlap in using data to make change.
- Some campaigns should remain separate and there is little utility in merging with a mediocre campaign.
- Make sure today's campaign builds on historic efforts with similar results and objectives. Communities need to embrace the long-term storyline of change.
- Understand whether the parallel work of different campaigns is a result of funder priorities.
- Overlap of leadership in multiple campaigns can help make partnerships and alignment a day-to-day reality.
- Make sure to invest in the increased capacity and reach of partner campaigns; assume they need improvement.

Early-Stage Advice for Aligning Multiple Collaborations

- Map current campaigns and collaborations and points of intersections.
- Agree on results to maximize civic alignment.
- Make alignment with other campaigns a leadership priority.
- Reassure other campaigns that joining together is a "win/win."

10. BUILDING MOMENTUM THROUGH EARLY WINS

Producing results takes time. But many collaboratives want to show progress in the shorter term to build credibility and momentum and demonstrate their commitment to making concrete change over the long term. These collaboratives hope to communicate regularly about important on-the ground activity and positive results.

Early wins may be "low cost/no cost" and relatively easy actions that test commitments of key stakeholders to make change and get things moving. These kinds of investments may prompt a response of "this would have happened anyway," but multiple early wins will quell this skepticism. It's important to remember that early wins can deliver a message to multiple audiences – the broader community, the collaborative itself, public agencies, and the governance table.

The "gold standard" early win could be expanding access to a new student or family resource like college scholarships, which in turn can help reinvent the education pipeline. Such a change benefits real people; a disparity is addressed, and a system change agenda emerges. Some collaboratives, however, stated that even "process" or "symbolic" wins can be valuable, such as getting key partners together or gaining access to new data. In all cases, effective communications is essential if early wins are to convey progress.

Focusing on early wins has risks for new collaboratives. Early wins that focus on new funding can foster program proliferation that may undermine efforts related to continuous improvement and building system capacity. Such proliferation also may communicate that the overall effort is about attracting new funding and reinforce traditional grant-seeking behavior among community partners. Generating quick wins also may lead to favoring the usual partners, focusing on the easiest to serve populations, or claiming credit for what was going to happen anyway. Several collaboratives said that they were not concerned about early wins because they diluted the focus on long-term, systemic change. In one case, a community achieved a large and unexpected early win – major new resources – but one that made it difficult to organize a sustainable collaborative to take on system change.

Examples of early wins
- Forming the collaborative and obtaining multiple partners' sign-on.
- Winning grants from national foundations and joining national campaigns (e.g. the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading).
- Generating and sustaining cooperation from major civic leaders with a focus on important goals.
- Avoiding investments or campaigns that are not aligned with overarching goals.
- Announcing the investment of new or rebalanced resources that can generate a major result, such as the addition of pre-school slots.
- Sharing new grassroots-generated data with key agencies.
- Changes by top collaborative leadership in their own organizations that contribute to achieving key results.
- Intermediate outcomes with a clear link to long-term results, such as increased registration for early learning or increased participation rates for people of color.
- Investments in short-term prototypes that explicitly test key elements of new interventions or seek to improve or adapt existing programs.
- Access to new resources that can lead to system changes (e.g. post-secondary scholarship funds).
- Taking community input seriously and reframing goals and results in response.
- Reporting back to the community about progress, results, leadership, and investments.
- Holding firm on investment criteria or accountability for results with popular grantees.

<u>**Early-Stage Advice for Building Momentum through Early Wins**</u>

- Decide what kinds of early wins would contribute to system change and achieving long-term results.
- Use credible service and programmatic data to target early wins.
- Do not chase early wins and be mindful of targeting the easier to serve.
- Create a "living timeline" of achievements.
- Have a communications plan for getting good news out to the broader community.

II. USING AND BUILDING EVIDENCE FOR RESULTS

Multi-sector collaborations seek to align public, private, and philanthropic investments to achieve better results. A familiar underlying assumption of these collaborations is that communities have too many programs, with mixed quality, disconnected from systems, and functioning without attempting continuous improvement. In some cases, though, a community may lack proven programs.

Most communities contain a mix of locally generated programs and imported evidence-based practices related to such interventions as home visiting, mentoring, or after-school programs. And some communities are the home of well-known national programs. But experience has shown that achieving ambitious results will require expanding the most effective programs – taking them from "good to great" – while filling program gaps with the most proven, evidence-based practices.

The StriveTogether cradle-to-career approach is premised on the continuous improvement of existing programs and systems. In this view, starting with familiar local programs and recognizing local assets builds credibility. Indeed, communities report that some nationally recognized programs produce no better results or have less ambitious aspirations than those sought by local investors. Moreover, some evidence-based programs developed for specific sub-populations need to be adapted for communities where culture or language differs. On the other hand, some civic leaders are discouraged by the local "sacred cow" programs with mediocre results that drain resources. Some dramatic changes will be required.

Another approach is to identify the top evidence-based interventions that will produce major results, such as reducing poverty. The list might include expanding access to childcare, promoting housing stability, providing financial incentives, and training and job placement support. Then, the challenge is to pick local examples of those interventions and help them improve and expand. It will be important to make sure the local interventions offer the "dose and duration" needed to improve results.

Consider the task of communities and systems that seek to identify and address the specific challenges faced by students both in and out of school. This is a more fine-grained effort than one focused, for example, on simply expanding mentoring or after-school programs and may require addressing complex social and emotional issues like stress, anxiety, and depression. Why wouldn't communities choose established, evidence-based programs to address these challenges?

Still other communities will be seeking to improve programs to reach outcomes for which there is little or emerging rigorous evidence; in some cases, multiple systems work at cross purposes, and run-of-the-mill programs proliferate. Finding local "bright spots" may be the way to start, but extensive local and national innovation may be required.

In the end, communities need to use data on a regular and ongoing basis to assess program and system performance, make improvements, and align investments. Our best advice is to start with local efforts and use data to both improve programs and assess gaps.

Community Practices
- Establish a performance management infrastructure before starting new programs.
- Build the capacity of workgroups to assess program performance and foster continuous improvement within them.
- Understand the contribution of evidence-based programs for achieving durable results on a predictable basis.
- Adapt proven and promising programs by using data about sub-populations and other local conditions.
- Assess the contributions of different kinds of interventions for achieving progress on major goals.
- Try out new approaches where few established programs exist or evidence is developing.
- Use data to critique "sacred cow" programs and ensure openness to other evidence-based approaches.
- Use process and outcome evaluation data to assess results.

Early-Stage Advice for Using Data and Evidence

- Assess the contribution of existing interventions and other evidence-based models for improving results.
- Build capacity to use data and apply continuous improvement techniques that all workgroups and partners adopt.
- Align program improvement efforts with goals for enhancing system capacities.

12. MISTAKES

Mistakes are inevitable in the process of community collaboration. Most mistakes can be corrected if recognized early in the initiative. Yet leaders often fear that admitting mistakes leads to dire consequences rather than to an opportunity to learn and adapt. Collaboratives need to build a culture that learns from mistakes throughout the initiative. Top leaders play an especially important role in setting the tone for acknowledging mistakes and getting beyond them. The interviews identified a range of common mistakes, summarized below.

Getting Organized
- Not including key stakeholders like mayors, school superintendents, or departments. Relying on one top leader, rather than a handful of civic leaders.
- Becoming preoccupied with "form" rather than "function" in establishing the collaborative's structure and organizing its backbone functions.
- Picking the wrong partners and anchor organizations and having to start over.
- Not having full-time, independent staff who can engage widely and act with confidence and authority.
- Becoming seen only as a short-term funding pool.
- Not having more than one major funder.

Getting Started
- Announcing the initiative's start-up too loudly, which leads to oversized expectations.
- Not having early, in-depth conversations about race, key results, and the role and practice of continuous improvement.
- Being distracted – not driven – by data, which can prompt collaborative leaders to lose focus and get lost "in the weeds."
- Not having implementation plans and long-term financial resources.
- Not recognizing that data and indicators of progress need refining when working on post-secondary and workforce development issues.
- Failing to balance community voice with implementation and governance.
- Waiting too long to start community partnerships and policy advocacy.
- Not having a communications plan and ability to promote common messages.

Doing the Work
- Focusing too narrowly on programs and not on system change.
- Devoting inadequate time to building the capacity and designing the process to achieve results, including program-fidelity measures.
- Duplicating efforts or attempting to bring in the "perfect" intervention.
- Moving too quickly to invest in programs rather than prototyping promising approaches.
- Tracking too many indicators all at once and losing a sense of priorities.
- Being unwilling to fail, redesign, and try again.

Early-Stage Advice for Learning from Mistakes

- Set the right tone for learning quickly from failure.
- Adopt the mantra of "Make New Mistakes" – rather than repeating old ones.
- Encourage leaders and partners to model how to learn from mistakes.
- Celebrate programs and systems that make midcourse corrections.

CONCLUSION

Multi-sector, collective impact collaborations for results hold great promise for improving the lives of children, families, and communities. They hold the ability to mobilize local leaders, use data, set goals, address disparities, encourage continuous improvement, and build more effective public and nonprofit systems. A number of collaborative examples from around the country are inspiring many more communities to pick up the challenge of collective impact and organize themselves in new ways to align systems and build on local bright spots.

In many respects, however, these new forms of collaboration for results are deeply countercultural. They run up against our institutional fragmentation, go-it-alone entrepreneurs, the allure of "silver bullets," and a persistent focus on the short term. Overcoming these obstacles makes the job of collective impact incredibly challenging.

This is why it is so important to build the mission, leadership, and infrastructure of these collective impact endeavors for the long term. We have tapped a growing and insightful collection of literature about multi-sector collaborations and have interviewed a number of leaders who are making these campaigns a reality. We have been greatly impressed by these leaders and common collaborative strategies, but also the adaptations they have made to improve collective impact efforts in their communities.

Our contribution has been to harvest a sample of the lessons and advice from this movement to inform start-up collaborations as they plan and launch. We reinforce many of the lessons already identified in the field while showing the variation across communities and the factors that need to be balanced as early-stage decisions are made. Mistakes will be made in implementation, but the good news is that midcourse corrections are possible. We hope our advice and suggestions assist civic leaders in moving forward to improve results in their communities.

INTERVIEWEES

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ENDNOTES

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¹⁶ Collective Impact Forum (2014). Hanleybrown, et al. (2012).

¹⁷ Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., & Martin, E. (2012). Understanding the value of backbone organizations in collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 1-8. Jolin, et al. (2012). The Bridgespan Group (2013). Needle-moving collective impact guide: Capacity and structure.

¹⁸ Phillips, D., & Splansky Juster, J. (2014). Hanleybrown, et al. (2012).

¹⁹ Defining ambitious results using data is a core component of collective impact and multi-sector collaborations. Unfortunately, many different words and definitions are used in the field to describe results. We have tried to bring some consistency to this results language in this report.

²⁰ The six StriveTogether Core Outcome Areas include Kindergarten Readiness, Early Grade Reading, Middle Grade Math, High School Graduation, Post-secondary Enrollment, and Post-secondary Degree Completion. Say Yes to Education has developed and tracks 13 indicators related to post-secondary success. Retrieved August 18, 2014, from http://sayyessyracuse.org/dashboard. For a review of StriveTogether's Cradle to Career Outcome Areas see StriveTogether. (2014). Cradle to career core outcome areas. Retrieved July 26, 2014, from http://www.strivetogether.org/sites/default/files/images/StriveTogether_Cradle%20to%20Career%20Outcomes%20Research%20Publication_1.pdf

[21] See Lumina Foundation Strategic Plan 2013-2016. Retrieved August 14, 2014, from http://www.luminafoundation.org/advantage/document/goal_2025/2013-Lumina_Strategic_Plan.pdf.

[22] William Potapchuk identifies the costs of competition among cradle-to-career efforts and established community schools, as well as examples of how local leaders create synergy by taking advantage of complementary efforts. Potapchuk, W. (2014). Linking initiatives for student success. *National Civic Review*, 103: 2, Summer 2014, 23-26.