When professionals in workforce development and other fields talk about “sustainability,” they tend to focus on locating additional funding sources as the means to continue operation of a program or initiative. The experience of effective and stable National Fund collaboratives has shown that, while resources to continue working are critical, sustainability involves much more.

Sustainability in this context refers to the ability of collaboratives to pursue a strategic vision and mobilize the resources to address a community’s workforce issues over time by simultaneously addressing industry needs and creating opportunities for low-wage workers.

The sustainability of National Fund collaboratives is founded on high-quality work that delivers value by addressing real and pressing community needs, and is pursued with strong leadership and engaged partners who contribute collectively to sustainability efforts. Sustainability is not just about sustaining collaboratives as organizations; it is about continuing meaningful work and fostering lasting positive change among the institutions and systems that serve both workers and the businesses that employ them.

This guide is intended to provide National Fund leaders and partners with a framework for thinking about what they must do to sustain their work. It also offers information, tools, and resources for working with partners to support collaborative sustainability.

To create this guide, the authors conducted interviews with site directors and partners of collaboratives that have operated four or more years. They also drew on lessons and resources derived from a Kellogg Foundation-funded sustainability initiative supporting 11 National Fund sites operating in the southern United States. Using these experiences, the authors have developed a framework and gathered resources and examples to provide insight into the elements of sustainability and to support collaborative development of these elements in their work.
Organization of the Guide
The guide is organized in three major thematic sections and concludes with a section that helps collaboratives put everything together in a sustainability plan.

The topics in each section were chosen because they reflect the experiences and insights of National Fund collaboratives and their leaders. These topics highlight the multiple elements of your work that contribute to sustainability.

Section 1 Laying the Groundwork
- A Understanding Your Context
- B Partner Engagement
- C Strategic Planning

Section 2 Strengthening Operations
- A Collaborative and Organizational Capacity
- B Budget and Funding
- C Strategic Communications

Section 3 Increasing Impact
- A Reflection and Evaluation
- B Systems Change

Section 4 Putting It All Together—Creating a Sustainability Plan

Each topic section begins with a set of self-assessment questions, a definition of terms, and a brief discussion the section’s relationship to collaborative sustainability. Each section contains ideas on how to address the topic in your work, as well as “Ideas in Practice” drawn from National Fund collaborative work around the country. At the end of each section is a list of related resources, tools, and continued learning on the topic.

How to Use the Guide
The comprehensive nature of this guide reflects the perspective of the National Fund’s leadership that sustainability is a process that is embedded in the ongoing work of collaboratives. The guide is designed as a tool to serve newly established as well as more mature collaboratives. How you use it depends on where your collaborative is in thinking about and working toward sustainability. You can review the guide in its entirety or just focus on specific components as needed to support sustainability planning and activities. You do not have to take on every section at once. You can use the self-assessments at the start of each section (and compiled in Appendix A) to help identify and prioritize areas that are most in need of attention. You can use the questions provided to guide discussions among your partners, use frameworks for capturing the exchange of ideas, and refer to resources to learn more. The “Putting It All Together” outline can help you and your partners determine concrete steps to move forward. Ultimately, the guide is intended to serve as a resource, so make it work for you!

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“Sustainability is about making transformational change in the community, creating impacts that help other organizations, not ourselves, so they can start working and take it from there.”

Mireya Eavey,
Sarasota Area President,
United Way Suncoast
**SECTION 1**

**LAYING THE GROUND WORK**

*The first step in planning for sustainability is to ensure you have a good understanding of your context, including but not limited to your regional economic conditions, funder community, education and training landscape, and policy environment.*

Then, we move into a discussion of engaging your partners within that context as well as a discussion of strategic planning as a way to assess the continued effectiveness and relevance of your work within the framework of sustainability planning.

**UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF YOUR WORK**

The work of National Fund collaboratives is grounded in “place;” that is, in the communities that collaboratives are trying to support and enrich through their work to advance low-skilled workers and support the needs of the businesses that employ them.

Context potentially includes:
- Funder landscape
- Local economy and industry structure
- Labor force and population characteristics (e.g., education and poverty levels)
- Workforce system
- Education and training landscape
- Employment/job vacancies
- Political environment
- Policy environment
- Outcomes, results, and progress to date

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**UNDERSTANDING YOUR LOCAL CONTEXT**

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<td>1) The collaborative has a collective understanding of the community in terms of major issues of concern, as well as individuals and institutions that hold power.</td>
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<td>2) The collaborative has a collective understanding of unmet workforce needs in your community informed by employer input, in addition to population and labor market data.</td>
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<td>3) The collaborative has an understanding of the legislative environment as it relates to workforce development.</td>
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<td>4) The collaborative has an understanding of the philanthropic and public workforce funding landscape of your community.</td>
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<td>5) The collaborative has analyzed stakeholders to identify those who can advance or hinder the work.</td>
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Some of the most important things you can do to sustain your work are to demonstrate that the collaborative is addressing a meaningful local need, is achieving results, and is adding value through the collective nature of its work. Understanding the context helps to define that need. It also helps to identify the resources you can draw on to support your work, and the potential barriers that might hinder your efforts or limit their effectiveness. Since community needs can change, analyzing the context you are working in should be an ongoing collaborative activity.

COMMUNITY SCAN
To help you understand your context, you will likely want to conduct a scan of your community. One way to organize your scan is to examine three key areas that contribute to your collaborative’s context: policy, systems, and environment.

Policy
Laws, regulations, rules, protocols, and procedures that relate to labor and workforce development.

- What, if any, relevant legislation is currently under consideration in your city/region/state?
- What, if any, movements to change policies or laws related to workforce development are underway?
- What, if any, policies related to accessing training and/or hiring influence the local labor market context (e.g., local hiring requirements or community benefit agreements)?

Systems
Features of organizations, institutions, and/or systems that influence labor and workforce policies and activities.

- What are the elements/institutions that constitute your local public workforce system? How are they perceived, and how well do they function in meeting both employer and worker needs?
- What training and education providers develop the skills of the current and future workforce? How are these entities connected?

Environment
Physical, social, or economic factors that influence opportunities and behaviors.

- What are the most prominent issues currently on the minds of political and community leaders?
- What issues are most on the minds of employers in your community?
- What geographic or other characteristics of your community create opportunities or barriers for individuals seeking to access new jobs or advancement at their current employer?
- What is the nature of the funding landscape—both philanthropic and public sources—in your community?
- What do current economic indicators say about the state of your community?
- What do population data and labor market information (LMI) tell you about the match between worker skills and employer needs?

PROCESS TIPS
Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you work with your partners to analyze your context:

- Define your “context.” Agree on the parameters or boundaries of the context (both geographic and systemic) you will analyze. Your collaborative may draw from multiple subregions or communities, which may have differing challenges and opportunities. You will want to consider such differences as you determine the context(s) to be analyzed.
- Work with collaborative members to determine the best approach to collecting and reviewing information on your context. Should you use committees? What resources or partners beyond the collaborative could you draw on?
- Select appropriate means of gathering data, such as key informant interviews, report reviews, and online data sources.
COMMUNITY SCAN SUMMARY

You can summarize the findings of your scan in a table like the one below and use it as a reference/review tool for the collaborative’s regular discussions. A worksheet for this exercise can be found at http://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/sustainability-guide/.

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<tr>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Significant Factors (include conditions, events, data, individuals &amp; institutions)</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
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<td>Policy</td>
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<td>Systems</td>
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As you review the information gathered in your scan, take time with partners to consider the collaborative’s current outcomes and results to date and discuss how the changing community landscape is influencing outcomes (e.g., if we are still not producing enough health care workers based on our economic indicators, how can we find ways to sustain and grow more efforts in this area?)

LOCAL ECONOMIC CONTEXT

It is critical for the collaborative to understand the economic landscape of the community to help identify needs and opportunities and guide investments. Depending on the resources of the collaborative, you may want to gather LMI directly by using available tools or by accessing information gathered by other entities, such as Workforce Development Boards, universities, local government, or other groups. See Figure 3 for information on different kinds of LMI sources.

“Sustainability is about creating a framework that has the flexibility to allow you to be able to respond to a changing environment.”

Laura Chandler, Executive Director, Southwest Alabama Workforce Development Council
IDEAS IN PRACTICE
Job Opportunity Investment Network’s Labor Market Study

Driven by a desire to understand the local labor market beyond anecdotal reports, in 2013, the Job Opportunity Investment Network (JOIN) and its partner, the CEO Council for Growth, engaged researchers from the Drexel University Center for Labor Markets and Policy to examine regional labor market data in the region surrounding Philadelphia. JOIN and the CEO Council funded the study and defined a set of research questions that would help them assess the relevance of their investments and advocacy efforts.

Researchers at Drexel produced a series of papers that highlighted trends over 10 years showing a “hollowing out” of the local economy, with growth occurring in “low-end” industries (e.g., nursing/residential care facilities and food services), offering lower pay and fewer hours, as well as “high-end” industries (e.g., hospitals and professional and technical services), offering more opportunity for higher wages and full-time employment—but no growth in industries between these ends. (See graphic below).

JOIN and the CEO Council launched a series of in-person briefings with employers and workforce professionals around the region to validate the findings and gain additional insights. In addition, JOIN set up an online survey on its website to allow people who couldn’t attend to weigh in and share their reaction to the findings.

The research findings and subsequent discussions highlighted the need for JOIN and its partners to consider how their efforts might be directed toward helping individuals move beyond entry level toward middle and high-end opportunities through the development of career pathways as a new investment strategy. In addition, the process surfaced the critical importance of behavioral traits among workers and the role that practitioners might play in helping to develop them.

JOIN continues to update its understanding of labor market conditions by periodically vetting findings of the study with employers and other groups to stay abreast of any changes that could impact the direction of its investment and advocacy efforts.

Figure 2
Industry Growth Trends from Drexel’s Labor Market Study

These industries offer lower pay and fewer hours most likely due to the fact that these positions do not require substantial education. Together these five industries employ just 9% of all workers in professional and managerial occupations.

These high-end industries offer more opportunity for higher wages and full-time employment. Together 58% of all workers employed in these five industries work in professional and managerial occupations.
With traditional and real-time LMI tools, you can

- Assess the number of past, present, and anticipated jobs in an industry or occupation
- Observe which job titles map to target occupations
- Identify the number of persons in an area employed in each industry, the share of persons in an occupation group employed in each industry, and the proportion those jobs represent in each industry
- Identify the primary employers of these occupations in a labor market area
- Identify the skills and credentials for given occupations important to local employers

In either case, you will want to test or verify the data with local employers and other community stakeholders to ensure that you are not missing important trends or context, such as the impact of a projected relocation of a new company or the opening or closing of plants or other facilities in your region. Employers and stakeholders can also help explain the reasons for certain data and trends that is not evident from the data itself.

**Analyzing Individuals and Organizations in Your Context**

Part of understanding your context involves examining the individuals and organizations that have a stake in your work directly or can influence your work by the role they play in the larger context surrounding your work. Analyzing these actors can help you determine who:

- Cares about your work
- Can contribute directly to it
- Can support and advance it in their own networks
- May pose resistance to your work

One way to start such an analysis is to develop a system frame like the one below, which outlines areas, or subsystems, that relate to the central purpose of simultaneously advancing workers and meeting employer needs.
Using this kind of organizing structure, you can identify and analyze stakeholders in your local context. Within each subsystem, consider:

- Who are the key individuals and institutions?
- What are their current relationships to our work?
- What role/perceived role do these stakeholders have in the work?
- What kind of relationship do we want to have going forward?
- How can they help our collaborative sustain our work?
- Where can we identify and cultivate champions?

You may want to go deeper in exploring the relationships among actors within your system by working with your partners to map out the actors and their connection (close or distant) to your work. As a resource for this process, FSG’s System Mapping: A Guide to Developing Actor Maps outlines instructions for developing actor maps. These maps provide a visual representation of the key organizations and/or individuals in a system, as well as their relationships to a given issue and to one another. Actor maps can support your stakeholder analysis by providing insights into actors and their roles within a system and highlighting opportunities to build new relationships.

These maps can also help inform your planning and systems change goals, as they can highlight levels of engagement among actors and identify potential points of leverage and areas for intervention.

Figure 4. Sample Collaborative System Frame

Advancing Workers + Meeting Employer Needs

Public Workforce System
Economic Development
Social Services
Philanthropy
Local Government
Education and Training

Figure 5. Analyzing Stakeholders: Power and Interest Grid

As you identify actors in your context, one way of considering your relationship with key stakeholders in your community is by analyzing power and interest. Determining where stakeholders sit along these two indices can help you determine the kind of relationship and the nature of communication you need to maintain with your stakeholders.

For instructions about stakeholder analysis, visit www.mindtools.com and search "stakeholder analysis".

You can record the results of your stakeholder analysis in a table like the one below. A worksheet for this exercise can be found at http://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/sustainability-guide/.
Once you identify important actors and organizations through this exercise you can consider how to leverage them in your broader sustainability efforts.

**NEXT STEPS**

1. Assess your collaborative’s current understanding of your local context, including policies, systems, and environment. Complete the community scan summary.

2. Summarize the labor market data you currently have, identify any gaps in your understanding of local labor market conditions, and make a plan to gather this data, including sources, roles, and responsibilities.

3. Complete a stakeholder analysis, either through system mapping, analyzing power and influence, or both.

4. Work with key partners to understand and analyze the information on the local context and draw out broad themes and/or problems that the region should prioritize and address.

5. Include these areas of work in your sustainability plan.

All resources for these sections are available at the end of this section on page 24.
PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Operating an effective workforce funding collaborative is much like leading any robust community partnership. The right people need to be at the table with a clear purpose for their collaborative effort, shared goals for their work, and joint ownership of solutions. In this context, “partner engagement” refers to the process of building a collaborative, developing relationships and trust with and among partners, establishing ways of working together, and helping to maintain the commitment of partners’ time, ideas, and resources over the life of the collaborative.

Sustaining the work of a collaborative over time requires that partners maintain ownership of the collaborative and its processes, regularly participate in meetings, and contribute their ideas and resources to the strategic work of the collaborative. Over time, funder priorities shift, individuals come and go, community contexts change, and distractions of all sorts arise. Collaborative leaders must therefore strive to lead a process and foster an environment that demonstrates value—both for the communities served and the partners who comprise the collaborative.

This section focuses on ways of orienting your work to help keep partners active, committed, at the table, and involved as owners of the collaborative’s goals and strategy and always thinking about ways they can contribute to sustaining the collaborative.

BUILDING THE COLLABORATIVE—PARTNER SELECTION

Sustaining your collaborative begins with having the right people at the table. You will want to engage funders and other organizations whose missions align with the work that your collaborative is undertaking. You will also want to ensure that multiple perspectives on workforce issues are represented and that the individuals that attend meetings have a sufficient level of influence within their organizations to help mobilize resources and draw on professional networks to be able to effectively support your work. They should be important stakeholders to the region in terms of business, industry, economic development and workforce development.

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<th>ASSESSING THE COLLABORATIVE’S BUILDING BLOCKS</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) The collaborative composition integrates the variety of perspectives and expertise necessary to define problems and pursue solutions to them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) The collaborative identifies and cultivates champions.</td>
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<td>3) The collaborative has established clear and agreed upon ways of working together.</td>
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<td>4) The collaborative has a process in place to define desired results and monitor progress in achieving them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5) The collaborative uses a process to assess member satisfaction with collaborative operation and achievements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) The collaborative has plans in place to manage partner and individual transitions.</td>
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As you reach out to organizations, it is important to set up in-person meetings to discuss your vision for the collaborative and, most importantly, to listen to potential members’ concerns, desires, and needs to help determine whether they are a good fit for the collaborative and how they might contribute to it. Ultimately, you want to communicate the value proposition of their participation for them as well as for the collaborative.

Consider the questions below as you think about involving new partners in your collaborative.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS**

- Does the potential partner organization have a stake in the problem you want to address and a willingness to share ownership of the solution?
- Does the potential partner share your values and level of concern over the problems your collaborative aims to address?
- Does the potential partner have a level of credibility and legitimacy in the philanthropic community, workforce development, or other related domain?
- Is the potential partner willing to invest staff and resources in the collaborative?
- Is the potential partner organization in good financial and organizational health, and do they have a proven track record?
- Does the potential partner have committed leaders who can articulate your shared vision, build a constituency, and manage these joint efforts?
- What does the potential partner expect from participation in the collaborative? Can you and the collaborative fulfill these expectations?

*Adapted from A Pocket Guide for Business Leaders: Find, Train, & Keep Productive Employees Through Alliances in Your Community.*

**COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION: WHO NEEDS TO BE AT THE TABLE?**

You may not check all of the boxes below but here are two ways of thinking about whom you might want to include as partners at your table.

![Collaborative Composition](image_url)

**ORGANIZATION TYPES**

- Community foundation
- Other local foundations
- Workforce Development Board(s)
- Economic development organizations
- United Way
- Chamber of Commerce
- City/County Government
- Businesses or industry associations
- Organized labor
- Community based organizations
- Other

**AREAS OF EXPERTISE**

- Philanthropy
- Public Workforce System
- Labor Market Information
- Public Policy/Advocacy
- Fundraising
- Marketing
- Communications
- Facilitation Skills
- Community Knowledge
- Industry Expertise
CULTIVATING CHAMPIONS

Over time, as you work with your partners, individuals can serve as champions for your work and contribute to its sustainability. Champions build support and credibility and mobilize resources to sustain and even broaden the reach of your effort.

So, how do you “cultivate” champions? One approach is to create opportunities for distributed leadership; that is, providing opportunities for partners at multiple levels to take on leadership roles, such as spearheading a committee, leading work in a particular issue area, or representing the collaborative publicly. This allows your partners to have a deeper connection to your work, become more familiar with your successes and challenges, and be better positioned to see the value of the collaborative. You can support champions by working with them to identify opportunities to share information on the collaborative and by providing them with a set of talking points or other information to help them communicate your message.

ESTABLISHING WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER

Engaging in collaborative work with multiple partners can be complex. The “results, process, and relationship” framework can be helpful in thinking about how to make your collaboration more successful.

Results are what a collaborative actually accomplishes—e.g., establishing an industry partnership, securing investments for workforce development, and changing public policy to support programs that advance workers and keep businesses competitive. Results are driven by the goals established by the collaborative, and seeing results helps to maintain partner engagement.

Process includes establishing: a governance structure, shared mission and goals, norms and values, modes of communication, roles and responsibilities, and decision-making processes. Well-designed processes make good use of the time and resources that partners can offer and keep the work of the collaborative focused toward achievement of its goals.

Relationship in collaborative work refers to the ways in which people interact and relate to the lead organization; how they feel about their involvement, contributions, and decisions made by the collaborative; and the level of trust and respect among partnership members. Failure to address this dimension of collaboration can result in conflict that impedes progress toward goals.

A list of questions to consider in attending to each of these areas is provided on the next page.

“Finding agreement around values is a contributor to sustainability. All organizations have values. The key is to confirm alignment and cultivate a sense of shared purpose, a feeling that they are “all in this together,” fostering a sense of a shared destiny.”

Kelly Ryan, president and CEO, Incourage Community Foundation, Workforce Central
Checklist for Managing Results, Process, and Relationship

**RESULTS**
- Our collaborative has clearly articulated and agreed upon a mission statement and/or goals.
- We have established and used a regular process for reviewing our goals.
- We take steps to ensure shared commitment to our goals and hold ourselves accountable for their achievement.
- We have established clear benchmarks and processes for assessing progress.
- Progress on goals is communicated regularly with collaborative members and external stakeholders.

**PROCESS**
- We have established a clear and transparent governance structure for the collaborative.
- We have agreed on and articulated a set of shared values and norms for participation in the collaborative.
- We have a clear decision-making process for goals, activities, and investments.
- We provide opportunities for multiple partners to demonstrate leadership.
- We have a process in place to identify and resolve areas of disagreement.
- We have established a plan for orienting new partners to the collaborative and managing leadership transitions.

**RELATIONSHIP**
- We take time to establish, build, and foster relationships among our partner organizations and individuals.
- We provide opportunities for all members to contribute to the collaborative’s work.
- We conduct all meetings and interaction in a way that is respectful of differences among members.
- We periodically solicit feedback on each member’s satisfaction with the operation and results of the collaborative and use that feedback to make necessary adjustments.
- We recognize the hard work, contributions, and achievements of collaborative members and celebrate our successes.
**IDEAS IN PRACTICE**  
Southwest Alabama Workforce Development Council (SAWDC)

SAWDC uses a multipronged approach to monitor the results, process, and relationship dimensions of its collaborative work. The strategy map below clearly articulates the vision, mission, high-level goals, and strategies used by the council.

The map serves as the basis for the SAWDC Scorecard, which outlines key metrics to monitor processes and results. In addition, the council and board conduct a quarterly review of outcome data, including the latest figures on participants enrolled, training completions, and job placement rates within each targeted industry sector. These data indicate areas of success and highlight opportunities for improvement.
### Stakeholders

1) Engage industry clusters (partnerships).
   - Establish workforce partnerships and serve their WFD needs.
     - # Industry Clusters
     - Industry Clusters

2) Influence the system of education/training.
   - Align resources to workforce needs.
   - Influence policy and systems change to support regional needs.
   - $ and % grant money directed via SAWDC (community colleges)
   - % clients who got jobs
   - # of policies/systems change influenced
     - Community College Alignment
     - Policy & systems change

3) Inspire the future supply of workers
   - Create awareness of and market career opportunities in Southwest Alabama.
     - # students/potential workers reached by SAWDC events.
     - SAWDC worlds of opportunity; K-12 Programs

### Key Business Processes

Leverage partnerships to effectively accomplish goals.
- # Active partners (non-business participation in the last 12 months)
- Council & Partner Participation

Engage our council and increase participation.
- % council members on committees
- Attendance at council meetings by business members

Ensure government participation
- % of funding from government
- Funding Stability

Create business participation
- % of top employers participating

Focus grant funding on mission-related programs
- % of funding from businesses/industry
- % of funding from grants

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This data review is complemented by satisfaction surveys administered to both SAWDC partners and employers served by the collaborative. Among the questions asked, surveys assess respondents’ evaluation of the quality of the collaborative’s efforts, the benefits of working with SAWDC, and the desire to remain engaged with the collaborative going forward. Survey results help SAWDC leaders to monitor the value of their services as well as partner engagement.
### How do we rate on the following attributes?

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<th>WELL BELOW AVERAGE</th>
<th>BELOW AVERAGE</th>
<th>AVERAGE</th>
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<td>Communication</td>
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**MAINTAINING PARTNER ENGAGEMENT**

Collaboratives use a variety of strategies to maintain partner engagement and increase organizational ownership of the collaborative’s work. For example, the Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford uses work groups, which focus on resource development, capacity building, public policy, and communications, are a way to engage additional staff from organizations on the collaborative steering committee. Boston’s SkillWorks has made it a regular practice to give partners meaningful roles, including agenda development, drafting work plans, giving presentations, hosting meetings, and overseeing partnerships.

Similarly, engaging partners in the strategic planning process is a way to engage them and to get their buy-in to the next phase of the collaborative’s work and priorities. The most critical element of partner engagement is the value that partners experience in being part of the collaborative. That value can be derived from several sources, including: the relevance the collaborative has in meeting community needs, the effectiveness of the collaborative in addressing workforce needs in ways that exceed the capacity of any individual organization, and the information and relationships that partners gain being part of a collective. It can be helpful to check in with partners at regular intervals to understand the value they derive from being part of the collaborative. (A sample collaborative survey is provided in Appendix B).

**PLANNING FOR TRANSITIONS**

It is natural for both individuals and organizations to come and go over the life of a collaborative, so it is important to plan for transitions. To facilitate the entry of new collaborative members, you will want to develop onboarding processes to help new members quickly understand the work of the collaborative and...
their role in it. You will also want to prepare for the departure of individuals who represent organizations in the collaborative. Consider ways that you can build relationships within organizations that transcend single individuals, such as providing information on a regular basis to organization CEOs, and involving multiple staff members in work groups.

**NEXT STEPS**

1. Review collaborative membership and roles
2. Take the results, process, and relationship self-assessment above, and make note of any areas the collaborative needs to work on
3. Document your current partnership engagement and transition plans and make note of areas that need to be strengthened
4. Include these areas of work in your sustainability plan

**STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Strategic planning is a critical process to determine: 1) the purpose of the work and the approach your collaborative will take; 2) how you will make use of the resources available to conduct the work; and 3) how you will know if your work has been successful.

Planning supports the sustainability of your collaborative as it enables the collaborative to engage stakeholders, develop a shared understanding of the problem, and get buy-in around the future purpose and approach of the collaborative. Moreover, as the collaborative’s work unfolds, strategic plans provide a clear framework around which to assess the effectiveness of your work, whether it is still relevant, and whether it still merits the continued investment of attention and resources.

**ASSESSING YOUR STRATEGIC PLANNING APPROACH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MISSING</th>
<th>DEVELOPING</th>
<th>ESTABLISHED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The collaborative has clear and agreed upon statements of its mission and vision.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The collaborative has a structured process for gathering stakeholder input and contextual information to help shape and refine its goals.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The collaborative has a structured process for determining objectives and action steps to pursue achievement of its goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) The collaborative has established a timeline for regular review of its plans and progress in carrying out action steps and achievement of goals and objectives.</td>
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</table>
STRATEGIC PLANNING OVERVIEW

Strategic planning helps to establish organizational priorities and direct the use of resources toward the achievement of goals.

**Figure 8**

**Key Strategic Plan Elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>A vision describes the ideal conditions for your community – the way things would look if workforce development issues were all resolved.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>A mission describes what the collaborative will do and why. It’s more concrete and action-oriented than the vision. It should be concise, outcome-oriented and inclusive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Objectives should be aimed toward achieving your mission. They refer to specific measurable results for the collaborative’s broad goals. Objectives tell you how much of what should be accomplished by when.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Strategies explain how you will reach your objectives. They can range from very broad, encompassing different entities within your community to very specific, aiming at carefully defined areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Action Plans | Each strategy should have a set of actions that tells you what will change – who will do what to make it happen. Outline the key aspects of the intervention and/or systems changes that are sought. Include:  
  - **Action step:** what will happen  
  - **Person responsible:** who will do what  
  - **Date to be completed:** the timing of each action  
  - **Resources required:** what resources and supports are needed and available  
  - **Barriers/Resistance:** include a plan to overcome them!  
  - **Collaborators:** who else should know about this action |
| Evaluation | You will want to use a structured process to determine the degree to which you are meeting your goals and provide learning about the effectiveness and impact of your efforts. |

This excerpt from a strategic plan developed by [Partners for a Competitive Workforce](#) in Cincinnati demonstrates how a vision and mission can translate into concrete collaborative strategies.
IDEAS IN PRACTICE
Excerpts from Partners for a Competitive Workforce Strategic Plan

• Vision
Employers have the talent they need to compete, and people have the skills they need to get good jobs and advance their careers.

• Mission
Meet employer demand by growing the skills of our current and future workforce.

• Bold Goal
By 2020, 90 percent of the labor force will be gainfully employed.11

PRIORITY OBJECTIVE
Connect Businesses with Qualified Workers

• Strategy 1
Support the Employers First Regional Workforce Network in creating a streamlined business services approach to deliver workforce solutions in response to employer needs. This process will consist of: 1) a single contact point for employers; 2) an in-depth assessment of the employer’s need by a business services representative; 3) navigating workforce and education resources available to address the need and developing a proposal package tailored to meet the employer’s need; and 4) continued follow-up to navigate and manage the services selected by the employer.

• Strategy 2
Support Employers First in launching a communications and outreach campaign to raise employer awareness of the “menu” of workforce services.

• Strategy 3
Support Employers First in developing a strong partnership with economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, industry associations, and other business organizations to coordinate workforce services with business retention and recruitment efforts.12

PCW’s complete strategic plan is available at: http://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/sustainability-guide/

Planning Tips
There are multiple approaches to strategic planning. However, there are some common important elements to consider, regardless of the approach:13

✓ Manage conflict. Establish some ground rules for working through disagreements.14
✓ Communicate the products of planning, including lists of issues and ideas, as you move toward creating the final plan.
✓ Set up a regular schedule (e.g., quarterly) to review your plan, progress toward goals, and relevance in terms of any environmental shifts.15

✓ Take into account the information gathered in understanding your context (information on the labor market, local population needs, etc.)
✓ Be sure to involve all of your partners, including representatives of workers and/or program participants, employers, funders, education and training providers as well as other stakeholders, and support the participation of everyone, even the quieter members of your collaborative.
APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

As you approach your planning, you may want to consider employing appreciative inquiry as a framework for leading your partners through the process. This is an approach to organizational change that focuses on strengths rather than on weaknesses. Appreciative inquiry is often presented in terms of a four-step process around a chosen topic: 16

1 Discover
   Appreciating and identifying processes that work well.
   What works well in our approach, our systems, our community?

2 Dream
   Envisioning results and how things might work well in the future.
   What might be?
   What is our community calling for?

3 Design
   Co-constructing—planning and prioritizing processes that would work well.
   What should be the ideal?

4 Destiny (or Deliver)
   Sustaining the change.
   How can we empower, learn and adjust/improvise?

These steps can serve as the framework for guiding discussions within your collaborative.

SUPPORTS TO PLANNING

Determining how you will achieve your goals requires some careful thought as to how investment and activities are expected to bring about desired changes. Two approaches to understanding and communicating these connections are a theory of change and a logic model. Both approaches can contribute to strategic planning, ongoing decision making, and evaluation by helping to keep a focus on what you want to achieve and how you will get there.

A theory of change explains how and why an organization/initiative’s activities are expected to lead to the changes it wants to happen. It differs from a logic model in helping to explain why the activities are expected to produce outcomes; it may incorporate research findings and usually elucidates the assumptions that underlie the connections between activities and outcomes. The theory of change outlines short- and long-term goals, what is needed to achieve them, and what measures can help to determine if they have been met.

A logic model describes what a program or initiative is trying to accomplish and how it will get there. It typically includes information on: 17

- Purpose or mission—the problem or goal to which the program, effort, or initiative is addressed
- Context or conditions—the situation in which the effort will take place or factors that may affect outcomes
- Inputs: resources and barriers—resources may include time, talent, equipment, information, and money; barriers may include history of conflict, environmental factors, and economic conditions
- Activities or interventions—what the initiative will do to effect change and improvement. This may include providing information and enhancing skills; enhancing services and support; modifying access, barriers, and opportunities; changing the consequences; and modifying policies and broader systems.
- Outputs—direct evidence of having performed the activities, such as the number of services provided
- Intended effects or outcomes
  - Shorter term (e.g., increased knowledge or skill)
  - Intermediate (e.g., changes in community programs, policies, or practices)
  - Longer term (e.g., change in behavior or population-level outcomes)
IDEAS IN PRACTICE  Theory of Change from the Incourage Community Foundation

The example below from the Incourage Community Foundation, and anchor organization for the Workforce Central collaborative in Wisconsin Rapids, WI, shows how a theory of change can integrate guiding principles, values, strategies, and outcomes.

### Incourage building a community that works well for all people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>VALUES</th>
<th>CORE STRATEGY</th>
<th>KEY LEVERS</th>
<th>SHIFTS IN COMMUNITY CAPACITY &amp; CONDITIONS (Ongoing)</th>
<th>SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES (0-3 years)</th>
<th>INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (4-10 years)</th>
<th>LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (10+ years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values-led</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting and leveraging all institutional capitals for increased impact:</td>
<td>Resident Engagement</td>
<td>• Stronger and more inclusive social networks</td>
<td>• More residents are actively engaged in their community as decision makers, leaders, entrepreneurs and investors</td>
<td>• Functioning local and regional capital markets direct capital to promising firms/organizations/households/entrepreneurs</td>
<td>• A strong and inclusive local economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident-centered</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Moral</td>
<td>Financial Capital:</td>
<td>• Increasingly robust local information ecosystem</td>
<td>• Inter-organizational relationships within and across sectors are increasingly characterized by trust, shared norms and alignment of priorities for greater impact</td>
<td>• Increased local employment in living wage jobs</td>
<td>• A healthy, livable, sustainable community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place-based</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Human</td>
<td>• Impact investments</td>
<td>• Increasing number of adaptive leaders</td>
<td>• Increased diversity of sector and firm size in the economy</td>
<td>• Increased diversity of sector and firm size in the economy</td>
<td>• A community that is open to change with a culture of shared stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Social</td>
<td>• Strategic grants</td>
<td>• More local investors and users of capital understand impact investing structures</td>
<td>• Increased local ownership and control</td>
<td>• Increased local ownership and control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Intellectual</td>
<td>• Purchasing strategy</td>
<td>• Increasing number of local institutions and entrepreneurs use data for continuous improvement</td>
<td>• Increased resident stewardship of all community assets</td>
<td>• Increased resident ownership and control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reputational</td>
<td>Research and Data</td>
<td>• Increased diversity on governing boards and of institutional leadership</td>
<td>• Reduced carbon emissions, water use and waste leading to improvements in the quality and sustainability of local and regional natural resources</td>
<td>• Increased resident ownership and control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Financial</td>
<td>Capacity Building</td>
<td>• More residents are active in public life and agree on priorities for their shared future</td>
<td>• Improved population health</td>
<td>• Increased resident ownership and control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>...while stewarding community capitals, such as natural capital</td>
<td>Public-Private-Philanthropic Partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Community demographic profile that is increasingly balanced, including a growing share of young adults and families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence and Advocacy</td>
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</table>

- Openness to new ideas and entrepreneurial possibilities
- Community narratives reflect pride in place
- Mind shift from “I cannot” to “I can” and “We can do better”
- A more participatory culture
NEXT STEPS

1. Review your current theory of change and logic model with the collaborative. Are these documents still relevant and reflective of what you do, how you do it, and why? If not, make a plan to revise them.

2. Review your current strategic plan with the collaborative and assess how you are doing. Does it include the key elements described above? Is the plan still relevant, or has your context changed? Are you making progress as expected? If so, include a plan and timeline to review the strategic plan again in a year. If not, include a plan to revise it as part of your sustainability plan.

SECTION RESOURCES: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTEXT, PARTNER ENGAGEMENT, AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Understanding Your Local Context

LABOR MARKET INFORMATION (LMI) RESOURCES

Traditional LMI

1. State Labor Market Information Contact List Includes data on employment, projections, and employers at the state and local level http://www.bls.gov/bls/ofolist.htm

2. Emsi Labor market research software blending data from BLS and other sources; intuitive interface; subscription http://www.economicmodeling.com


Real-time LMI

1. Burning Glass Real-time labor market research software; intuitive interface; requires a subscription http://burning-glass.com/workforce-agencies/

2. The Conference Board Help Wanted OnLine Measures the previous month’s job postings from thousands of Internet job boards, corporate boards, and job sites https://www.conference-board.org/data/helpwantedonline.cfm


Classification of Industries and Occupations


Population Data Resources
U.S. Census Bureau American FactFinder A free tool to parse census and survey data
http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml

Stakeholder Analysis

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT
1 Building Effective Business Partnerships: A Pocket Guide for Nonprofit Leaders from the Hitachi Foundation
2 The Community Toolbox: Creating and Maintaining Coalitions and Partnerships
http://ctb.ku.edu/en/dothework/tools_tk_1.aspx
3 Building Collaboration from Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
http://www.geofunders.org/smarter-grantmaking/collaborate
4 Partnerships: A Workforce Development Practitioner's Guide
5 Program Sustainability Assessment Tool: Partnerships
https://sustaintool.org/understand/partnerships

STRATEGIC PLANNING
1 The Community Tool Box Chapter 8: Developing a Strategic Plan
2 All About Strategic Planning http://managementhelp.org/strategicplanning/index.htm
3 Strategic Planning: A 10-Step Guide
5 W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
1 Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadb193.pdf
2 The best of appreciative inquiry websites https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/community/link.cfm
ENDNOTES

1 The assessment questions and definitions in each section have been adapted from: the Program Sustainability Assessment Tool v2, copyright 2013, Washington University, St Louis, MO. All rights reserved. If you would like more information about the original framework or Program Sustainability Assessment Tool, visit https://www.sustaintool.org.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.


8 This framework is derived from the work of Interaction Associates around Facilitative Leadership. See: Effective Teaching Framework Community. n.d. Facilitative Leadership: Tapping the Power of Participation.” Available at: https://effectiveteacher.wcpss.net/facilitative-leadership-tapping-the-power-of-participation/


12 See more at: Partners for a Competitive Workforce. n.d. “Priorities.” Available at: http://www.competitiveworkforce.com/Priorities.html


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 For more on federal grant requirements, see: White House Office of Management and Budget. n.d. “Federal Financial Management, Grants Management.” Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_default

22 Adapted from National Fund Positioning Survey – Anthology Communications.


28 Ibid. p. viii.

29 Ibid. p. 4.

30 Outline adapted from: Georgia Health Policy Center. Bringing the Future into Focus.

31 This tool is adapted from: the Program Sustainability Assessment Tool v2, copyright 2013, Washington University, St Louis, MO. All rights reserved. If you would like more information about the original framework or Program Sustainability Assessment Tool, visit https://www.sustaintool.org.