

SECTION 2

STRENGTHENING OPERATIONS

A key step in planning for sustainability is to ensure you have addressed critical parts of your collaborative’s operations, including collaborative and organizational capacity, funding, and strategic communications.

A COLLABORATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

When asked to discuss important elements of sustainability, site directors universally agreed on the importance of having the “capacity to do the work,” which they defined as having financial, operational, and staffing capacity commensurate with the expectations of the collaborative’s members and funders.

Financial capacity includes the ability to raise funds as well as the sound internal systems and controls necessary to manage these funds. Operational capacity

includes governance and an active and engaged board or leadership council. Staffing capacity includes the ability to manage the collaborative, work with stakeholders, and engage with industry representatives.

This section discusses four key areas of collaborative and organizational capacity: 1) internal systems; 2) leadership and staff; 3) governance; and 4) relationship with a fiscal agent / organizational home. We include examples of strong practices from around the National Fund and exercises to help you complete your sustainability plan.

ASSESSING COLLABORATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY	MISSING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED
1) The collaborative has strong, defined internal supports, systems and resources in place for fiscal management, grants and contracts, fund raising and reporting, and hiring and staff development.			
2) The site director and other collaborative staff have the skill sets and capacities needed, including board development, grant making, fund raising and reporting, assessing progress and impact, communications and building a learning community.			
3) The collaborative has a clear, written governance structure and decision-making process that members and staff understand and adhere to.			
4) If applicable, the collaborative is in alignment with its fiscal/organizational home in terms of priorities and operations.			

INTERNAL SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT

In order to function effectively and sustain a high level of capacity, collaboratives need robust internal systems, supports, and resources.

Fiscal Management and Controls

A collaborative needs to have written internal controls that clearly describe the procedures it will follow and who is responsible. These should include, at a minimum, basic internal controls that address who has access to the collaborative's accounts and who has the authority to approve grants, contracts, and expenses. These can be defined by the organizational home or fiscal agent, or by the collaborative itself, and should be documented.

Grants and Contracts Management

The collaborative should have defined policies that describe how grants made by the collaborative and contracts entered are reviewed, approved, and evaluated. This should include procurement policies, the roles of funders, staff, and any applicable consultants, as well as the role of the fiscal agent, if applicable.

Fundraising and Reporting

The collaborative should have a clear understanding of who is responsible for managing fundraising and reporting to funders. Sometimes it is the site director who is responsible; other times it is the development staff at the fiscal agent. Often, both parties have responsibility. All models work as long as the roles are clear to all parties. No matter who is responsible for managing the fundraising and reporting, however, it is important to note that the collaborative's funders also have an important role to play. Their willingness to leverage their networks and relationships to bring in new funders; standardize or streamline applications and reporting for the collaborative; and commit to longer-term funding can be key to sustainability. Finally, if the collaborative has a fiscal agent, it should have a clear understanding of any fees or indirect costs and a protocol for communicating those costs to collaborative funders.

SITE DIRECTOR AND STAFF CAPACITY

The strength of a collaborative's staff, especially of its director, is a crucial element of sustainability. First and foremost, it is important to have a clear job description for the collaborative director that specifies a set of

responsibilities distinct from any related to the fiscal/organizational home and specific to managing the collaborative. The collaborative members should have a clear understanding of who hires, supervises, and provides feedback to the collaborative director and other collaborative staff.

Effective collaborative directors generally play a number of roles, from board development and relationship management to fundraising and communications. Collaboratives should look for competencies in the following areas when hiring a collaborative director. These can also be used by collaboratives to help identify areas for growth, professional development, or additional staffing capacity.

Leadership development, relationship, and succession management for collaborative board and/or leadership body

- The collaborative director communicates and works closely with the investors and key stakeholders, guiding and supporting them in meeting the initiative's strategic goals.
- S/he staffs the board or leadership council and any committees, executes decisions effectively, and ensures that investors and stakeholders are informed of critical developments in a timely and effective manner.
- S/he facilitates and assists in the succession management for the collaborative's leadership body or board.

Grantmaking and grants management

- The collaborative director and his/her staff are responsible for soliciting, selecting, and managing all grants awarded by the initiative.
- Staff communicate regularly with grantees, analyze grantee progress, provide support to grantees, and ensure that grantee work plans are consistent with the collaborative's goals.

Fundraising and reporting

- Working with collaborative funders and members, the collaborative director and his/her staff develop fundraising plans, bring additional funders to the table, and maintain strong relationships with existing funders.

- The collaborative director and his/her staff negotiate work plans and contracts with public and private funders and assure that each funding source receives reports on program results and finances in accordance with reporting requirements.

Measuring collaborative impact

- The collaborative director and his/her staff oversee the collaborative's evaluation efforts, including contracting with any external evaluators, designing or overseeing the design of data collection procedures and templates for grantees, facilitating the regular collection and reporting of participant and business impacts, and assisting grantees and subcontractors in outcomes measurement that assists the investors in assessing the collaborative's impact.

Building a learning community

- The collaborative director and his/her staff maximize learning and collaborative action among grantees, funders, and other stakeholders, and oversee and develop such efforts as capacity building workshops, peer learning groups, presentations, webinars, tools, and publications based on the collaborative's learning and evaluation to ensure a culture of continuous improvement.

Serving as the collaborative's chief spokesperson and ambassador

- The director serves as the collaborative's lead ambassador. S/he represents the collaborative at local, regional, and national meetings, participates in other efforts that are aligned with the collaborative's interests and goals, and leads public policy and advocacy efforts to ensure the success of the collaborative's strategies.
- S/he actively forges connections to other organizations and stakeholders in the community, serving on relevant committees or boards as the opportunities arise.
- S/he supports and develops key stakeholders as spokespersons—enabling them to communicate and feel vested as spokespersons for the collaborative.
- S/he brings in and continuously develops a workforce development policy and practice knowledge base informed by the collaborative's own investments as well as by local, regional, and national issues and priorities.

Overseeing consultants and contractors

- The collaborative director and his/her staff regularly communicate with all consultants and contractors retained by the investors and/or assigned by collaborative funders and/or grant initiatives, such as the National Fund for Workforce Solutions coaches or U.S. Department of Labor technical assistance consultants. The collaborative director and his/her staff negotiate the terms of contracts and contract renewals, coordinate work plans, and facilitate information sharing to develop among them a core expertise and commitment to maximizing the systems change opportunities of the initiative.

Overseeing staff and planning for succession

- The collaborative director hires and oversees any administrative or program staff, provides access to professional development opportunities, and ensures that the organization is effectively structured and managed.
- The collaborative director, working with the investors, plans for succession by effectively engaging and building the leadership of key investors, stakeholders, and staff within the collaborative.

ROLE OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

The collaborative's leaders can include funders, employers, labor, and other stakeholders. In fact, going beyond funders on the leadership body can bring in valuable perspectives that the collaborative may otherwise miss. The leadership body can and should play an active role in helping the collaborative meet its goals. The roles and responsibilities of the collaborative's leadership should be detailed in a set of governance documents. These should include a conflict of interest policy as well as clear delineation of responsibilities and decision-making authority, especially if non-funders and/or potential grantees are brought into the leadership body.

Some of the suggested roles of funders and/or collaborative leadership include:

- Providing input on and approving the strategic priorities and direction of the collaborative, including but not limited to grantmaking, advocacy, and capacity building activities.

- Providing input on and voting on any grants and contracts from the collaborative, designating the name of the grantee/vendor, the amount and purpose of the grant/contract, and any special conditions attached.
- Recommending an annual budget for the collaborative with input from the collaborative director/staff.
- Participating in hiring the collaborative director and providing input on the performance evaluation and compensation of the collaborative director.
- Making cash or in-kind contributions to the collaborative. Some collaboratives define members as those who contribute.
- Assisting staff in identifying and increasing the resources available to the collaborative to meet its programmatic and budgetary goals.
- Seeking out opportunities to recognize and highlight the collaborative's mission, goals, and accomplishments within their own organizations and externally as appropriate.
- Regularly participating in collaborative meetings and/or subcommittees and voting on or providing feedback on grants, contracts, or other collaborative decisions as detailed in the governance policies of the collaborative.

WORKING IN ALIGNMENT WITH A FISCAL AGENT OR ORGANIZATIONAL HOME

While collaboratives should have a distinct identity separate from their fiscal agent or organizational home, collaboratives should nonetheless work in alignment with their fiscal agent or organizational home. This means aligning priorities and mission as well as operations. Here are some things to look for or work toward.

Alignment of Priorities and Mission

- The collaborative's mission and goals are shared by and aligned with that of the fiscal agent or organizational home.
- The collaborative has more than one internal leader within the fiscal agent/ organizational home that serve as advocates and champions for the work.

- The fiscal agent and collaborative have a clear understanding of and respect for each party's role and contributions.
- The fiscal agent or organizational home sees the collaborative as a valued partner in meeting organizational goals, rather than as a threat or competitor for resources or visibility.

Alignment of Operations

- The collaborative and its fiscal agent identify ways to jointly fund and support complementary programs or priorities.
- The collaborative and its fiscal agent agree on whether or not the collaborative can or will receive public funding—in particular federal funding—which may require additional expense, capacity and expertise.
- The fiscal agent/organizational home provides institutional support for some of the collaborative's key services, activities, or operations (e.g., communications, fundraising, grants management/ RFP processes, and special events).
- The fiscal agent and collaborative work together to identify opportunities to share staff and physical resources.

NEXT STEPS

- 1 Gather your existing governance documents, job descriptions, and any other documents related to the areas of collaborative operations and capacity described above.
- 2 Take a careful look at these documents, examine your current practices (even if not documented), and write down any areas that need to be developed or strengthened as you move forward.
- 3 Describe specific next steps you will take to strengthen and support these areas of your collaborative's work. Be specific and include timelines and responsible parties. (See the [Sustainability Action Plan](#) for a suggested format for this planning work.)

IDEAS IN PRACTICE

SkillWorks Partners for a Productive Workforce (Boston, MA)

Established by a group of public and private investors in 2003, [SkillWorks](#) established a Funders Group consisting of all investors in the initiative and instituted a “one funder, one vote” policy to gain buy-in and build an environment of consensus building. The collaborative also had strong support from its fiscal agent and organizational home, the Boston Foundation, including support from senior leadership.

The collaborative transitioned from a consultant-managed model to a full-time director in 2005 as the funders determined that the activities of the collaborative would benefit from more dedicated time and attention.

As the collaborative developed and evolved, a number of approaches and practices proved helpful:

- **The Boston Foundation’s strong internal controls and processes** enabled the collaborative to manage federal grants and allowed the foundation to successfully compete for and manage other federal funding, which was seen as a positive impact of SkillWorks on the foundation.
- **The collaborative’s identity as a platform for multiple funders, along with** the approach of consensus building and providing all funders with equal footing within the collaborative, reassured funders that SkillWorks was not just an initiative of, or a platform for, the Boston Foundation. Early collaborative leadership helped to make this possible by clearly creating a separate initiative brand and website and delineating the roles and responsibilities of collaborative staff with respect to the fiscal agent.
- **Developing a written set of governance documents** was a concrete way to develop leaders and champions among the SkillWorks funders group. Completed as a key follow-up step to an initiative strategic planning process, developing these documents also allowed the group to plan for succession and move toward sustainability.

B DIVERSE AND STABLE FUNDING

It is important for the collaborative to have a consistent level of funding over time from a range of funding sources, including but not limited to public, business/ employer, and philanthropic sources. This funding should support not only programs and initiatives of the collaborative but the infrastructure and management of the collaborative itself, including collaborative staff, convening stakeholders and employers, evaluation and data collection efforts, and any indirect or overhead costs.

A diverse range of funding sources protects against dependence on any one funder or type of funder, whether public, private, or philanthropic, and mitigates fluctuations due to changes in funders’ priorities, budgets, or political and economic circumstances.

Funder diversification provides the collaborative with broader representation of interests and points of view. It also gives the collaborative community credibility and helps transform the collaborative from a grantee to a collaborative space for philanthropy.

Planning for funding sustainability should be a strategic process and part of how the collaborative addresses its long-term needs and goals. Significant fluctuations in funding may prevent the collaborative from making long-term investment decisions, which may make it more difficult to document participant or employer outcomes and have a particularly adverse effect on sustaining systems change efforts. As with any organization, unstable funding may also lead to staff turnover.

ASSESSING YOUR CURRENT FUNDING PICTURE	MISSING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED
1) The collaborative has a long-term financial plan.			
2) The collaborative is funded through a variety of sources (public, private, business, philanthropic, pooled, aligned).			
3) The collaborative regularly and strategically engages its funders in bringing in new funders or sources of funding.			
4) The collaborative has supportive public partners at the local and/or state level.			
5) The collaborative has a combination of stable (long-term/general operating) and flexible (shorter-term/program-specific) funding.			
6) The collaborative’s fiscal agent supports the collaborative’s fund raising efforts, and each party has clearly defined roles, responsibilities and processes for communicating with funders.			

DEVELOPING A THREE-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN

After you have assessed your current funding landscape, you will want to pull multiple elements above into a strategic, three-year financial plan for the collaborative. Figure 10 provides a sample three-year budget. Here are a few ways to get started:

Figure 9 Funding Flowchart

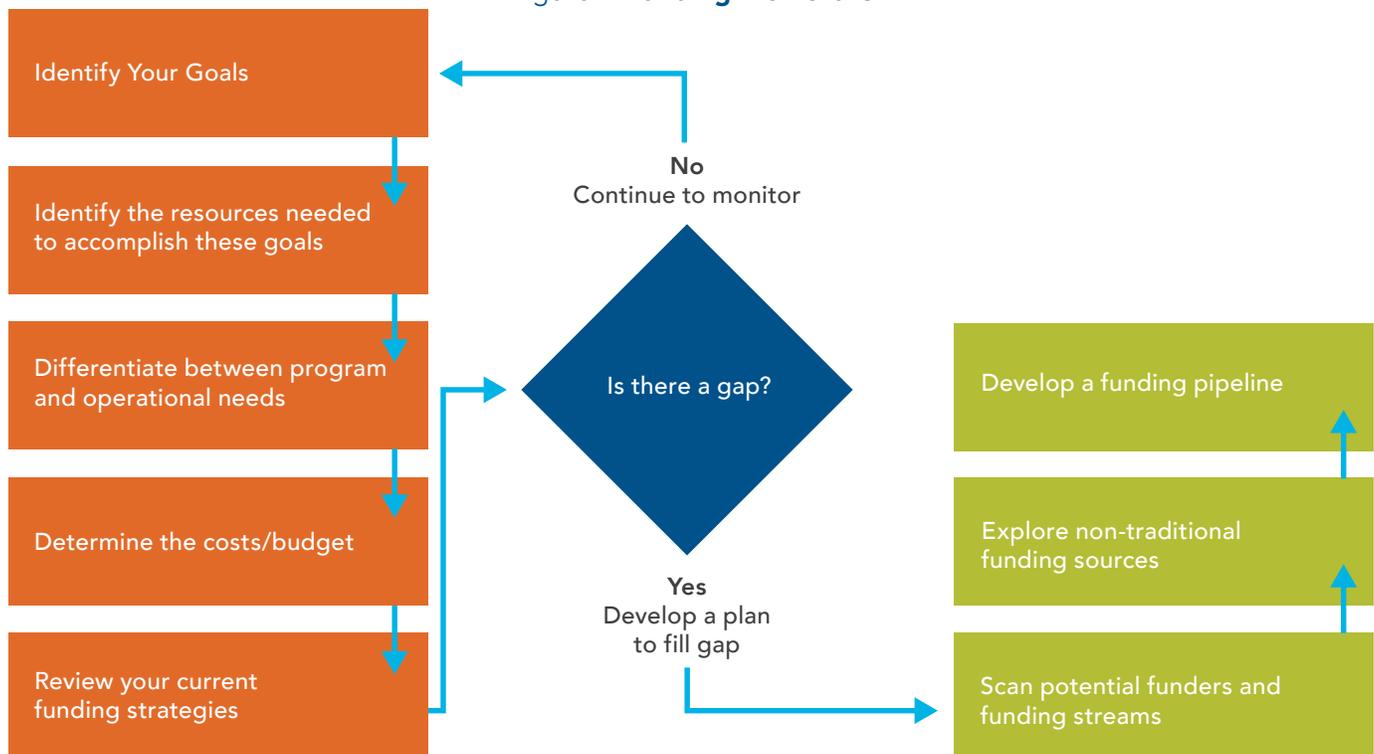


Figure 10
Sample Three-Year Budget

Projected Expenses	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)	3-Year Expenses (\$)
Salaries/Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director • Associate 	150,000	160,000	170,000	480,000
Non-personnel Initiative Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications • Rent/Telephone • Office supplies • Fiscal agency fee/indirect 	100,000	100,000	100,000	300,000
Evaluation and Data Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract with evaluator • Data management system • Business impact report 	75,000	75,000	75,000	225,000
Forums/Convenings/Sponsorships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State workforce forum • Report release forum 	25,000	25,000	25,000	75,000
Capacity Building Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching training and guide development • Business impact training • Partnership management training 	50,000	50,000	50,000	150,000
Program/Training Grants	500,000	500,000	500,000	1,500,000
Employer Organizing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant/contract(s) to support employer organizing and convening in 2 key sectors 	100,000	100,000	100,000	300,000
Public Policy Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State budget advocacy • Develop and implement “Skills” campaign and materials 	75,000	75,000	75,000	225,000
Total	1,075,000	1,085,000	1,095,000	3,255,000

SAMPLE THREE-YEAR FUNDING STRATEGIES¹⁸

After you put together your three-year budget, you'll need to consider your funding strategies, which should include a range of methods and sources of funding.

Figure 11 provides an overview of a number of methods and funding sources that you may want to think about. Use this as a starting point to brainstorm with your current funders and partners, including employers, to make a list of current and possible funders/supporters that are relevant to your initiatives. Be as specific as possible. List names of foundations, businesses, government agencies, and individuals who you can approach for support, both cash and in-kind.

Look specifically to employers who benefit from and/or help drive collaborative funding and priorities. They may have access to sponsorship, membership, or training/ tuition reimbursement dollars that can help support the collaborative's work, especially if they can see a direct benefit to their company in terms of jobs filled or training provided. They may also be able to contribute in-kind support such as equipment, training/facilitation space, work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, internships, or guest speakers/trainers. Some employers

may also dedicate staffing to the collaborative or provide opportunities for workforce or college advisors to be on site to work with their employees.

In addition to employers, other collaborative partners can also play a role in providing in-kind support. They may be able to institutionalize or absorb current collaborative activities or expenses, and it is worth exploring these possibilities with partners in a thoughtful way.

The collaborative may also have revenue generation or earned income opportunities. Some collaboratives may be able to leverage their expertise to provide consulting or workforce-planning services. Others may be able to secure sponsorships for signature events or conferences.

In general, make the value proposition of contributing to the collaborative as clear as possible for all potential funders, adapting this statement as necessary for different audiences.

Remember: chasing funding that does not support the core mission and goals of the collaborative may distract you from your strategic plan, consume organizational capacity, and even alienate current partners and funders.

Figure 11
Funding Diversification¹⁹

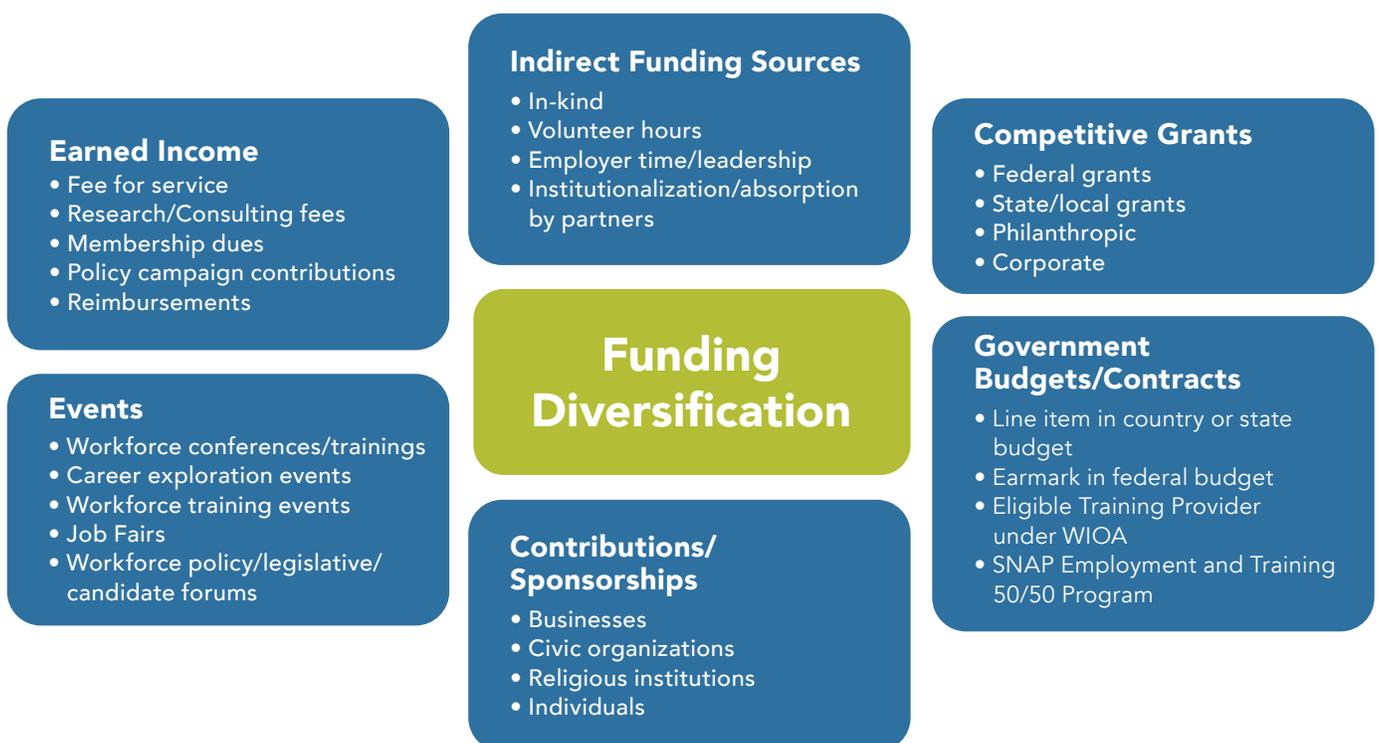


Figure 12
Sample Three-Year Funding Strategies Table²⁰

Projected Expenses	3-Year Expenses (\$)	Current Funding	Proposed Gap Funding Strategies
Salaries/Benefits	480,000	50% of salaries paid by fiscal agent	50% from other grants
Non-personnel Initiative Management	300,000	\$30,000/year rent from fiscal agent; \$10,000/year in-kind communications	\$60,000/year from other grants
Evaluation and Data Management	225,000	\$150,000 grant for evaluation from Foundation A	\$75,000 from other grants
Forums/Convenings/Sponsorships	75,000	\$0	\$60,000 in event sponsorships; \$15,000 in event fees
Capacity Building Activities	150,000	\$100,000 grants for capacity building from Foundation B & C; \$10,000 in identified sponsorships; \$10,000 in in-kind support for space, food	\$30,000 from new grants or sponsorships
Program/Training Grants	1,500,000	\$250,000 in existing city grant for training; \$250,000 in existing philanthropic grants for training; \$500,000 in federal funds from TechHire	\$500,000 from other grants
Employer Organizing	300,000	\$100,000 in identified membership dues/fees from businesses	\$100,000 from other grants; \$100,000 from employer contributions (dues or grants)
Public Policy Activities	225,000	\$100,000 grant from Foundations D & E for public policy advocacy	\$105,000 from other grants; \$10,000 from campaign dues/fees; \$10,000 in-kind support of printing and materials
Total	3,255,000	Secured: \$1,730,000	Gap: \$1,525,000

SEEKING AND SECURING PUBLIC FUNDING FROM FEDERAL, STATE, OR LOCAL SOURCES

Federal and state funding may offer opportunities for collaboratives to significantly scale their work, start new work, or bring in new partners and funders. In the case of [AmeriCorps](#) funding, it may also allow sites to expand staffing capacity or invest in programmatic work in a different way. Below are a few resources for public workforce funding and some tips for collaboratives seeking public funding.

Partial list of potential federal workforce funding sources

- U.S. Department of Labor**
https://www.doleta.gov/grants/find_grants.cfm
 e.g., H1-B Visa grant programs, Community-Based Job Training Grants, Senior Community Service Employment Grants, ApprenticeshipUSA, America's Promise Job Driven Grants program, Women in Apprenticeship in Nontraditional Occupations, YouthBuild, Reentry Demonstration Projects for Young Adults, Career Pathways for Youth, Strengthening Working Families, adult reentry programs, and TechHire partnerships. Collaboratives should also work with their regional/local Workforce Development Board. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act mandates the use of industry partnerships, and it makes little sense to duplicate efforts if the collaborative or board is already operating partnerships in relevant sectors.
- U.S. Department of Commerce—Economic Development Administration**
<https://www.eda.gov/funding-opportunities/>
 e.g., EDA Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program promote the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region as well as the development of effective economic development programs. The Economic Development Assistance Program is an annual grant program primarily for capital improvements but could be useful for partnership with community colleges and economic development organizations that need new facilities for training.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
<http://www.hrsa.gov/grants/index.html>
 e.g., Nursing Workforce Diversity grants and Health Profession Opportunity Grants, if reauthorized.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/Federal-Jobs-Programs>
 e.g., the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Employment and Training programs.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**
<https://www.epa.gov/grants>
 e.g., Brownfields Cleanup Grants and the [Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grants Program](#).
- U.S. Department of Education**
<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grants-apply.html?src=pn>
 e.g., Programs for youth and young adults, including Investing in Innovation Fund grants, Talent Search, career and technical education, Pay for Success grants and others.
- Corporation for National and Community Service**
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/>
 e.g., [AmeriCorps](#) State and National grants and [Social Innovation Fund](#) grants.

In addition to federal sources, collaboratives should be aware of and regularly check for state and local funding from state departments of labor, commerce, education, and rehabilitation; and from local and regional economic development agencies.

Capacity to manage public funds

Public funding—especially from federal government sources—comes with a lot of requirements. These often include implementing specific accounting practices or systems that segregate and account for federal dollars; timesheets or other mechanisms to track personnel hours billed to federal grants; comprehensive audits if the grantee receives more than \$750,000 per year from federal sources; additional background check requirements for staff; different hiring and procurement processes; and fiscal and programmatic reporting requirements. Collaboratives and their fiscal agents need to carefully consider their own capacity as well as the costs of compliance before seeking these funds.

TIPS FOR GRANTSEEKERS

- Sign up for alerts on [Grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov/) (<http://www.grants.gov/>) and regularly review funding opportunities.
- Subscribe to the [Federal Register](https://www.federalregister.gov/) (<https://www.federalregister.gov/>) for daily summaries of federal notices. You can customize your subscription to the agencies or topics you are interested in.
- Register for a [D-U-N-S number](https://fedgov.dnb.com/webform) (<https://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>) or ensure that your fiscal agent has one already.
- Apply for and obtain an [approved indirect cost rate](https://www.dol.gov/oasam/boc/costdeterminationguide/main.htm) (<https://www.dol.gov/oasam/boc/costdeterminationguide/main.htm>).
- Build your grant partnership early. Federal grants usually require partners, and it is advantageous if your partnership is used to working together before the grant announcement comes out.
- Put together a grantwriting team with representatives from key partners. Divide up the work, develop a work plan, and meet regularly.
- Begin working on the proposal well ahead of time. Do not wait until the last minute to get started.
- Take note of key deadlines and grant requirements. You can be disqualified for leaving off a single signature or submitting your grant just one minute late.
- Build the costs of compliance and evaluation into your grant budget.

WORKING WITH AND MANAGING FUNDERS

One key to keeping your funders engaged and to working with them to streamline requirements and reporting is to ensure that funders see and experience the real value added of being a member of the collaborative. As your collaborative brings in more funders and new sources of funding, here are some additional things to keep in mind.

Reporting and Grants Management

- Work to understand each funder's interests, priorities, and expectations with regard to the collaborative, and be transparent about the collaborative's goals, capacity, and needs.
- If you can, work with your funders on streamlined reporting in terms of requirements and timing. Getting multiple funders to agree to one set of outcomes/requirements, a common reporting format, or a common reporting calendar can be a huge time saver.
- Before applying for a grant, consider the effort required to submit and manage that grant, and weigh that against the resources that the grant provides. Have a realistic conversation with your fiscal agent about the grant management and reporting resources and capacity available to support the collaborative. Does the collaborative or fiscal agent have the financial systems to effectively track different types of funding streams? This is particularly important for federal funding, where there may be accounting, auditing, personnel, and systems requirements that the fiscal agent will have to follow if funds are awarded.²¹
- Work closely with your fiscal agent to determine the roles you will each play in reaching out to new funders as well as the resources you will need to successfully apply for and report on funding. These will include board lists; organizational charts; organizational budgets for past, current, and future years; audited financial statements; 990s; and annual reports.

Funding and Governance

- As a collaborative, you will need to figure out the link between funding and governance. Will you require partners to contribute to the collaborative in order to participate in collaborative decision making?
- What is your conflict of interest policy should funding or policy decisions arise that affect funders in the collaborative?

IDEAS IN PRACTICE

Pooled Funding

Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative

The [Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative](#) was established in 2005 at the San Francisco Foundation. The collaborative has a pooled funding model.

Funders have mostly been local foundations, although the collaborative has also had support in the past from the California Employment Development Department and the National Fund's Social Innovation Fund grant.

The pooled fund is held at the San Francisco Foundation. Each funder has one vote in policy and funding decisions. The collaborative has a full-time director who is a legal employee of the foundation but whose salary is paid by all of the funders through the pooled fund.

The annual budget of the collaborative has varied, but is in the range of \$1.5 million per year.

The site director has primary responsibility for setting the budget and raising funds for the collaborative.



Aligned Funding

Partners for a Competitive Workforce

[Partners for a Competitive Workforce](#) (PCW) is a partnership in the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana tristate region focused on meeting employer demand by growing the skills of the region's current and future workforce. It was established in 2008 and is currently managed by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati.

The partnership has both pooled and aligned funds, with \$1.38 million in pooled funds and \$12.8 million in aligned funds in 2014.

PCW actively solicits aligned funds when an opportunity like a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) grant comes up. The collaborative convenes folks, helps to figure out who the best lead entity would be, and supports the application.

The biggest sources of aligned funding have been public, such as Individual Training Accounts or On-the-Job Training Funds from the Workforce Investment Boards and DOL Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training grants that PCW's partners have received.

If the money flows through PCW or the United Way, it is considered pooled. If it flows through another entity, it is aligned with PCW's work. Any reporting on outcomes is the responsibility of the organization that received the funding. PCW doesn't have any formal MOUs and the aligned groups are considered PCW partners.

NEXT STEPS

- 1 Identify the strategies and activities that you will work to sustain over the next three years.
- 2 Develop a three-year line-item budget for each collaborative strategy/activity.
- 3 Describe the strategies you will use to sustain each strategy/activity.
- 4 Identify potential sources of support.
- 5 Include a timeline and strategies for developing or applying for new sources of support.
- 6 If you are at the stage of “planning to plan,” describe specific next steps you will take to strengthen and support your collaborative’s funding picture. Be specific and include timelines and responsible parties. (You may wish to refer to the [Sustainability Action Plan Template](#) for a suggested format.)

In interviews, site directors emphasized that partners need to see results and evidence of return on investment to stay committed to the work. Yet they also expressed the challenges of articulating the value of a funder collaborative, and particularly quantifying its convening, connecting, and system-building work and outcomes.

This section helps collaboratives assess and develop their communications strategies and plans; communicate their value added; communicate a brand identity; and develop campaigns and communications materials that increase awareness of workforce issues and raise the collaborative’s profile. We include a few examples of strong practices from around the National Fund; provide an excerpt of a sample strategic communications plan, which can be used as a template; and conclude with a set of practical tools and resources.

C STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Strategic Communication is the ability to explain your collaborative’s role in and its contribution to the local or regional workforce ecosystem, which may include or intersect with economic development, community development, education, and other systems.

A collaborative may have many communication strategies and approaches—including those that focus on policy or systems-change campaigns; examples of business impact; program outcomes and evaluation; stories of individual impact; or local workforce or economic needs and trends.

Effectively communicating the collaborative’s value builds greater external visibility and support. If the collaborative is engaged in systems-change work, effective communication may also increase the likelihood that stakeholders will take part in those efforts. Regular internal communication about the details and the evidence of your impact keeps funders and other partners engaged in the work.

“Backbone organizations, like our collaboratives, are not direct service providers. It can be challenging to articulate the value of the backbone and of systems change. [Yet] it is critically important to talk about how things are different at the systems level.”

Janice Urbanik,
Executive Director,
Partners for a Competitive Workforce

ASSESSING AND DEVELOPING A COLLABORATIVE'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY	MISSING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED
1) The collaborative has a strategic communications plan to secure and maintain support from key stakeholders and the public.			
2) Staff and funders communicate regularly and effectively the need for and value of the collaborative to key audiences, including the business community, policy makers, and funders/potential funders.			
3) The collaborative has a clear brand identity and is marketed to communicate its unique value to key audiences (policymakers, employers, philanthropy).			
4) The collaborative increases community awareness of workforce issues and solutions and builds support for the solutions.			
5) The collaborative tracks the results and measures the success of its communications efforts.			

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

After you have assessed your capacity, you will want to pull all the elements above into a strategic communications plan.

Just keep these things in mind:

- Define your communications goals.
 - ▶ It's not just to get the collaborative's name in the paper. Sample goals might include:
 - Influencing a particular policy;
 - Increasing or maintaining your profile with funders;
 - Generating community interest in workforce issues;
 - Marketing collaborative services to increase participation or funding;
 - Highlighting challenges faced by lower-income workers and solutions that work to address these challenges; or
 - Building greater support on your issue by highlighting the importance of workforce issues and their relationship with more “tangible” issues like poverty or competitiveness.
- Communication is about telling a story.
 - ▶ Stories resonate with people. Telling a compelling story is a way to accomplish multiple goals—such as funding, policy, or maintaining your visibility.
 - ▶ In the case of workforce development, we are telling a story about why our communities need to focus on and invest in skills and careers and what solutions we can offer.
 - ▶ An effective story may inspire your audiences to take action.
- Measure the success of your efforts.
 - ▶ Outputs (e.g., number of page views or articles) are easiest to measure, but you should also think about appropriate metrics that relate to your communications goal (e.g., influence on a particular policy or audience, or greater awareness in the community about workforce issues).

The key elements of a communications plan include:

- **Why** – goals and objectives for communications
- **What** – clear, distilled messages
- **Who** – identified target audiences
- **How** – materials needed and methods used
- **When** – timing

These elements are illustrated below in an excerpt from the CareerSTAT communications plan.

COMMUNICATING A COLLABORATIVE'S VALUE ADDED

While it can be daunting to describe the value added of a collaborative, some effective messages and practices can help.

In developing your value proposition, **DO**:

- Describe the problem(s) your collaborative is addressing
- Tell specifically how you are addressing the problem—and what makes it different than other approaches
- Include specific outcomes and accomplishments of your work—and how you were able to get there
- Include insights and quotes from third-party validators
- Use graphics and pictures to make your story come alive
- Avoid jargon and use simple language

Figure 13

Excerpts from the CareerSTAT Communications Plan (April–June 2016)

Goals	<p>Broad: Develop the CareerSTAT brand as a national resource and expert network on frontline health care worker development.</p> <p>Specific: Deepen engagement with the CareerSTAT members network, maintain active press presence, and better integrate National Fund/CareerSTAT audiences.</p>
Key Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CareerSTAT and its materials (guide and case studies) provide a series of best practices for the industry on frontline health care workforce investment. • CareerSTAT's Frontline Worker Champions are business examples showcasing the value of frontline workforce investment. • CareerSTAT is a dynamic network operating across the country and participation can improve an organization's investment programs or HR policies.
Target Audiences	<p>Existing CareerSTAT members, health care representatives from a diverse array of health care institutions, health care boards of directors and C-suite</p>
How & When	<p>April–June 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign CareerSTAT marketing materials • Promote the Business Guide in industry outlets as a leading resource • Pitch CareerSTAT and best practices to Chief Executive magazine • Promote Frontline Champions Program to generate nominations • Present at CLOs in Healthcare conference

IDEAS IN PRACTICE

CareerEdge (Bradenton-Sarasota, FL)

CareerEdge's publication, [*The Power of Partnerships*](#), clearly articulates the value added of this Bradenton-Sarasota region's funder collaborative. Here is an overview of how CareerEdge describes what it brings to the table. These are fleshed out more fully in the publication, with examples of accomplishments and outcomes.

Unrestricted Funds

- Nimble, flexible, innovative
- Additive to the workforce board

Employer-Focused

- Market- and demand-driven
- Employer commitment of resources

Sector-Based

- Gain critical mass around common needs within an industry
- Industry-level employer partnerships

Data-Driven

- Evidence-based
- Aggregation of needs across employers

Founded as a Collaborative

- Bridging gaps between government, education, and business
- Connecting partners toward a common cause
- Holding each other accountable

See: <http://careeredgefunders.org/the-power-of-partnerships/>

Developing and Communicating a Collaborative's Brand Identity

Different from a collaborative's value proposition (what the collaborative does and adds), a collaborative's brand identity or "personality" is about who the collaborative is and what it invokes. These are themes that can guide your communications strategies.

The National Fund recently completed a brand positioning survey with Anthology Communications that revealed a number of brand traits that are also relevant to its collaborative partners.

The National Fund²²

- Values innovation, creativity
- Spreads ideas freely—has a generous and egalitarian spirit
- Is optimistic about the future—identifies problems in order to solve them
- Cares about results and impact, not convention
- Dares to ask the question: "What if . . . ?"
- Fast moving, agile, responsive, and flexible

An effective communications strategy will balance a focus on brand—"who you are"—with a focus on tactics—"what you do."

DEVELOPING A DISTINCT COLLABORATIVE IDENTITY

Many collaboratives are part of larger organizations and/or have fiscal agents with their own brands and identities, which can prove challenging when trying to differentiate between the activities of the collaborative and those of the organizational home.

Even in this context, it is possible to develop a distinct identity for the collaborative. Using a combination of characteristics, activities, and outcomes consistently will help tell a collaborative's unique story. In addition, it is helpful to have an identifiable public "face" such as an employer partner, distinct from the spokesperson for the fiscal agent, who is skilled in telling this story.

Increasing Community Awareness of Workforce Issues and Solutions

One key purpose of strategic communications is to increase community awareness of the problems you are trying to address and the solutions you are proposing.

Given the stakeholders and resources that many National Fund collaboratives have at the table, as well as their systems building or systems-change approaches, increasing community awareness is a natural way for a collaborative to set itself apart in the workforce ecosystem.

There are multiple ways to tackle this, but a few suggestions include and can be found in the Sustainability Resource Center at <https://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/sustainability-guide/>:

- Developing a policy platform that identifies the problem(s) that need to be addressed and your recommendation (See Sustainability Resource Center: [Iowa Skills2Compete](#)).
- Working with local businesses to identify workforce or talent pipeline issues and the role of workforce training in addressing these issues (See Sustainability Resource Center: [SkillUp Washington Manufacturing Employer Survey](#)).
- Developing an OpEd or pitch as a story to a local business reporter.
- Communicating the return on investment of workforce training (See Sustainability Resource Center: [Return on Investment Study for Three National Fund for Workforce Solutions \(NFWS\) Partnership Programs in Ohio](#)).
- Identifying local/regional economic issues, such as new economic development or industries, inequality, unemployment, or changing demographics, and developing a workforce story to tell (See Sustainability Resource Center: [Labor Market Data & Trends produced by JOIN](#)).
- Focusing on and telling a human story—whether of a participant, business, or both, and the impact that workforce programs have had.
- Reaching out to local elected officials and inviting them to site visits, meetings, and events.

PRO TIPS: WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

- Cultivate relationships with reporters
- See reporters as experts and help them see you as an expert
- Compliment reporters on good stories and not just stories about you.
- Write thank you notes/emails
- Think of the different angles you can use to frame your work. Some angles include: inequality, education, business, economic development, and a personal narrative
- Generally speaking, the “good for business, good for the economy” angle resonates with the media
- Make your language accessible and avoid jargon if possible
- Look beyond big papers and network television—look for industry publications, trade journals, and blogs

NEXT STEPS

- 1 Gather together any existing communications strategies, plans, or documents.
- 2 Take a careful look at your existing documents, examine your current communications plans, and write down any areas that need to be developed or strengthened as you move forward.
- 3 If you are at the stage of “planning to plan,” describe specific next steps you will take to strengthen and support your collaborative’s communications strategies. Be specific, and include timelines and responsible parties (See the [Sustainability Action Plan](#)²³ for a suggested format for this planning work).
- 4 If you are ready to write a communications plan, use the CareerSTAT template provided above to as a starting point to develop your collaborative’s plan.

D SECTION RESOURCES: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY, BUDGET AND FUNDING, AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

RESOURCES: COLLABORATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

- 1 Overview of organizational capacity with respect to sustainability planning: <https://sustaintool.org/understand/organizational-capacity>
 - 2 Defining your organizational structure: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/organizational-structure/overview/main>
 - 3 Building Future Leaders Diagnostic Survey and guide (a tool for assessing succession planning and a guide to strengthen it): <http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Career-Professional-Development/Develop-My-Staff/Building-Future-Leaders-Diagnostic-Survey.aspx>
 - 4 *Nonprofit Leadership Development: What's Your "Plan A" for Growing Future Leaders?*
 - 5 Staff/succession planning (SkillWorks tool kit): <http://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/sustainability-guide/>
 - 6 Collaborative Governance (SkillWorks sample): <http://nationalfund.com/learning-evaluation/publications/sustainability-guide/>
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RESOURCES: BUDGET AND FUNDING

- 1 Federal funding information: www.grants.gov
 - 2 Foundation information: www.foundationcenter.org/findfunders/foundfinder and www.fundsnetsservices.com
 - 3 Grant writing resources: <http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/> and <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/writing-grant-application>
 - 4 The Bridgespan Group's Finding Your Funding Model is a practical guide for nonprofits in general: <http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Funding-Strategy/Finding-Your-Funding-Model-A-Practical-Approach-to.aspx#.Vly3Mnv1gt8>
 - 5 DOL Funding Opportunities - <http://www.dol.gov/dol/grants/funding-ops.htm> and http://www.doleta.gov/grants/find_grants.cfm
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RESOURCES: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Developing a plan

- 1 SmartChart 3.0—a great interactive tool for developing a communications plan: <http://smartchart.org/>
- 2 Implementing Social Marketing: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/implement-social-marketing-effort>

Developing materials

- 1 Infographics: <https://piktochart.com/>
- 2 Graphic design: <http://www.canva.com>
- 3 Diagrams, charts, and graphics: <https://docs.google.com/drawings>





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>.
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- 3 Fogg, N.P., P.E. Harrington, & L.A. Knoll. 2014. *The Greater Philadelphia Labor Market and Opportunities for Human Capital Development: Executive Summary*. p. 2. Philadelphia, PA: Drexel University Center for Labor Markets and Policy.
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- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
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- 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/>; The description of each element provided here is adapted from: Commonwealth Corporation. 2013. *Partnerships: A Workforce Development Practitioner's Guide*. Boston, MA: Author. Available at: <http://commcorp.org/resources/partnerships-a-workforce-development-practitioners-guide/>
- 9 Commonwealth Corporation. *Partnerships: A Workforce Development Practitioner's Guide*.
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- 12 See more at: Partners for a Competitive Workforce. n.d. "Priorities." Available at: <http://www.competitiveworkforce.com/Priorities.html>
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- 14 The University of Wisconsin has put together a helpful Facilitator Tool Kit with a number of resources to help groups manage group dynamics and work through conflict: University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of Quality Improvement. 2007. *Facilitator Tool Kit: A Guide for Helping Groups Get Results*. Madison, WI: Author. Available at: <http://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Facilitator%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>

- 15** Smith, S. 2014. "Top Questions on Strategic Planning." *Social Trendspotter* blog. Available at: <http://socialimpactarchitects.com/wp/top-questions-on-strategic-planning/>
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- 17** Community Tool Box. 2016. "12. Evaluating the Initiative." Available at: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/evaluating-initiative>
- 18** Georgia Health Policy Center. 2011. *Bringing the Future into Focus: A Step-by-Step Sustainability Planning Workbook*. Atlanta, GA: Author. Available at: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/sustainability/pdf/bringing-the-future-into-focus-sustainability-planning-workbook.pdf>
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- 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.
- 23** Sustainability Planning Template, accessed at <https://sustaintool.org/sites/default/files/SustPlanTable.doc> on September 27, 2016.
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- 25** Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. n.d. *How Do We Select the Right Evaluation Approach for the Job?* Washington, DC: Author. Available at: http://docs.geofunders.org/?filename=right_evaluation_approach.pdf
- 26** Mt. Auburn Associates. 2012. *The Integration Initiative Midterm Outcome Report*. Somerville, MA: Author. Available at: <https://livingcities.s3.amazonaws.com/resource/282/download.pdf>
- 27** Soricone, L. 2015. *Systems Change in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions*. p. vii. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Available at: <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/Systems-Change-in-the-National-Fund-120415.pdf>
- 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>.



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