INCREASING IMPACT

The third step in planning for sustainability is to ensure you have built in thoughtful mechanisms for evaluating your activities and investments, reflecting on your learning, and taking on systems-change goals and priorities. Engaging stakeholders in doing this work will expand the impact of your collaborative.
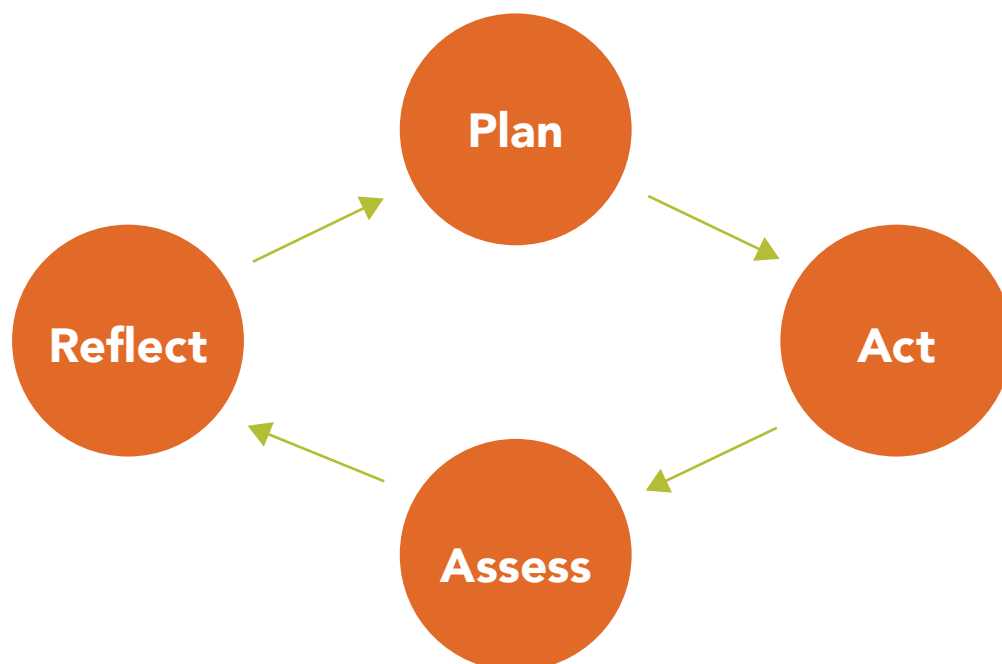
A REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Reflection is a critical process in supporting the sustainability of your collaborative as it helps to ensure the quality, relevance, and value of collaborative activities. During the reflection process, collaborative members should examine the results of collaborative activities to determine the extent to which the collaborative is meeting its goals and whether course corrections might be needed, and consider the context of the work to identify any significant changes. In reflecting, collaborative members can draw on data, formal evaluation findings, and informal stakeholder

insights. Reflection should be part of a regular, repeated cycle of planning, acting, assessing, and reflecting.

Evaluation is a critical support to your reflection process. For the National Fund, evaluation is about much more than accountability—it is an essential vehicle for learning about your work. It can help answer questions about your progress toward goals, identify areas for improvement, and provide valuable information that you can use to communicate the value and success of your collaborative's work.

Figure 14
Continuous Improvement Cycle

ASSESSING YOUR REFLECTION AND EVALUATION PROCESS	MISSING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED
1) The collaborative has developed an explicit process for reflection, including review of key questions at regular intervals.			
2) The collaborative has established an evaluation process to support reflection and planning.			
3) Collaborative activities include designated time/activities to review evaluation reports and findings.			
4) The collaborative regularly seeks input from external stakeholders as part of its reflection activities.			

Key Reflection Questions

Your reflection process should allow leadership and partners to explore questions that are important for sustaining your work, such as:

- What progress are we making toward our goals?

- What are we hearing/seeing/learning about the implementation and effectiveness of our activities?

- Does this information suggest the need for any changes in our work?

- What has changed in our context—including opportunities and challenges—that might suggest the need for modifying our goals, strategies, activities, or resources?

- Is the focus of our work still relevant in addressing workforce needs?

EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Embedding evaluation and reflection in your work fosters the development of a "learning mindset" within your collaborative with the aim of improving the collaborative's effectiveness.

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations offers a set of useful suggestions for developing a culture within your collaborative for using evaluation as a vehicle for learning.[24]

- Use evaluation for improvement, not just proof: How can evaluation inform your grantmaking and other decisions/strategies?

- Use evaluation to show contribution: How can evaluation serve as a way to learn about the range of factors that affect progress on an issue and how a specific intervention may or may not contribute to change?

- Learn with others, not alone: How can you build a learning community that involves staff, your grantees, and community members to inform development of an evaluation that meets multiple needs?

- Look beyond individual grants: While you will want to collect data on individual grants or projects, what can you learn from looking across grants and activities to help inform your strategies toward achieving larger goals?

- Learn from failure: How can you create a safe space for grantees and partners to discuss failure and mistakes without negative consequences and help to support better results in the future?

IDEAS IN PRACTICE
National Fund Local Evaluations

National Fund collaboratives use evaluation to examine multiple aspects of their work, including their overall strategies, participant outcomes, business impact, and social impact. Below are a few examples of the evaluations that can be found on the National Fund website (www.nationalfund.org):

- The Job Opportunity Investment Network: *How Workforce Partnership Training Benefits Business, Workers & Community*

- Partners for a Competitive Workforce: *Participant Employment and Earnings Outcomes (1st Quarter 2007—2nd Quarter 2012)*

- *Workforce Central Evaluation: January 2012*

- *Social Benefit Analysis of Hotel Training Center's Room Attendant Training Program*

- SkillWorks *System Change—Phase II year 2*

- TriHealth: *Investing in the Future of the Healthcare Workforce: An Analysis of the Impact of the HCC Programs at TriHealth*

PLANNING AN EVALUATION

Successful evaluation requires thoughtful planning to ensure that the process addresses the questions and concerns of your collaborative through a feasible and timely approach. To help plan your evaluation, you can work with collaborative members to discuss answers to a set of basic questions:[25]

- **WHY** What is the purpose of the evaluation? Who is the intended audience? What are the intended uses of the evaluation?

- **WHAT** What do we want to learn? How much information will we need to collect for our purposes? How will we use what we learn?

- **WHO** How will we involve the appropriate stakeholders in the evaluation? With whom will we share the results and how?

- **HOW** Who will collect and analyze the necessary data? What is our capacity? How can we leverage existing resources, infrastructure, and capacity to assist in evaluation?

- **WHEN** When are key elements of data available? When do we need information to support important decision-making junctures?

You can find more helpful information to plan your evaluation in the *National Fund Evaluation Guide* included in the resource list at the end of this section.

NEXT STEPS

- Review your collaborative's current reflection and evaluation process

- Take the reflection self-assessment above, and make note of any areas the collaborative needs to work on to strengthen evaluation and a learning mindset.

- Include these areas of work in your sustainability plan, being sure to note roles, responsibilities, and timelines.
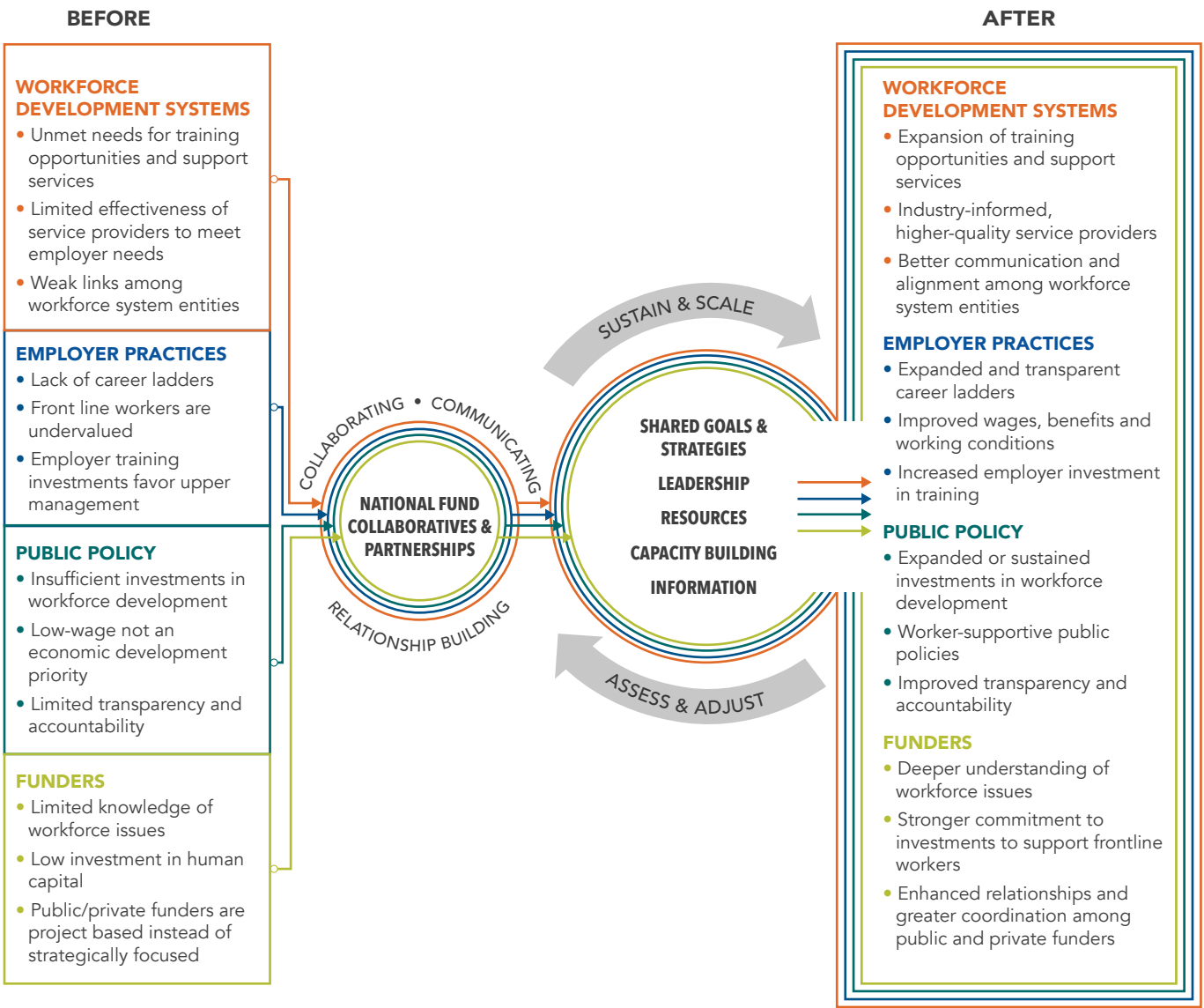
B SYSTEMS CHANGE

Systems change is an important means for ensuring collaborative solutions and strategies are sustained for the long term. The term systems change refers to changes in organizational policies, procedures, practices, and culture, within or across organizations that improve services or activities aimed at benefiting specific stakeholders, markets, or populations. It also encompasses changes in the operational boundaries between organizations, the relationships among entities and people within and across system levels, and the perspectives of different actors within the systems (i.e., how they think about and approach challenges, goals, and strategies).[26,27]

National Fund collaboratives achieve systems change when their work affects the way that organizations work, individually and collectively; when efforts alter stakeholder perspectives in ways that change their priorities and actions; when the changes brought about in institutions and systems increase the scale of services and opportunities offered to workers and employers; and when the structures and working relationships created are institutionalized and sustained.[28]

Systems change broadens the impact of your work and ensures that the changes you foster are maintained over time. These results increase the value that the collaborative brings to your community and can support your efforts to sustain your work.

Figure 15

Mechanisms Supporting Systems Change in the National Fund*

*Excerpted from Systems Change in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions

ASSESSING YOUR APPROACH TO SYSTEMS CHANGE	MISSING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED
1) The collaborative has identified the systems that relate to/impact your work.			
2) The collaborative has articulated systems change goals that relate to the larger goals of the collaborative's work in at least one of four areas: educational and workforce development systems; employer business practices; policy, regulation, practice or investment; and the behavior of philanthropy.			
3) The collaborative has identified a set of indicators of success that correspond to its systems' change goals.			
4) The collaborative has developed a process for monitoring and documenting systems changes that result from the collaborative's efforts beyond National Fund reporting requirements.			

WHAT IS A SYSTEM?

For the National Fund, a "system" is a set of organizations—which may include individual employers, employer associations, community colleges and/or other training organizations, publicly funded career centers and other workforce development agencies, community-based nonprofit organizations, and funders—whose functions intersect toward some common purpose.[29]

PURSUING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Systems change needs to be an explicit goal of your work and should be woven into your strategic planning process. You can draw on the analysis of your context and stakeholder knowledge to identify the systems that relate to your work to identify areas in needs of change.

The National Fund has established a framework for systems change in four areas that are tracked across the fund. The table on the next page explains the areas and offers indicators of success in achieving change in each area.

> **" Sustainability is about whether we have achieved local or regional ownership of the [National Fund] model and the degree to which the principles of the model have been integrated into the way that we as organizations operate. "**
>
> *Paula Gilberto,*
> *President and CEO of United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut*

Figure 16
The National Fund Systems Change Framework

SYSTEMS CHANGE AREA	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
1 How **educational and workforce development systems** support **A** Low-skilled, low-wage workers in acquiring education and skills and finding jobs or advancing in their jobs and careers, and **B** Employers to meet the education, training, and skill needs for frontline workers—both new employees and incumbent workers.	• Expansion or improvement of training/job placement services. (Institutions/organizations are working with employers or industry associations and training and placing more individuals for employers.) • Expansion of support services to promote training completion. (Institutions/organizations are providing better support to low-income, low-wage workers to complete education or training.) • Improvements in the ways workforce entities and systems engage employers. • Creating/fostering new linkages and communication among entities.
2 How **employer business practices** **A** Provide low-skilled, low-wage workers with opportunities for education/training/skills or career advancement, and **B** Improve wages, benefits, or working conditions for low-skilled, low-wage workers.	• Expansion and increased clarity of career ladders and advancement opportunities. • Increased employer-supported training opportunities. • Increase in the number of workers having access to benefits. • Wage increases for trained workers. • New HR practices put in place within/across employers or industries.
3 New local, regional, or state **policy**, **regulation**, **practice**, or **investment** that incents or supports outcomes related to systems change areas 1 or 2.	• New policies. • New investments to support training/advancement of low-income workers.
4 How **philanthropy** supports low-skilled, low-wage workers in acquiring education and skills and finding jobs or advancing in their jobs and careers.	• Expansion of funding support for low-skilled, low-wage workers acquiring education and skills and finding jobs or advancing in their jobs and careers. • Creation of a workforce funder collaborative in the region. • Increase in number of funders who are members of the regional workforce funder collaborative. • Increase in funds pooled and aligned by philanthropy in support of low-skilled, low-wage workers acquiring education and skills and finding jobs or advancing in their jobs and careers. • Creating/fostering new linkages and communication among funding entities.

TIPS FOR PURSUING SYSTEMS CHANGE GOALS

- Develop a theory of change: What will be different as a result of your efforts? What system(s) will be altered? How?

- Take the time to document and describe your baseline conditions as they relate to your goals. For example, you could look at:

  ▸ Regional economic and workforce conditions

  ▸ Political will / external support for your work among local leaders and philanthropy

  ▸ Historic relations among groups and organizations in your community

  ▸ Level of collaboration/coordination among organizations

  ▸ Exchange of information among peers

  ▸ Existing service systems

  ▸ Data collection capacity

  ▸ Level of public/employer/philanthropic investments

- Monitor progress toward your systems-change goals.

- Document change. How are conditions different from those described in your baseline?

- Communicate evidence of systems change or progress toward systems change to internal and external stakeholders.

Adapted from Evaluating Community Change: A Framework for Grantmakers

SYSTEMS CHANGE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

You can record the results of your systems change planning in a table like the one below. A worksheet for this exercise can be found at http://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/sustainability-guide/.

Figure 17

Sample Framework for Structuring Systems-Change Planning

Area of Systems Change from NF Framework	Local System to be Targeted	Baseline Conditions	Vision for Systems Change	Action Steps

IDEAS IN PRACTICE
Central Iowa Works Drives Public Policy to Address Middle Skills Gap and Systems Change

In carrying out its systems-change work, the Central Iowa Works collaborative has pursued an ambitious policy agenda to foster changes required to address local workforce issues. In collaboration with the United Way of Central Iowa, the collaborative leads the IOWA Skills2Compete Coalition as an important vehicle for bringing about change. The Coalition includes representatives from employers, labor, education and training institutions, community colleges, community organizations, and public agencies. Meeting two to three times a year, the Coalition helps to define policy priorities, often bringing otherwise opposing organizations together around issues of common concern to advance the citizens and economy of Iowa.

In recent years, Central Iowa Works and its partners have focused their efforts on policies to help address the gap between the qualifications of many Iowa residents and the skills required to fill middle-skill jobs that can provide family-sustaining wages in areas such as health care technology, administrative support, and construction. The Coalition has pursued an agenda that includes funding for adult education, maintenance of child care subsidies for low-income working parents, funding for education for incarcerated individuals, supports for transportation, and the development of career pathways linking K-12 to postsecondary education.

Central Iowa Works and its partners have been successful in several areas of policy change. The Coalition helped to secure the first state appropriation for adult education

($12 million) in 2013 and has helped to sustain that level since then. In addition, they successfully pushed for a statewide workforce evaluation system to monitor the outcomes of these educational investments aimed at helping Iowans acquire high school and postsecondary credentials. The Coalition was also successful in launching the development of a career pathways system to help prepare young people to attain the education required to obtain middle-skill jobs in the future. For fostering such systemic change and for its success with training thousands of low-income individuals, the collaborative won the 2015 United Way Worldwide Common Good Award, which was awarded to only three organizations around the world.

Central Iowa Works leadership acknowledges several keys to its success in achieving change. Having employers as an engaged voice in seeking policy change helps to gain the attention of lawmakers. Working with the United Way and the community college system helps to add leverage to the collaborative's advocacy efforts. Emphasizing statewide issues encourages a broad range of legislators to consider proposed changes as they affect constituents in similar ways across the state. And finally, collaborative leaders recognize that systems change work of this kind requires time and persistence. They understand that to achieve change, they must introduce a proposal and push for its acceptance, but not to give up if efforts are not successful the first time around.

Additional documentation of systems change in the National Fund can be found in, *Systems Change in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions*.

NEXT STEPS

- Review your collaborative's current systems change goals.

- Take the systems-change self-assessment above, and make note of any areas the collaborative needs to work on.

- If you are at the point where the collaborative feels comfortable with its systems-change goals, complete the systems-change planning framework above and include it in your sustainability plan.

- If you are at the place where more work needs to be done to refine your systems-change goals and framework, include your plan to develop this framework in your sustainability plan, including roles, responsibilities, and timeline.

C   SECTION RESOURCES: EVALUATION, REFLECTION, AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

RESOURCES: EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

1 National Fund for Workforce Solutions—
Evaluation Guide: How Collaboratives Can Design, Manage, and Use Evaluations
https://nationalfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NFWS_evaluation_guide_2009.pdf

2 *W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook*
https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2010/w-k-kellogg-foundation-evaluation-handbook

3 *GEO 2014 Evaluating Community Change: A Framework for Grantmakers*
http://www.geofunders.org/resource-library/all/record/a066000000FgMTiAAN

4 GEO—Learn for Improvement
http://www.geofunders.org/smarter-grantmaking/learn-for-improvement

5 Community Tool Box—*Developing an Evaluation Plan*
http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation/evaluation-plan/main

6 Center for Disease Control and Prevention—Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan
http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/CDC-Evaluation-Workbook-508.pdf

7 BetterEvaluation—Information on managing an evaluation http://betterevaluation.org/

8 "Using Data for Collective Impact Step One: Agree on the Data"
https://www.livingcities.org/blog/1067-using-data-for-collective-impact-step-one-agree-on-the-data

9 Collective Impact Forum—*Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact*
http://collectiveimpactforum.org/resources/guide-evaluating-collective-impact

10 Program Sustainability Assessment Tool—Program Evaluation
https://sustaintool.org/understand/program-evaluation

RESOURCES: SYSTEMS CHANGE

1 National Fund—*Systems Change in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions*
https://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/systems-change-in-the-national-fund/

2 State Sector Strategies—State and Regional Roles in Sector Evaluation
http://www.sectorstrategies.org/toolkit/mod12/roles

3 GEO—*Evaluating Community Change: A Framework for Grantmakers*
http://www.geofunders.org/resource-library/all/record/a066000000FgMTiAAN

4 SkillWorks—*Systems Change Final Report*
http://www.skill-works.org/documents/SystemChange_Final_10-8-2014.pdf