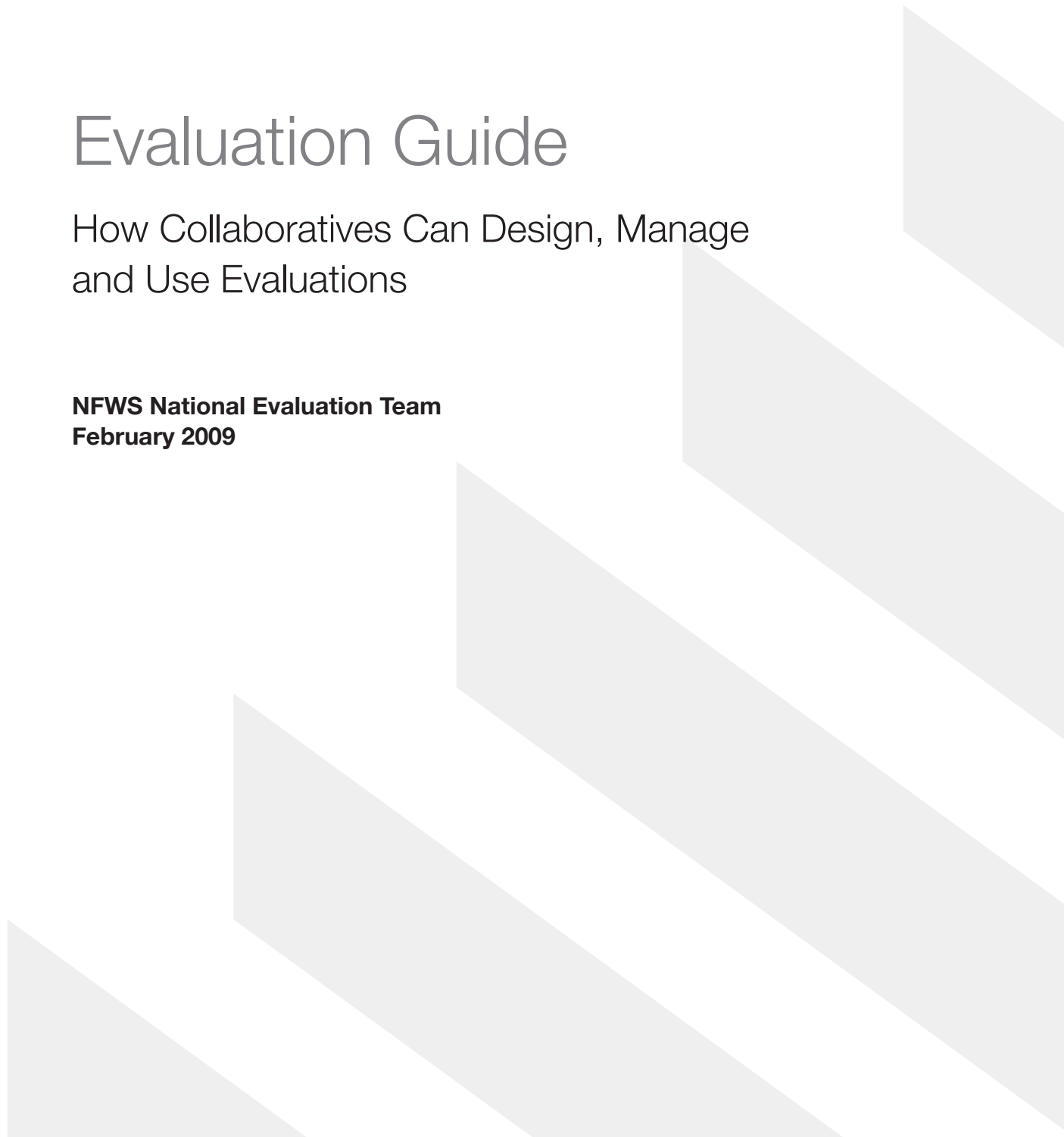




# Evaluation Guide

How Collaboratives Can Design, Manage  
and Use Evaluations

**NFWS National Evaluation Team**  
**February 2009**



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## **I. Overview**

The purpose of this Evaluation Guide is to assist the Regional/Rural Collaboratives in designing, managing, and effectively using evaluation to support your work in light of the new strategic role you have assumed. While historically local private and public investors have co-funded and coordinated workforce development efforts, a Collaborative operates as a strategic player within a region. It brings together critical stakeholders and resources to invest in long-term and sustainable efforts to change the economic prospects of workers and employers at a regional scale. The Collaborative does that by identifying and supporting effective practice, improving public workforce systems, and changing employer behavior.

NFWS has established a broad framework of goals and strategies; it also has funded a national evaluation to assess the progress made in achieving these goals. While each Collaborative operates within this NFWS framework, as a strategic regional player you will tailor this framework to effectively address the workforce challenges and opportunities of your community. You also will want to know if the investments you are making are paying off and what the problem is if your goals are not being achieved. The national evaluation will offer insights through an analysis across the NFWS-funded sites, but you will need a local evaluation that is directly responsive to your goals and direction.

The purpose of an evaluation is to provide high quality timely information that is valuable to you in assessing your strategies and making course corrections as necessary. Properly framed, managed and implemented, an evaluation can be used to inform strategy and decision making, build capacity, and catalyze program and policy change. This Guide addresses each of those tasks and is organized into the following sections:

- Structuring and Managing a Local Evaluation;
- Data Collection and Reporting by the Workforce Partnerships;
- Working with the National Evaluation; and
- Tools and Resources for Evaluation.

## **II. Structuring and Managing A Local Evaluation**

### ***Purpose of Section***

Each Collaborative will make use of experts to help it structure and implement an evaluation, but it is essential that throughout the process the Collaborative itself remain in the driver's seat. The evaluation must be responsive to the needs and goals of the Collaborative, not driven by outside sensibilities. Each step of the way, the members of the Collaborative will want to ensure that the evaluation provides timely, relevant, and actionable information.

There are five major stages of the evaluation process the Collaborative should lead and direct:

1. Establishing the evaluation framework;
2. Selecting the local evaluator;
3. Designing the evaluation;
4. Managing the evaluation; and
5. Using the findings.

### ***1. Establishing an Evaluation Framework***

The purpose of the local evaluation is to inform the Collaborative of how your NFWS-related initiative is performing against your goals for that initiative. Failure to establish clear common goals not only makes evaluation problematic, lack of clarity on what you are trying to achieve also makes it almost impossible to chart successful strategy. The first step in implementing

a local evaluation is for the Collaborative to create a framework that clearly identifies what you are trying to achieve (your goals) and how you are trying to achieve it (your strategy). This evaluation framework will inform the RFP that you issue seeking a local evaluator or, if that evaluator has already been chosen, will be used as a guide for the evaluation design.

**Creating a Theory of Change:** The Collaborative can create a Theory of Change (TOC) diagram to clarify its goals and strategies. A TOC explains how and why a project's activities are expected to lead to desired changes.<sup>1</sup> It provides a road map to those changes, based on an assessment of the environment in which you are working, including the following factors:

- **The goals of the Funding Collaborative.** NFWS has the broad goal of improving the economic prospects of workers and employers, and strengthening the systems that serve them. Your Collaborative will have more specific goals based on your own economic and institutional environment, the target population you want to serve, and your resources and commitments. For instance, if your local economy has experienced a severe loss of jobs, your primary goal may be to spur the growth of key industries while also providing good jobs for low-income individuals. Alternatively, if your economy is strong but there is a widening income gap, your goal may be to develop career ladders in the growing sectors. Both of these goals can utilize dual-customer approaches – a key NFWS principle -- but have different implications for strategy.
- **The target population.** The target population also can have an important influence on strategy. The major issue in one labor market may be broad demographic change; in another labor market, the key problem may be widespread dislocation; in a third, the long-term unemployed, many of whom have criminal records. Again, each of these target groups has a different implication for a Collaborative's strategic approach.
- **The structure of the local labor market.** NFWS emphasizes sectoral approaches, but does not – and cannot -- select the industry targets. This is another key strategic decision where Collaboratives must weigh a variety of factors, such as which industries are growing and which provide career opportunities for the target population. Collaboratives also must consider whether some employers are more willing to participate because of skill shortages and whether the current economic downturn makes it more difficult to work with other industries.
- **The institutional framework.** Strategic possibilities are shaped by more than the economy. An interwoven set of historic political, social, and institutional factors can provide both opportunities and challenges. Relevant factors include prior collaborations among employers, the role of local labor unions, the orientation of the education system, the role of the local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), the size and strength of the community-based organization (CBO) community, and the priorities and influence of the local philanthropic community. A region with a strong community college system may choose to build on this base to create responsive training programs for key regional industries. Alternatively, a community with a broad network of CBOs with deep connections to low-income workers and local employers may utilize that for their base of activities. Regions with active employer organizations and/or strong labor-management partnerships may want to build on and deepen those.

**Identifying Desired Outcomes:** Contextual factors not only shape the viability of particular strategies within each region, they also should help Collaboratives set realistic outcome measures for each target of their initiative: individuals, employers, and institutional systems. Establishing outcomes goals that are measurable, collectable, and accurately reflect the goals of the Collaborative is the fundamental underpinning of a meaningful evaluation.

NFWS direct outcomes goals for the five year initiative are the following <sup>2</sup>:

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1 Additional information on Theory of Change can be found in Appendix A of the Evaluation Guide.

2 The NFWS Collaborative believes that reaching 50,000 workers and 1,000 employers within five years not only has merit in its own right, but also helps to provide a “proof of concept” that the principles embedded in the initiative are effective. These numbers, therefore, represent a stepping stone to reaching the scale needed to have true national impact. NFWS's theory is that addressing the larger skills and income challenge of millions of workers and employers will be achieved by changing public and private policies and practices that continue to build and support effective practices.

- 50,000 or more low-income individuals will access jobs with opportunity and career advancement
- 1,000 or more employers are helped in addressing skill shortages, retaining a skilled workforce and/or improving employer measures such as productivity and quality.
- Public and private policies and practices are implemented that help to increase human capital investments and effectiveness.

In their oversight role, the funding Collaboratives will collect an array of data, including individual and employer characteristics. But, like NFWS, you will want to identify a few key measures that should:

- **Reflect progress toward your goals.** A key indicator should measure more than process; it should reflect real progress against one or more of the Collaborative’s major goals. For example, the number of participants served may indicate that your funded Workforce Partnerships have been successful in getting the target population in the door. However, if your primary goal is ensuring economic success for low-income individuals, you are likely to be more interested in metrics on wages, retention, or career advancement.<sup>3</sup>
- **Be measurable.** Not all goals easily translate into a numerical measure, either because they cannot be quantified (such as changes in employer or institutional behavior) or because capturing the data is difficult or impossible. In some cases, you will need to create “proxies” for the goals you seek; in others cases, you will need to set qualitative goals and then decide how to interpret the data.<sup>4</sup> In most cases your overarching goals will take years to accomplish, but there are outcomes that can be tracked to demonstrate progress toward those goals. For instance, your goal may be to move low-income workers into jobs with family sustaining wages. The proxy you may use to measure progress toward this goal is entry into a career path or receipt of a degree or certificate. If you cannot find any way to measure an outcome or progress toward an outcome, your goal should be re-examined and revised to be more useful and practical.
- **Be collectable.** Even when concrete measures can be established, the data is not always collectable. Take the example of retention of workers in employment. It may be that your strategy is built with the assumption that it will take at least three years for the workers you are targeting to achieve a sustainable wage, but are your Workforce Partnerships capable of collecting data on participants for years? If not, are you willing to invest in their capacity to do that or are there alternative ways to obtain the data, such as using the state wage records?

There is a certain art and science in selecting outcomes metrics and you may decide that your Collaborative could benefit from help in navigating this process. The Collaborative may choose to use a consultant familiar with strategic planning or evaluations to provide guidance and advice on creating an evaluation framework and clarifying goals, strategies, and outcomes. Alternatively, you may choose to broadly define what you want to achieve and then work with the local evaluator, after that firm has been selected, to deepen your evaluation framework. Throughout the process, it is critical that the members of the Collaborative drive the process of selecting goals and devising strategy.

## 2. Selecting a Local Evaluator

Having an evaluation framework in place can help guide the selection of a local evaluator. Identifying the kinds of questions you hope to answer can help determine the critical characteristics needed in a local evaluator. Nonetheless, you should begin your search for a local evaluator with a discussion among Collaborative members on what they want from an evaluation. Most importantly, members should discuss how the local evaluation can support the Collaborative’s strategic role. Additionally, it may be useful to discuss if members place a value on selecting a local evaluator from within the

<sup>3</sup> You might track the number of participants to provide program management oversight; you might track sustainable wages as a key outcome.

<sup>4</sup> An example is if your goal is to increase public investment or employer investment in workforce training, what is the number measure for that? In this case, you will want to have a baseline measure of current public or employer investment and then track changes to that baseline over appropriate timeframes. The timeframe would depend on your strategy. You may anticipate spending the first two years building and using the workforce partnerships to demonstrate effective practice and advocating for greater resources for this model. The expectation would be that there would be an increase from the baseline of investment in the third year.

Collaborative's geographic area.

Any process that you use to select a provider should help ensure that the local evaluation provides:

- Timely, accessible information on progress towards the goals that you have for workers, employers and systems change;
- The opportunity to make any needed changes in strategy or implementation;
- Identification of capacity building needs; and
- Data and stories for stakeholders.

**Developing a Request for Proposal:** The Collaborative does not create the evaluation design; that is the job of the evaluator. However, it is absolutely critical that the Collaborative clearly identify its goals, strategy, and evaluation expectations. Collaboratives can expect the local evaluators to translate their mandates into specific protocols and evaluation strategies, but Collaboratives must retain overall direction of the evaluation.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) for a local evaluator should reflect your Collaborative's expectations, both in the overall approach to evaluation and in more specific details. In terms of overall approach, for example, is system change an important component of your strategy? If so, be clear in the RFP that you want potential evaluators to specify how they would capture progress against that goal. In terms of the details of the evaluation, be clear how frequently you want evaluation reports, what process you want for reviewing reports, and in very general terms what you want the reports to look like.

In most cases, the Collaborative will want an interim and annual evaluation report, at least during the first year. This allows time for activities to be implemented, but also provides feedback early enough to allow for any needed corrections. You may also choose to have more frequent reporting, such as quarterly or monthly dashboard indicators, to help with program management. Decisions on the frequency of reporting should be tempered with a discussion on costs, the reporting burden, and the time funding collaborative members will have to carefully review reports.

Additionally, you should include general expectations of reporting format. For instance, does the Collaborative want short, succinct summaries of progress or does it expect detailed reports and data analysis? Members may want some combination - a good executive summary that can be quickly and easily digested followed by more detailed analysis. Members may also believe that short case studies of Workforce Partnerships are useful in understanding the work being accomplished and developing materials for key stakeholders such as local legislators or potential new investors. Again, in providing general guidelines on reporting formats, Collaborative members should consider costs, how they want to use the information, and what reporting formats can most effectively support your strategic role.

One final note: in addition to specific and local guidelines from the Collaboratives, the RFP for a local evaluator should detail expectations for how the local evaluation will cooperate and coordinate with the NFWS national evaluation and the National Evaluation Team. (See Chapter IV of this Evaluation Guide for more information on working with the NFWS national evaluation.)

In most cases an RFP process or a similar alternative will provide you with the best opportunity to select an evaluator that meets your needs. An evaluation RFP should include the following information:

- **Collaborative overview:** A description of the Collaborative's goals, strategic framework, and intended outcomes.
- **Evaluation target:** Identification of evaluation targets (for example, Workforce Partnerships, systems change, capacity building, the Collaborative process).
- **Evaluation method:** Information on the type of evaluation you are seeking.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The NFWS asks that each Collaborative have a process and outcomes evaluation. A Collaborative may choose additional local evaluation features.

- **Data collection plan:** Information on the types of data to be collected and the role the local evaluator will play in data collection and reporting.
- **Reporting guidelines:** Instructions on how the Collaborative wants to receive information (frequency and process of reporting).
- **Coordination with NFWS national efforts:** Information on NFWS and coordination with the national evaluation.
- **Proposer capacity:** A request for information on the proposer’s experience and ability to provide technical assistance to the Collaborative and Workforce Partnerships on reporting and data collection.
- **RFP guidelines:** Specific RFP information, such as any instructions on length of proposals or format; proposal submission process; proposal due date; how to provide information on qualifications (resumes, short biographies of staff, references, etc.), budget, or work plans; and process for responding to RFP questions.

How you seek proposals will be determined by the needs and interests of Collaborative members. The organization issuing the RFP may have its own competitive proposal guidelines that need to be followed. NFWS held a limited competition among invited responders that were considered experienced evaluators of similar initiatives. You may choose to do that or more widely publicize the RFP to increase the potential number of responses.

Appendix B to this Evaluation Guide provides suggested language to describe the NFWS and the National Evaluation. Appendix C provides an outline of information that could be included in an RFP for a local evaluator.

**Considerations of Evaluation Costs:** The costs of the local evaluations commissioned by existing NFWS Collaboratives vary significantly. In general the size of your initiative, the evaluation scope, the tasks assigned to the local evaluator, and the length of time of the evaluation determines costs. You need to consider those elements in determining your evaluation budget. The box below provides an example of costs and cost factors in some of the current NFWS Collaboratives.

Collaborative	Local Evaluation Cost	Length of Time	Elements Included
Collaborative A	\$334,000	2 Years	20 Partnerships totaling \$6.5 million in grants
Collaborative B	\$650,000	6 Years	2 Pilot Partnerships Research City-wide Capacity Building Technical Assistance Collection of individual level data on participants Management of Fund
Collaborative C	\$900,000	5 years	6 Partnerships Capacity Building Advocacy An ROI Study Final evaluation report additions (longitudinal study plus two topic specific reports)
Collaborative D	\$50,000 - \$75,000/year	Annual	4 Partnerships



The following elements will shape the local evaluation budget and you can use them to help estimate an appropriate evaluation budget. Alternatively, these questions may be useful in determining the reasonableness of the submitted evaluation.

- **Type of Evaluation Requested.** What kind of evaluation are you anticipating? In most cases you will be requesting a process and outcomes evaluation. Longitudinal studies and/or control group evaluations are more time consuming and expensive.
- **Type of Data to be Collected.** Are you asking the local evaluator to collect and analyze participant level data? This is highly recommended because it will provide richer detail and more ability to conduct comparative analysis. However, it generally requires more time than the collection and analysis of aggregate data.
- **Data Collection and Reporting:** What role do you expect local evaluators to play in supporting data collection and reporting? Will existing MIS systems be used for data collection? If so, will there be a need for the local evaluator to create crosswalks of data fields among organizations? Will there be a need for the local evaluator to train Workforce Partnerships in adapting to the Collaborative's data requirements? If a new MIS system is required, what role will the local evaluator play in selecting that system? What role will they play in staff training? Will the local evaluator be responsible for ensuring the quality of the data collected?<sup>6</sup>
- **Number, Size, and Complexity of Workforce Partnerships:** How many Workforce Partnerships are to be evaluated? Are these experienced providers or pilot efforts? What size are these Partnerships? Do they have a single base or multiple sites? Are they located in a large or small geographic area? How many services are being provided? How many participants are being served? Do partnerships offer both new entrant and incumbent worker strategies? How many employers are participating?
- **Scope of Systems Change:** What is the desired systems change? Is the systems change regional, state-wide or local? How many institutions, partners or policies is it likely to involve?
- **Scope of Capacity Building:** Will the evaluator be assessing the capacity building effort? If so, how extensive is the capacity building being implemented? How many partners are involved in this effort?
- **Frequency and Types of Reporting:** How often data will be collected and analyzed (monthly, quarterly or semi-annually)? What kinds of reports do you want from local evaluators (full reports, PowerPoint presentations, case studies, electronic report cards, etc.)? How frequently to you want these reports? What kinds of presentations do you want on the report (Collaborative members, stakeholders, Workforce Partnerships, etc.). Do you anticipate any special topic reports?
- **Special Research.** Do you anticipate having the local evaluators conduct any special research? For instance one Collaborative described in the chart above asked for research on Return on Investment.
- **Evaluation Length:** How long is your initiative? Will the local evaluator be involved from the beginning of this effort? Will you want them to continue any data collection and reporting after the formal end date of activities (for example to capture retention information or longer term results)?
- **Type and Size of Evaluation Organization.** What overhead or profit costs will a local evaluator charge? If the evaluator is not local, will there be additional travel and communications cost?

**Contracting and Payments:** How you contract and the payment schedule for the local evaluation will generally be shaped by the practices of the lead organization in the Collaborative. You may have an evaluation budget and payment schedule based on cost reimbursements. Alternatively, you may develop a deliverable budget. In either case, plan for and expect

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<sup>6</sup> Additional information on the role of local evaluators in data collection and reporting is included in the next section of the Guide



upfront costs as the local evaluation is implemented. These costs could include developing a more detailed evaluation design, determining additional data fields, helping to select a data collection and reporting system, and assisting the Workforce Partnerships in implementing data collection.

The existing Collaboratives have also reported incurring unanticipated additional costs during implementation. For instance, in a number of cases local evaluators identified data quality and MIS capacity issues that required more time and effort than originally expected. As a result some sites have recommended setting aside funds for future unforeseen expenses. Additionally, it is recommended that Collaborative incorporate contractual language with the evaluators requesting ample notice and budget justifications should any changes in scope and timeframe for the evaluations be necessary.

**Assessing the Requests for Proposals:** Your final step in selecting a local evaluator is to choose among the submitted proposals. In that review process, representatives from the Collaborative assess the quality and responsiveness of the proposals to the RFP's questions and requests for information. In general Collaboratives have used a subcommittee to review proposals. The subcommittee then makes a recommendation to full membership to help ensure that all members have a commitment to this selection process.

It may also be useful to have two or three of the applicants who have submitted the strongest proposals come in for an oral interview. This can take time, but you are likely to be making a major investment in the evaluation, and it is important to be sure that you select not only the best proposal, but also an organization that you will feel comfortable working with for several years.

A tool in Appendix C can be adapted to help with the proposal review process.

### **3. Designing the Evaluation**

After you select a local evaluator, their first job is to prepare an evaluation design, under the guidance of your Collaborative. If you have a fully fleshed out evaluation framework, the evaluators will have critical parameters for developing an evaluation strategy and protocols. If you have not yet developed this evaluation framework, the local evaluators can help you create one.

Key issues to consider in designing the evaluation include what kinds of outcomes you are seeking and what kinds of data (a) best capture these outcomes and (b) are available and able to be obtained. For example, if an important goal for the Collaborative is to change employer behavior, evaluators need to propose good indicators of the kind of change you want to see. In this case, qualitative data – gathered through surveys and/or employer interviews – may provide the best (and maybe only) way to measure progress against the Collaborative's goal. Other goals require other approaches.

In evaluating a proposed design for the local evaluation, the Collaborative should ensure that:

- 1. The evaluation design addresses all three targets of the initiative (individuals, employers, and systems).** The NFWS Theory of Change includes strategies aimed at individuals, employers, and key institutions and policies. A useful evaluation will examine progress against all three targets.
- 2. The priorities it sets for how to use limited resources are in line with those of the Collaborative.** For example, if the Collaborative prioritizes career advancement as a goal, does the evaluation design focus on evaluating progress toward this goal? Will it help the Collaborative understand related successes and challenges across partnerships?
- 3. The local evaluation design builds on and coordinates with the national NFWS evaluation.** The national NFWS evaluation requires the Workforce Partnerships to collect and report annually on a substantial amount of aggregate data on individual and employer characteristics, services provided, and outcomes. These data are to be reported by either the Workforce Partnership or the Collaborative through a web-based system. The national evaluation also requires Collaboratives to report on their activities and outcomes bi-annually.

The evaluation design proposed by the local evaluators should build on and complement the data already being collected, including any additional specific quantitative data reflective of the Collaborative's strategy. Local evaluators also should focus on fleshing out the story by gathering qualitative information.

4. **The design meets the Collaborative's expectations and needs for the format and timing of reports.** Finally, the Collaborative should ensure that any proposed evaluation design meet its specifications for how reports should look and when they will be received. Reports from the local evaluators also should be timed to feed into the annual NFWS national report.

#### 4. *Managing the Evaluation*

To fully reap the benefits of an evaluation, Collaboratives must actively manage it. You do not want to simply wait for the annual report, to determine if you are receiving the information you need.

Some tools that can help you manage the evaluation include:

- **Request a detailed work plan as a part of the evaluation design:** This plan helps the local evaluator to chart its work and the Collaborative to identify if the work is proceeding as expected. The work plan should include the major research questions, evaluation methods, key products and deliverables, a timeline, and a detailed budget.
- **Pre-scheduled meetings/conversations:** Monthly or quarterly check-ins with evaluators can help to identify progress and any identified challenges. This time can also be used to provide snapshots on initial observations and brainstorm on solutions to identified challenges.
- **Establish interim deliverables:** If your budget allows, you will want to request interim evaluation reports. These provide you with more immediate feedback on the progress of your initiative and allow you to determine any needed course corrections. Additionally, these deliverables will help you any potential modifications that you would like to make in the local evaluation.
- **Monitor the budget.** As described there may be unanticipated evaluation costs – or, in some cases additional tasks that you request of your local evaluator. If you have a cost reimbursement contract, monitor invoices to identify actual costs compared to the original budget projections. With either a cost reimbursement or a deliverable contract, you should ask the local evaluator to alert you as quickly as possible to any unanticipated costs or additional costs that result from new tasks. If those new costs occur, ask the local evaluator to provide estimates on a new budget and/or the implications for changes in scope, instruments, deliverables or timeframe to be able to stay within the existing budget.

#### 5. *Using the Results*

Ultimately, the most important question for Collaboratives to ask when they review a proposed evaluation design is how they plan to use the information. Collaboratives are not research organizations; they are strategic actors. What Collaboratives need most from their evaluators is regular and consistent feedback that can help them make timely course corrections. Once the evaluator is hired, work with them to create processes that allow you to periodically assess progress and make needed modifications. This can include:

- Presentations of each evaluation report and discussions on the results and implications;
- Periodic updates between reports on any evaluation challenges or preliminary findings; and
- Utilizing evaluation results in an annual review of the Collaborative's theory of change to assess if both the theory and the implementation of the strategy have gone according to plan.

You will invest good resources in your evaluation, so use it! Information from the local evaluators, in whatever form, will be most meaningful if your Collaborative is committed to periodically reflecting on the progress of the initiative and making changes as needed.

The evaluation will provide you with data and stories. These also can be powerful resources for your advocacy work. Legislators and investors respond to compelling stories and to well presented data. The evaluation should be both a tool to improve your initiative and to argue for the importance of your work.

### **III. Data Collection and Reporting by the Workforce Partnerships**

#### ***Purpose of Section***

Once you have established the evaluation framework for your initiative, you will need to determine how the information needed to evaluate its progress is collected and reported. This section of the guide focuses on those primarily responsible for quantitative data collection and reporting, the Workforce Partnerships.

Your local evaluator can assist you in making decisions on data collection and reporting for the Workforce Partnerships. This is their area of expertise and they will be advocates for an accurate, efficient data collection and reporting system. However, there are some decisions that you may need to make prior to hiring a local evaluator; and others that you will want to guide because they are critical to your initiative. The information below describes:

- Important decisions in creating a data collection and reporting system for the Workforce Partnerships;
- Information on data collection and reporting to include in RFPs or other guidance for the Workforce Partnerships;
- Considerations in assessing the MIS capacity of Workforce Partnerships; and
- Using evaluation feedback with Workforce Partnerships

#### ***1. Key Considerations on Data Collection and Reporting***

##### **1) Identifying the uses of the Workforce Partnership data.**

An important first step in determining what Workforce Partnership data should be collected and how is to identify how you will be using the information. You will have multiple purposes for this data including.

- **Assessing Progress towards Goals** – The data collected from your Workforce Partnerships should give you information on the change being sought: Has change occurred? Is the direction positive? Can it be attributable, at least in part, to strategy? That information can be used to not only to identify progress, but also to identify challenges and make any needed adjustments to implementation and/or strategy.
- **Strengthening Capacity** – An effective data system will provide the Workforce Partnerships with a management tool for overseeing and improving their work. Designed correctly it can identify and address what’s working (which services give us the most bang for the buck) and challenges (Are recruitments slow? Are certain trainings experiencing lots of drop-outs?).
- **Assessing the Investment** – The data collected will also provide information on the individual performance of each Workforce Partnership. You can use this information to identify the potential need for capacity building or reshaping investments.
- **Reporting to Funders** – The data collected will be used to report progress and accomplishments to the Collaborative’s investors including the NFWS and the NFWS national evaluation.
- **Making the Case** – Data can be powerful. Presented effectively data can assist the Collaboratives present their work and its results to potential investors, legislators, the general public and other stakeholders.

## 2) Choosing the data to be collected

Once you have developed your priorities for data uses, you will need to specify the data fields to be collected. Most likely, you will use your local evaluator to help you determine which measures are most useful in describing your initiative and tracking its progress. The following are important considerations in selecting the data:

- **Select the required data fields in the planning stages.** Data fields provide you with the means to assess progress towards goals. For validity purposes it is important to select most of the data fields before your evaluation begins. This will allow you to collect information from program inception to determine if the changes you expect are occurring or not. Moreover, it will allow you to validate the premises you have about strategy and program success based on information systematically collected rather than subjective perceptions.
- **Be precise on data definitions.** Consistency of data definitions is one of the main sources of problems when multiple organizations are charged with collecting information for a common initiative. The National Evaluation Team has put together a Data Dictionary<sup>7</sup> with basic definitions on the NFWS measures to guide the Collaboratives' data collection efforts. However, your local evaluation team will need to develop precise definitions for any additional data elements that you want to have collected. In addition, solicit the help of your local evaluator to ensure that the Workforce Partnerships fully understand the data definitions and are able to collect and report the information accordingly.
- **Be rigorous on timeliness.** Collecting data in a timely fashion is vital for evaluation and management purposes. Collaboratives should clearly specify expectations around data collection (Do you expect monthly, quarterly or semi-annually data entry?). However, keep in mind that Workforce Partnerships might have additional data collection and reporting demands from other funding sources. You need to balance timely receipt of information with an understanding of the capacity and constraints of the Partnerships.
- **Be modest about your data "wish list".** When collecting data, quality trumps quantity. It is better to limit the data fields to the information that you actually use rather than accumulating reams of data that is ignored. Furthermore, for evaluation purposes complete data is as important as consistent data. You can add data fields as need arises but initially plan on only collecting what you truly need and concentrate your efforts on ensuring that the Workforce Partnerships understand what is required and agree to collect complete data.
- **Be conscientious about data quality.** One of the main challenges in data collection is ensuring data accuracy or "cleanliness". Data collection efforts (and budgets!) can be unexpectedly spent on data cleaning. Collaboratives should carefully delineate a data quality control process which can be led by your local evaluator or by the Workforce Partnerships. The box below describes the pros and cons of each.

### Who Cleans the data?

**Local Evaluator.** With this option, the Workforce Partnerships provide the individual level data to the evaluator. The evaluator then reviews this data to spot missing fields or duplications, clarify inaccuracies, check for integrity between fields and identify suspicious or non-intuitive values. To help ensure high quality data, you should be prepared to spend a portion of your evaluation budget to have the local evaluator review the raw data.

**Workforce Partnerships.** With this option, the Collaborative should require each partnership to develop a data quality protocol and designate a specific staff person to perform data cleaning on a regular basis (at least quarterly but better monthly). You will spend fewer dollars on data cleaning by having the Workforce Partnership staff rather than the local evaluator to this step. Additionally, this may help to strengthen the Partnerships' internal capacity for data collection and reporting. However, you may sacrifice some data accuracy.

**Combined.** Another option is to utilize both approaches for the first year or so of your initiative. That is, have the Workforce Partnerships develop protocols and assign dedicated staff to do the first round of data cleaning but then have them feed this cleaned individual level data to your evaluator. The local evaluator can review the data and perform any additional needed quality control. Do this until the Workforce Partnership has developed a strong internal capacity to collect clean data and your evaluator is comfortable with the quality of the data received.

- **Be aware of “difficult” data.** Not all data is created equal. Some data is just more difficult to collect. Local evaluators will assist you in determining how to collect “difficult data” like retention rates for new entrant and incumbent workers. In some cases you will need to seek additional data sources or involve stakeholders in the data collection efforts. For example, it can be difficult to obtain and measure employer outcomes. However, Collaboratives and local evaluators can assist Workforce Partnerships to work with employer representatives to identify: their goals for the training or other services being provided; measures that will track progress towards those goals; and a process for collecting those measures.
- **Create a flexible data collection system.** Although most of your data collection design will occur during your initiative’s planning stages, it may also evolve during implementation as your strategies and specific programs evolve. Therefore, you need to make sure that you create a system that that can be easily modified to accept new data fields.
- **Prepare your Workforce Partnerships.** If you make changes in data elements or collection, anticipate what those changes will mean for your providers and prepare them for any changes. Additionally, be aware that adding or modifying data elements could affect the budgets of Workforce Partnerships as well as the cost and scope of the local evaluation.

### 3) Determining what level of data to collect

A critical purpose of the local evaluation is to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the activities and progress of the Workforce Partnerships. Therefore, we highly encourage Collaboratives to require the Workforce Partnerships to collect and report participant level data rather than aggregate data. Participant level data allows for agility in making comparisons among key measures. For instance you may want information on retention rates by particular participant characteristics or to compare retention rates by individual employer.

### 4) Selecting where to store the data

You will also need to determine where to collect data: Will you define the data fields and then ask the Workforce Partnerships to collect it through their existing systems and submit it? Or will you require that the data be submitted and stored through a centralized data base? There is no universally right answer to this question. If you decide to opt for the central database option you will gain on data consistency but will lose the benefits of data ownership by the Workforce Partnerships. Some of these benefits and drawbacks are described below.

**Collaborative’s centralized database.** If you choose to utilize a centralized database, you will need to select your MIS vendor and budget for a capacity building effort to assist the Workforce Partnerships navigate the new system. Since there are many vendors that can provide this service you may want to issue an RFI (Request for Information) that at a minimum states your vision for the MIS, its objectives and your preliminary design concept. You should also request a demonstration on site and ideally have your Workforce Partnerships weigh in on its usability. Alternatively, you may be able to identify a locally available resource for centralizing data collection. For instance, Boston SkillWorks was able to obtain a license to utilize the data collection system of its state workforce training fund operator.

**Reporting through existing systems:** The Workforce Partnerships will do most of the data collection; therefore, you may decide that it is most efficient to have them use their existing MIS for reporting. In this case, the local evaluators will need to carefully review what is currently collected at the Workforce Partnership level, ensure that all data have equivalent definitions across sites, and determine if there are additional data fields that need to be created.

The final answer to the question of a central or locally driven MIS system might only be possible once you – ideally with the help of your evaluator - have analyzed the MIS capacity of your Workforce Partnerships. (Additional information on this is in Section 3 below).

## 2. Information on data collection and reporting for Workforce Partnership RFPs

In addition to selecting and guiding the local evaluation, the Collaboratives have responsibility for ensuring that the Workforce Partnerships collect and report the necessary data, including data on employers and employer outcomes. Therefore, your RFPs for Workforce Partnerships will need to clearly identify the Partnerships' responsibilities for data collection and reporting. If you are asking for additional data as a part of the local evaluation, you will need to identify that as well. At a minimum your RFP for Workforce Partnerships should ask applicants to:

- **Describe their goals and theory of change: Having a theory of change is crucial for evaluation purposes.** This will diagram how and why the Workforce Partnerships' activities are expected to lead to the desired individual and employer outcomes.
- **Describe the target population and employers to be served:** This section should ask the Workforce Partnerships to provide information on such topics as: Who and how many individuals/employers are likely to be served? What is known about these individuals/employers strengths and challenges? And are there any significant sub-sets or clusters of customers with special needs or assets?

The Partnership should also describe the specific employers to be involved in the initiative and if possible provide existing agreements with employers. If the Partnership hasn't selected the specific employers to involve in their efforts it should at least provide the targeted employers and the process envisioned to involve them.

- **Describe the product steps/program of services:** Ask the proposers to provide information on essential elements, intensity and duration of services for individuals and employers, service delivery methods/modes (where, how, when, etc), comparative advantages vis-à-vis other approaches, and any other required information to assess quality of services.
- **Identify how progress will be measured:** This section should identify the measures you are requiring the Workforce Partnerships to collect including the NFWS performance measures. Additionally, Workforce Partnerships should describe the specific changes in individuals and employers that they seek and the methods for verifying (evidence) that those outcomes have or have not been achieved. These success matrices must be observable, measurable (ideally quantifiable) and bound in time. Partnerships should also include intermediary outcomes or benchmarks to track progress towards final outcomes. Finally, Partnerships should describe the methods and plans for using data for project management and program improvement.
- **Describe data collection systems and capabilities:** Partnerships should describe their MIS systems, data analysis and reporting experience, staff dedicated or responsible for data entry and analysis and processes for data quality control. (Collaboratives should define in the RFP how you want to receive information from the their data system, including the frequency and process of reporting)

Collaboratives should also provide information on their own Theory of Change (goals and strategies), overall target population, targeted industries sectors or clusters, desired outcomes, the NFWS and the need to provide data to the national evaluation.

The Appendix to this Evaluation Guide provides language that you can adapt for your RFP seeking applicants for Workforce Partnerships. Information on the NFWS metrics and data reporting system can be found in the NFWS User Guide<sup>8</sup> and Data Dictionary.

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<sup>8</sup> To obtain copies of the NFWS User Guide and Data Dictionary you can go to the NFWS website at <http://www.nfwsolutions.org>



### **3. Assessing MIS Capacity of Workforce Partnerships**

The Collaborative can choose to only fund Workforce Partnerships with robust data collection and reporting abilities – and in many cases this makes sense. Alternatively, you may choose to invest in building the MIS capacity of local providers either because there are few local organizations with a robust MIS capacity or as a conscious “system building” strategy for a targeted group of providers.

Effective data collection systems do not have to be sophisticated to collect and report the necessary data. Simple data collection mechanisms such as Microsoft Excel can be used for this purpose. However, local evaluators have reported that it is better if Workforce Partnerships are equipped to use at least a basic relational database (such as Microsoft ACCESS). Relational databases will not only help evaluators do their work but they can also increase the Partnerships’ ability to use data for management purposes.

Ideally Collaboratives should look for the Workforce Partnerships to have:

- A basic MIS system - preferably a relational database but many local evaluators are comfortable working with spreadsheets;
- Data quality control processes and procedures;
- Defined and clear roles and responsibilities for staff in charge of data entry (preferably at least a part-time dedicated MIS staff); and
- Demonstrated ability for data reporting and using data for management purposes.

Even if you target Workforce Partnerships with the necessary reporting capacity, it is likely that there will still be some need for capacity building. For instance most organizations with existing MIS systems have established these systems to meet the data requirement needs of other funders. These existing systems may be adaptable to your data collection and reporting requirements, but are likely to need some retrofitting.

Additionally, Workforce Partnerships will have varying degrees of internal capacity for data collection, analysis and reporting. Experienced local evaluators have reported that the main issue they encounter when working with different Partnerships is not the degree of sophistication of their MIS systems but the internal capacity for data collection and reporting. Staff capacity can vary significantly and experienced MIS staff may leave for other opportunities.

Given variations in MIS systems and internal capacity, once the Partnerships are selected, there is generally a need to assess the realities of their data collection and reporting abilities and to support them in collecting the required data for the local and the NFWS evaluation. This means you will need to build in resources to support this assessment and technical assistance. The existing Collaboratives have generally used their local evaluators for these tasks.

When assessing data collection and reporting capacity Collaboratives –usually through their local evaluators - should ask Workforce Partnerships the following questions:

- a. Does the Partnership use the MIS system for reporting AND management purposes?
- b. Who does the data entry in the Workforce Partnership? Is it done by several people or is there dedicated MIS staff?
- c. Who is ultimately responsible for the quality of the data? Does the Partnership have any data quality control processes?
- d. How often is data entered into the MIS system? What mechanisms or processes does the Partnership have to ensure timely data entry? What kind of reports does the Partnership generate on a regular basis?
- e. Who will need to receive technical assistance and support to ensure effective data collection and reporting? Ideally the technical assistance plan will involve Workforce Partnership staff at many levels (job developers, case managers, project



managers, and MIS staff). This helps to ensure anyone with any responsibility for collecting, managing, or reporting the data understands what needs to be collected, how frequently and their role in that. Most important, they need to understand why this data collection and reporting is important and how their work will benefit from it.

#### **4. Using Evaluation Feedback with Workforce Partnerships**

The data collected for the evaluation should help the Workforce Partnerships make better decisions about how to do their work. This means ensuring that the evaluators provide timely and useful feedback to the Workforce Partnerships during the life of the initiative. Collaboratives will want to direct their evaluators to create reports in formats that are accessible and directed toward the issues that are important to the Partnerships. When relevant, Collaboratives should also make clear to Partnerships that the data are being used in advocacy work on their behalf and/or encourage the Partnerships to use the evaluation information to advocate for policy reforms that move forward their agenda.

Workforce Partnerships will collect data about client service utilization patterns and trends, costs of services, client demographics, client goals to be achieved, and in the case of the NFWS, information on employer needs, services rendered to employers and the benefits of these. Collaboratives - with the help of the local evaluator- should encourage and assist the Workforce Partnerships in using this information to monitor performance, make management decisions and/or change program operations to increase effectiveness and efficiency. Workforce Partnerships should also use the data to strengthen their relationship with employers and even to advance their own policy and advocacy efforts.

If the Workforce Partnerships see that the data collected is beneficial for their own purposes, they will be more conscientious about data quality and timeliness. Make every effort to collect data useful for the Workforce Partnerships and this will increase their sense of ownership of this data. Also share reports from the NFWS National Evaluation with the Workforce Partnerships. This allows the initiative to benefit from information on projects in different regions, pursuing the same or very different strategies.

### **IV. Working with the National Evaluation**

#### **Purpose of Section**

As a part of NFWS, Collaboratives will also work closely with the national evaluation and the National Evaluation Team. The national evaluation will gather information about each Collaborative through data collection, qualitative information gathering, research, and review.

#### **1. Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative data related to the national evaluation will be collected through an on-line data system. Detailed information on the metrics, data definitions, and instructions about how to use the data collection system is provided in the NFWS User Guide and a Data Dictionary. Each Collaborative will report on the following schedule:

- Semi-annual (January and July) Collaborative-specific reporting;
- Annual (January) Workforce Partnership data reporting.

As described earlier, the Collaborative is responsible for ensuring that each of its funded Workforce Partnerships participate fully in the NFWS national evaluation, employing the common metrics and data definitions, and using the NFWS web-based reporting system. The Collaborative may choose to have its own staff enter the data from the Workforce Partnerships into the NFWS reporting system; it may elect to have the Workforce Partnerships themselves do the reporting; or it may turn this responsibility over to another reporting designee, such as the local evaluator. No matter who does the reporting, the Collaborative will review and sign off on Workforce Partnership data before it is officially submitted to NFWS.

## 2. Qualitative Information Gathering

The national evaluation also will gather qualitative data through a variety of methods including:

- **Semi-annual calls.** The National Evaluation Team will hold semi-annual calls with each of the Collaboratives. The purpose of the calls will be to discuss your strategies, progress, and challenges. The Collaborative will determine who should participate in the calls and participants may vary based on the specific agenda of the call. The calls should provide the opportunity for you to ask any questions you might have about the national evaluation and reporting. We anticipate that each call will take approximately 1 ½ hours and will take place generally in the February/March and June/July timeframes.
- **Site visits.** Each Collaborative will have at least one site visit from its National Evaluation Team liaison; if resources allow, we hope to visit you twice. During the site visits we will ask to interview Collaborative members and key stakeholders. We may seek to hold focus groups with participants and to observe Workforce Partnership activities. The purpose of these visits will be to obtain a deeper understanding of your effort and we will work closely with you prior to the visit to help meet that goal. We anticipate that the first site visit will occur early within the second year of your participation in NFWS. However, the timing will depend on the status of your activities and your judgment about the most productive time for a site visit.
- **Stakeholders calls.** In addition to our calls with you, we also anticipate making periodic calls to key stakeholders. The site visits provide us with a deeper view of your work; the stakeholder calls provides broader input on the context of your work and how it is perceived within your community. We will work with you to determine who might be appropriate observers of your work and the regional context. We will then ask you to help us identify the most appropriate way to make contact with them.
- **National meetings.** The national meetings held by NFWS also provide us with another opportunity to interact with the Collaboratives. At some of these meetings, we will be providing “Letters to the Field” summarizing trends, effective practices, challenges, and possible findings. Additionally, we will seek time with you to catch up on your work and to discuss any evaluation issues.
- **Coordination with local evaluators:** To help ensure some greater consistency in information gathering across the Collaboratives, the local evaluation teams will be provided with an evaluation template outlining common qualitative questions. Each local evaluation team will be expected to incorporate these questions into their protocols and annually report on them. These questions will also include a few to be used in annual surveys of employers active within each Collaborative.

The National Evaluation Team will create a working group with the local evaluators to coordinate our work. We also will use evaluation cohort team meetings to discuss effective approaches to challenges such as evaluating systems changes and employer impacts and exploring what we are each finding in our research and analysis. We expect the evaluation cohort will meet twice a year at national meetings and also hold two conference calls between these meetings.

## 3. Research

The National Evaluation Team believes that the strategies and results of each Collaborative are best understood within its regional, social and political context. Understanding these critical regional factors can also assist us in comparing similar types of Collaboratives. To help establish the regional context for each rural and regional funding collaborative, the national evaluation will be developing regional economic profiles and, as described above, interviewing key regional stakeholders. We will use the information we gather on the regional institutional, social, and political context to inform our interview questions to you and our reports.

## 4. Review

Information from direct contact and research will be complemented with a review of documents and materials relevant to each Collaborative. The most important document we will review is your annual local evaluation report. Additionally we will ask the Collaboratives to provide information you think will help us to better understand and describe your work. This could include:

- Regional reports, data or documents utilized to establish the Collaborative’s strategy;
- The Collaborative’s RFPs and MOUs with Workforce Partnerships, local evaluators, or other grantees and contractors;
- Marketing materials; and
- Newspaper articles on Collaborative activities.

## V. Conclusion

Traditionally, we think of evaluations as an after-the-fact verdict on our actions. We hope that this Evaluation Guide has shown that in the context of the NFWS initiative, evaluations can positively affect the decisions and actions of both the Regional/Rural Collaboratives and the Workforce Partnerships they fund.

The NFWS investors are committed to a hands-on approach to the bold national initiative they launched. They have promised to support the Collaboratives through active peer-to-peer exchanges and on-going capacity-building efforts. NFWS has also invested considerable resources in a five year national evaluation effort designed to provide both them and the Collaboratives with data they can use to make informed choices all along the way.

However, much of the information both the national initiative and the Regional/Rural Collaboratives will need to devise and revise strategy and to tell their story will come from the local level, from evaluations the Collaboratives will design and direct. Your Collaborative wants to do more than fund some programs and walk away; that means that the tasks of structuring and managing the evaluation process will be high on your priority list.

## IV. Appendix: Resources and Tools for Evaluation

- A. Information on Creating a Theory of Change (Process and Diagram)
- B. Suggested Language for Evaluation RFP Describing NFWS and the National Evaluation
- C. Suggested Outline for Local Evaluation RFP
- D. Template for Reviewing Local Evaluation Proposals
- E. National Evaluation Team Site Liaisons

### A. Information on Creating a Theory of Change (Proces and Diagram)

A theory of change explains how and why an initiative’s activities are expected to lead to desired changes. It provides a road map to those changes, based on an assessment of the environment in which you are working. A Theory of Change (TOC)<sup>9</sup> process can be the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making and evaluation. If used correctly it changes the way of thinking about initiatives from what you are doing to what you want to achieve.

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<sup>9</sup> Information in this section is adapted from the Theory of Change website ([www.theoryofchange.org](http://www.theoryofchange.org)). This site is operated by ActKnowledge, an action research organization dedicated to working with community organizations, not-for-profits, foundations and governmental agencies to transform traditional institutions and environments for social change.

To successfully create a Theory of Change, the Collaborative needs to:

- Be clear on long-term goals;
- Identify what is needed to achieve the goal;
- Formulate actions to achieve goals; and
- Determine the measurable indicators of success.

The chart below provides a listing of the steps to take in creating a Theory of Change, with examples illustrating each step.

<b>THEORY OF CHANGE: STEPS AND POTENTIAL EXAMPLES</b>	
<b>Steps in the Theory of Change Process</b>	<b>Potential Example</b>
Long Term Goal	Improve the ability of low income workers to earn a sustainable income. What is needed for the goal to be achieved
What is needed for the goal to be achieved	Low-income workers obtain a post-secondary degree.
Actions	targeting of growth sectors and occupations. Employer engagement in defining skills needs; offering internships; providing interview opportunities. Bridge programs connecting adult education to identified post-secondary certificates and degrees. Support services for retention in education. Active job development.
Measures	# of participants enrolled in degree programs. # of individuals obtaining certificates and degrees. % improvement in retention of students. # hired in targeted sectors. # securing sustainable wage target.

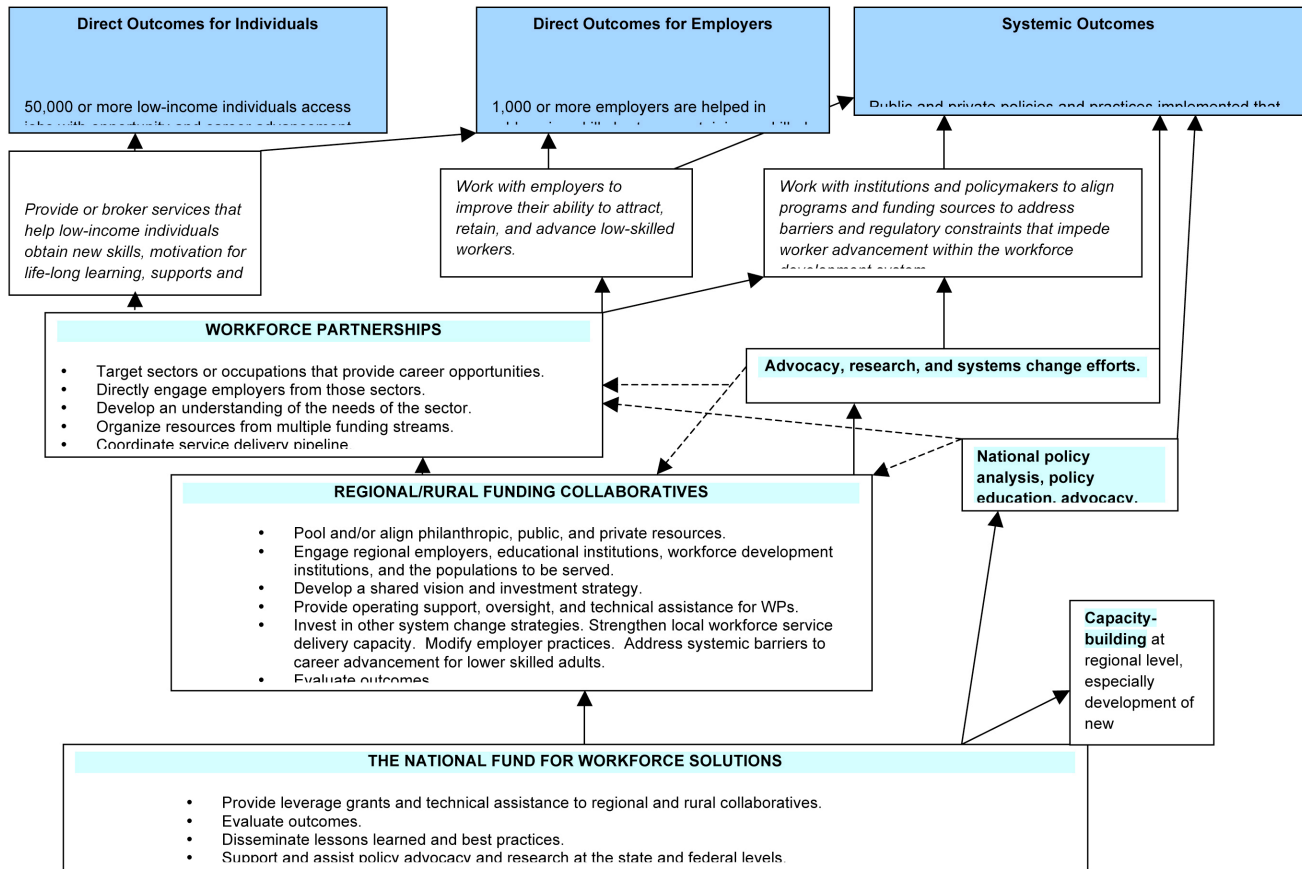
Once these steps are completed, a Theory of Change diagram can be created to be able to graphically present the change process. It is also useful to create a short narrative describing the information presented in the diagram. The next page offers the NFWS Theory of Change diagram as an example.

Additional resources can be found at the following sites:

- Theory of Change Website: [www.theoryofchange.org](http://www.theoryofchange.org)
- An example of a Theory of Change process: <http://www.theoryofchange.org/html/example.html>
- Information on evaluation tools such as the Theory of Change: “Evaluation Methodology”, Vol. XI, No. 2, Summer 2005, The Evaluation Exchange, Harvard Family Research Project, <http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/original/application/d6517d4c8da2c9f1fb3dffe3e8b68ce4.pdf>

Information and resources on setting outcomes measures can be found at:

- Mission Measurement: <http://www.missionmeasurement.com>



## B. Suggested Language for Evaluation RFPs Describing NFWS and the National Evaluation

The language below can be adapted and included in an RFP for a local evaluator. It describes NFWS, the national evaluation, and expectations for coordination between the local and national evaluation.

The (*name of funding Collaborative*) is an active participant in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions (NFWS).<sup>10</sup> Launched in 2007 by multiple national foundations and the U.S. Department of Labor, NFWS is a national funding collaborative that will be investing \$30 to 50 million over at least the five years between 2007 and 2011 to strengthen and expand workforce partnerships through direct support of Rural and Regional Collaboratives, technical assistance, research, evaluation, and policy advocacy.

Each Collaborative has its own unique goals and strategies; however, as a part of NFWS they share a common commitment to implement local Workforce Partnerships, capacity building, and systems change strategies. The purpose of these NFWS strategies is to advance three key goals:

- Create new opportunities for lower-wage workers to move into better-paying jobs and careers;
- Meet employers’ critical needs for skilled employees; and
- Strengthen public and institutional workforce systems.

Ultimately, NFWS seeks to have positive impacts on the economic futures of low-income workers and their employers at a scale that is meaningful and through mechanisms that are sustainable. NFWS supports Collaboratives through grants, technical assistance, research, and a national evaluation.

<sup>10</sup> NFWS is supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Hitachi, and Harry and Jeanette Weinberg, John S. and James L. Knight, Microsoft, and Prudential foundations and the U.S. Department of Labor.

This section of the RFP provides information on the relationship and coordination between the NFWS national evaluation and the local evaluation of (name of Collaborative). The local evaluation team selected by (name of the Collaborative) is tasked primarily with the job of evaluating the local workforce partnerships and (add any other local requirements). The NFWS National Evaluation Team is tasked primarily with the comparative evaluation of the Collaboratives (including the Workforce Partnerships that they fund) and the national effort. It is expected that the organization selected for the local evaluation will work within the NFWS national evaluation framework as well as provide evaluation services specific to the (name of the funding collaborative) described elsewhere in the Request for Proposals. Specifically, the local evaluation team will be expected to:

- Support the Collaborative in collecting and reporting on NFWS measures. (Describe what, if any role, you want the local evaluator to play in the funding collaborative funding on the NFWS web-based data system).
- Support Workforce Partnerships in collecting and reporting on NFWS outcome measures. (Describe what role, if any, you want the local evaluator to play in reporting the Workforce Partnership data through the NFWS web-based data system.)
- Collect information on a limited set of common qualitative questions related to the national evaluation.
- Collect information on a common set of employer questions annually.
- Issue annual local evaluation reports with information on the common qualitative questions.
- Participate in a national/local evaluation team including participation in two team calls and attendance by a local evaluation representative at evaluation team meetings at two annual NFWS peer learning meeting.

The national evaluation has created a set of tools to help ensure some commonality in the data collected across all participating sites. These tools include:

- A web-based data collection system collecting information semi-annually from the Collaboratives (January and July) and annually from each Workforce Partnership (January);
- User Guide providing information on data collection and reporting and a Data Dictionary<sup>11</sup> defining metrics and reporting terms;
- A template with common qualitative questions to be asked and reported on by all local evaluations annually; and
- A set of common employer questions to be asked and reported on annually

Your proposals should describe how you will work with the NFWS national evaluation.

### ***C. Suggested Outline for Local Evaluation RFP***

The outline below provides a structure for requesting information from potential evaluators of your initiative. As described earlier, this outline would be preceded by information on the goals and structure of your initiative including its relationship to NFWS and the national evaluation.

Proposals for a local evaluation should include the following:

- a. Name, Address, and Contact** of the lead organization making the application and the name, address, and contact that will be the fiscal agent for the evaluator (if different than lead organization).
- b. Name(s), Address(s) and Contact(s)** of major participants (co-evaluators or significant subcontractors).
- c. Statement of Qualification:** Describe the background of the proposer(s) and the qualifications for carrying out an

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<sup>11</sup> To obtain copies of the NFWS User Guide and Data Dictionary go to the NFWS website at <http://www.nfwsolutions.org>



evaluation with multiple sites. Qualifications must include capacities to carry out both evaluations of programmatic outcomes as well as organizational and process analyses. If multiple organizations are proposed to carry out elements of the evaluation then each must state its qualifications for the specific component of the evaluation it will carry out.

d. **Evaluation Strategy:** Proposers should provide a brief description of their proposed evaluation strategy for this initiative. This strategy should indicate an understanding of the (name of initiative) goals, the model of Workforce Partnerships and the relationships (as well as distinctions) between the NFWS strategy and the Collaborative's. The proposers should be able to show an integrated strategy for assessing this initiative relative to its specific goals and those of the workforce partnerships it supports, and should identify the key elements that the evaluation will explore, assess, and provide analysis. Additionally, the proposers should provide an understanding of the relationship of the (initiative name) to NFWS and its national evaluation.

e. **Work Plan:** Describe the overall work plan for the period of performance, and the key benchmarks for progress on the evaluation and targets for delivery of proposed reports. Describe how the proposer will organize and coordinate relationships with workforce partnerships and other projects funded by this initiative (including a multi-year timeline). Describe the methodologies to be employed for achieving the goals of the evaluation strategy in terms of the local assessment evaluation and the project as a whole.

Provide a timeline for the whole evaluation process that includes key milestones for the first year, in detail, and for the full period of performance (out years may be less detailed).

f. **Challenges and Strategies to Meet Them:** The proposers should briefly identify challenges unique to this evaluation and suggest strategies to address them.

g. **Key Products and Deliverables:** At minimum, proposers must offer the following products and deliverables: annual evaluation reports providing an assessment and analysis of the overall initiative as well as an assessment and analysis of each Workforce Partnerships. (Add other deliverables that will be required by your Collaborative). All products and deliverables should clearly be related to the evaluation strategy proposed for the evaluation and should clearly be related to the goals of this initiative.

h. **Projected Budget:** Provide detailed one-year and, somewhat less detailed, out-year budgets and budget narrative for the evaluation, describing the total budget. Provide a brief description of budgetary controls and spending procedures you expect to apply.

Examples of NFWS local evaluations can be found at the NFWS website at <http://www.nfwsolutions.org>

#### ***D. Template for Reviewing Local Evaluation Proposals***

The next two pages offer templates that can be modified and used by Regional/Rural Collaboratives in your review of evaluation proposals. You should modify the forms based on your Collaborative's specific goals and priorities for the local evaluation.

On the first page, the questions in the review categories track with the sections in the local evaluation RFP outline. The numbers in the response categories are suggested rankings. In the example, the rankings give more weight to the proposer's understanding of the Collaborative's strategy by having two questions under that category and assigning more points.

Potential modifications to the first page may include:

- Modifying and/or adding to the questions based on your key priorities.
- Substituting different numeric rates that reflect how important each question is to your funding collaborative.



Your team can choose to either use the accumulation of each reviewer’s ranking forms to determine final ratings for the proposal or simply use the discussion to develop a common ranking form scoring the evaluation proposals

The second page of this document provides a form where reviewers can note their comments. The reviewers can use the form to jot down their thoughts when reviewing the proposals. Both documents can be used in a discussion of the proposal.

Name of Organization Submitting Evaluation Proposal: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>TEMPLATE FOR REVIEWING EVALUATION PROPOSALS</b>				
<b>Review Category</b>	<b>No Response</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
Qualifications 1: The proposed evaluation organization(s) and the team members assigned to this project have the background and experience necessary to carry-out the proposed evaluations.	(0)	(5)	(10)	(15)
Evaluation Strategy 1: The proposed evaluation strategy shows an understanding of our initiative including the model for workforce partnerships, capacity building, and systems change.	(0)	(5)	(20)	(30)
Evaluation Strategy 2: The proposed evaluation strategy shows a clear understanding of the relationship with NFWS as well as the distinctive aspects of our initiative compared to the general NFWS strategy.	(0)	(5)	(10)	(15)
Work Plan: The work plan indicates a clear understanding of the timing and steps needed to carry fulfill the evaluation strategy.	(0)	(5)	(25)	(30)
Challenges: The proposal describes important potential challenges in evaluating this initiative and suggests strategies capable of meeting the challenges.	(0)	(5)	(10)	(15)
Key Products and Deliverables: The proposal is responsive to our requests for specific deliverables.	(0)	(5)	(10)	(15)
Budget: The budget is reasonable in relation to what we have requested and the evaluation strategy.	(0)	(5)	(15)	(25)

Name of Organization Submitting Evaluation Proposal: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Category	Comments
Qualifications 1: The proposed evaluation organization(s) and the team members assigned to this project have the background and experience necessary to carry-out the proposed evaluations.	
Evaluation Strategy 1: The proposed evaluation strategy shows an understanding of our initiative including the model for workforce partnerships, capacity building, and systems change.	
Evaluation Strategy 2: The proposed evaluation strategy shows a clear understanding of the relationship with NFWS as well as the distinctive aspects of our initiative compared to the general NFWS strategy.	
Work Plan: The work plan indicates a clear understanding of the timing and steps needed to carry fulfill the evaluation strategy.	
Challenges: The proposal describes important potential challenges in evaluating this initiative and suggests strategies capable of meeting the challenges.	
Key Products and Deliverables: The proposal is responsive to our requests for specific deliverables.	
Budget: The budget is reasonable in relation to what we have requested and the evaluation strategy.	

**E. National Evaluation Team Site Liaisons**



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Bay Area Los Angeles San Diego Washington, DC Cincinnati Des Moines	Boston New York Baltimore PA Philadelphia Wichita	Milwaukee Central Wisconsin	Seattle Denver Omaha	Rhode Island Chicago Hartford Dan River



maybe we could put contact information here