



*Quick Guides for Collaboratives*

## Ready to Form a Regional Workforce Collaborative? Here is How to Get Started.

A regional workforce collaborative coordinates local, cross-sector stakeholder efforts that help workers access good jobs, direct employers to the talent they need, and build more prosperous communities. A collaborative goes beyond one organization's initiative to formalize a shared vision for a specific region and aligns resources (money, expertise, time) to advance that vision. Collaboratives are ideal for tackling entrenched, systemic issues.

Set up a workforce collaborative in your area to obtain the following types of outcomes:

- Provide space for stakeholders to share **knowledge and expertise**.
- Understand the **root cause** of problems, needs, and gaps to develop a path for making systems change a reality.
- Incentivize and create greater **alignment** and **coordinated leadership** among partners.
- Encourage **innovation** by spreading financial and reputational risk for investments in a pilot programs.
- Support local and regional **advocacy** and **public policy changes**.
- Speak with a **coordinated voice** on important local issues.
- Tap into **new funding** streams.

What could a collaborative do for your community? Review our quick guide, [Know Your Collaborative's Value Proposition](#).

### Start by asking these questions

#### Who should be at the table?

Clarify the issue, challenge, or idea driving the need for a collaborative, and then consider who needs to be at the table. Does the potential stakeholder care about the work? Do they contribute to it directly? Might they pose some resistance? Assemble a coalition of the willing. Check out our quick guide, [Connecting Your Regional Workforce Collaborative with Private Funders](#).

#### How do you create a shared sense of ownership and accountability?

Engage partners to identify your collaborative's vision, mission, goals, strategies, and plan to address duplication and achieve consensus. Take time to build relationships, rapport, and trust — crucial ingredients to the success of your collaborative. Small working groups may help this process.

### **How do you make decisions collectively?**

Establish the decision-making structure for your collaborative early on. Determine which members vote on which decisions and whether questions are decided by consensus or by majority. Include people with lived experiences in the decision-making process.

### **How do you demonstrate success?**

Members should see the collaborative's progress. Build momentum with small, early wins. As your work continues, collect, analyze, and reflect on outcomes to tell a compelling story of impact in achieving your mission, vision, and goals.

### **Where should your collaborative "live"?**

Your collaborative needs a home to serve as its backbone. This backbone provides invaluable administrative support, including managing any pooled funds, contracts, and staff. Collaboratives tend to work best when they have a distinct identity from their fiscal agent or organizational home yet are seen working closely to further shared priorities and goals.

### **How do you fund the work of your collaborative?**

It takes resources to collaborate and staff to continue the momentum. Luckily, there are many funding sources to support the operations of your collaborative. Refer to our quick guide, [Funding Your Regional Workforce Collaborative](#).

## **Watch out for**

**Tense relations with the local workforce board.** Reach out early to establish a relationship with the board. Highlight the ways a collaborative can support the workforce board by being a partner, potential funder, and advocate.

**Loss of stakeholder interest over time.** Be opportunistic by identifying places to make early progress. Don't underestimate the need to build trust to create buy-in for the long term.

**Turnover of key partners and staff.** Consider methods to sustain the work in case individuals move on to other roles.

**Duplication of other community efforts.** Carefully interrogate whether and how your collaborative is fulfilling a need and not duplicating efforts. It may not be necessary or productive for the collaborative to be in the lead every time. Look for opportunities to leverage or add support to existing efforts that advance your desired workforce outcomes.

**Funder disinterest.** Funders may ask why they should support an intermediary like a collaborative rather than making a grant directly to a workforce organization or program. Be sure to clearly define the collaborative's added value and have a ready response to this question.