



Quick Guides for Collaboratives

Know Your Regional Workforce Collaborative's Value Proposition

In most regions, there are a lot of players in the workforce development ecosystem. It's important for your regional workforce collaborative to stand out in this often-crowded landscape. Do this by clearly defining and communicating your value proposition to various audiences. A well-crafted value proposition succinctly describes how your collaborative is uniquely positioned to add value in the workforce ecosystem. It names the collaborative's key differentiators and areas of potential impact and frames them in compelling language.

Here's what a clear value proposition can do for your collaborative:

- Differentiate the collaborative's work within the local context.
- Help members align their work and recruit other partners.
- Demonstrate that the collaborative is addressing a meaningful local need and supporting long-term sustainability.

Start by taking these steps

- **Assess the local context.** Examine the environment that shapes workforce development in your region: Which policies and practices drive local workforce outcomes? What does the disaggregated data tell you about the experience of workers and job seekers? Which industries are growing or declining? See the Community Scan Worksheet in our [Sustainability Guide for Funder Collaboratives](#).
- **Conduct an environmental scan and stakeholder analysis.** Gain an understanding of the key individuals and institutions in your workforce ecosystem and the work they are doing: What does this tell you about gaps, duplication, and needs? Where might relationships be helpful across the ecosystem? See the [FSG Guide to Actor Mapping](#) and our [Stakeholder Analysis Worksheet](#).
- **Assess your strengths.** Engage key stakeholders, funders, staff, grantees, and community members to identify what the collaborative does well or is positioned to do well. Create a "top 10" list of key strengths. See David Cooperrider and Associates' [Appreciative Inquiry](#) method.
- **See how your strengths stack up against other organizations in the workforce ecosystem.** Take a look at the list of organizations generated in your environmental scan and identify your unique strengths. Create your own comparative matrix.
- **Discern the implications of your unique strengths.** What does your combination of unique strengths mean for workers, job seekers, businesses, and other stakeholders? What impact might members make by participating in this collaborative? See Strategyzer's [Value Proposition Canvas](#).

What key stakeholders say

Need some inspiration? Here's what members of the National Fund name as the value of participating in a collaborative:

- **Philanthropic funders:** Leveraging their own grantmaking dollars and sharing the financial risk of newer investments; engaging in policy advocacy when individual organization policy is limiting; amplifying their voices and priorities. See our quick guide, [Connecting Your Regional Workforce Collaborative with Private Funders](#).
- **Public system:** Demystifying the public workforce system for key partners; sharing the burden of voicing the need for funding and policy changes; having the opportunity to shape what philanthropic funding supports.
- **Service providers:** Having one coordinated table to simplify reporting, metrics, funding applications, and priorities; accessing labor market information; finding partners to deliver on complex outcomes when capacity is limited.
- **Employers/businesses:** Accessing an honest broker to connect to a variety of options and resources and having support for shaping workplace practices.
- **Unions, labor management partnerships, and worker centers:** Having a table where voices and experiences are equally valued and where information about workforce policy and program decisions can be shared.

All audiences said they benefit from shared learning, increased visibility of workforce as an issue, and the amplification of voices through a shared agenda and priorities.

Watch out for

- **Setting up the collaborative as a savior.** Avoid messaging such as, "We are here to change/save/reform the workforce system." Focus on how a collaborative can complement existing programs and structures, bring new resources and partners to the table, and partner to strengthen the workforce ecosystem.
- **Using a "stigma" narrative.** Be careful not to define job seekers, workers, and potential participants by their challenges or define in personal terms the challenges to be addressed (e.g., "We are helping low-skilled workers gain middle-skill credentials."). Focus instead on the collaborative's assistance in addressing systemic challenges and barriers.
- **Confusing the value and identity of the regional collaborative with its fiscal sponsor or home.** Make sure you co-create a common vision and set priorities that collaborative members can jointly own and buy into.

Center equity

- **Consider impacts on people of color and marginalized populations at each step in the definition of your value proposition.** How is racial equity being addressed in the workforce system? Which policies or practices have disparate impacts on opportunities and outcomes for people of color? Who is currently addressing these inequities?
- **Address equity clearly.** Be explicit in the value proposition about the collaborative's goal to increase equity and close disparities. Center equitable outcomes within your collaborative's goals.

Learn more

Alyssa Conrardy, "[Determining your nonprofit's unique value proposition for donors and funders \(finding your reason for being\)](#)," Prosper Strategies blog.