

Community Collaboratives Life Stages

Introduction

Collaboration has long been a part of the social sector. But many have also experienced collaboratives that do not live up to their potential in one way or another—nothing happens between meetings, the group never reaches real agreement, the group loses steam as participants transition in and out, or the collaborative falls apart as participants jockey to claim whatever successes emerge.

There is an exciting groundswell right now in a new kind of collaborative that may hold the key to addressing some of these problems. A few collaboratives have made real progress in a fairly short time. The overarching difference we have experienced in these collaboratives is seriousness about having real, concrete impact on a community-wide goal. Unsatisfied with small gains for a smaller segment of the population, the leaders of these new collaboratives have put forth ambitious goals and backed them up with long-term investments of resources and effort.

This guide to collaborative life stages can assist community collaboratives to succeed at any stage in their life cycle – from planning and development, through roll-out and course-correcting, and on to deciding its next steps. We have thus organized it along a five-part timeline based on our extensive research into best practices. The first two sections will help guide new collaboratives in selecting goals and starting out on the right foot. The last three sections will help existing collaboratives stay on track to create the kind of outcomes that are inherently community-changing. Indeed, a hallmark of every successful collaborative is a high aspiration to make a meaningful difference.

With that ambition in mind, this guide to collaborative life stages is for collaboratives that say “yes” to the following questions:

- Do we aim to effect “**needle-moving**” change (i.e., 10% or more) on a community-wide metric?
- Do we believe that a **long-term investment** (i.e., three to five-plus years) by stakeholders is necessary to achieve success?
- Do we believe that **cross-sector engagement** is essential for community-wide change?
- Are we committed to **using measurable data** to set the agenda and improve over time?
- Are we committed to **having community members as partners and producers** of impact?

Please refer to the “Framework for Community Collaborative Introduction” for more information on any of these five components.

Many community efforts do not meet these criteria. Those focused on a single school or small neighborhood project, for instance, are eminently worthwhile. But we have designed this document for collaboratives that are taking on social challenges on a community-wide scale.

What’s in this guide to collaborative life stages?

- *Life stage roadmap*: This section lays out the key stages of a collaborative’s development, along with the lessons learned from our research. A best-practices case study illustrates each stage.
- The last three sections are valuable for collaboratives that are changing goals or wish to incorporate best practices gleaned from successful collaboratives.

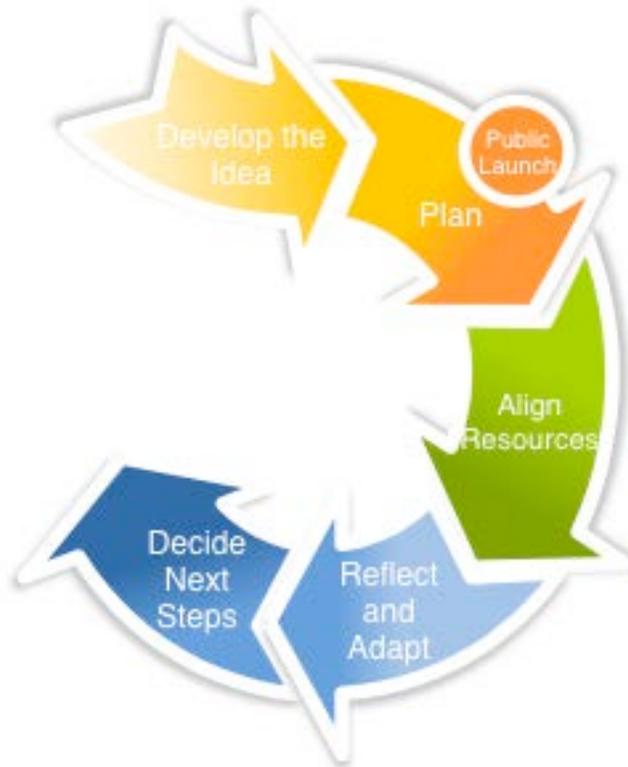
Arrayed within each life stage section is a core set of resources:

- *Introduction*: This gives an overview of what happens at each stage.
- *Key discussion questions*: These are the essential questions a collaborative must grapple with and resolve to move to the next stage.
- *Checklists of tasks to complete*: These are the building-block activities that collaboratives must master within each stage.
- *Potential roadblocks*: These are the all-too-common setbacks that collaboratives can encounter, along with suggestions for how to address them and a list of useful resources for assistance.

Additionally, we have included a full list of valuable Web resources, which share proven solutions and highlight organizations that support collaboratives.

Life stage map

Collaboratives typically go through a common series of life stages. These are described below, along with a rough indication of their duration.



	Develop the Idea	Plan	Align Resources	Reflect and Adapt	Decide Next Steps
Description	Collaboratives need to prepare for a strong start – one built upon broad public support and interest in the collaborative.	Successful collaboratives define their vision and develop action plans for years ahead – all while building out their capacity and resources.	Collaboratives efficiently align community resources, programs and advocacy toward what works best, using data to continuously improve.	Collaboratives monitor progress against their goals constantly to understand how they must adapt to changing circumstances.	Big change takes time. But at some point, collaboratives need to realistically assess their progress and determine the path forward.
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide on lead convener Define core problem, using data Conduct community landscape review Engage in peer learning Identify funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring in other players Develop a roadmap Agree on goals and metrics for measuring success Secure additional funding Launch public campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Execute action plan, aligning existing programs, policies, etc. against roadmap Test and refine direction based on data Communicate early successes Ensure long-term financial commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to coordinate efforts and track data Determine long-term plan for sustainability Revise goals by broadening or sharpening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take stock of progress and remaining work Acknowledge successes Decide on role for future
Duration	3-6 months	1-2 years	1-3 years with ongoing continuous learning	Ongoing , after Align and Improve	After 4-6 years
Key Players to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core group of partners Lead convener Local funder(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community partners (i.e., nonprofits, businesses, funders) Data analyst Director/Facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional community partners Additional dedicated staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional community partners Additional funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core group of partners

Develop the Idea stage (3-6 months)

Community collaboratives evolve out of pressing social needs and some initial thoughts about how to address them. The realization that collaboration is necessary to attack the problem at scale may be recent. Or, it may have come about when a prior set of partnerships has failed to yield significant results.

But whatever its origins, a collaborative needs to learn how to pull together. Therefore, when successfully completed, the “Develop the Idea” stage is characterized by an energized, cohesive core group of partners. This nucleus also develops a clear sense of the issue they want to address and a short list of additional players who should be involved. Typically, the lead convener, i.e., organization or individual(s) that will coordinate the collaborative process, is identified during this stage.

Spearheaded by this lead convener, new or refocused collaboratives often have to immediately address challenges. Not least of these is raising sufficient funds to start to build the staff necessary to support the collaborative process. When raising funds, collaboratives may find funders hesitant because their work is functionally more like overhead than program work. Its impact is indirect and the lines of accountability are less clear. Nonetheless, collaboratives need to identify local stakeholders in the short-term who are interested in sustaining the collaborative throughout the “plan” phase.

Also among these challenges is resistance from parts of the community that may feel unheard or disenfranchised, including individuals, families, service providers and advocates. To avoid such friction, the core group must ensure that the idea will generate broad support. This begins with understanding the community context, including the political and cultural landscape, early in the process, as well as completing the necessary research needed to identify existing work in the community.

In the case of Nashville, failure in the public schools was the catalyst for community decision-makers to come together. A study conducted by the Nashville Chamber of Commerce in 2002 highlighted the fragmented support network for Nashville schools. Business leaders saw an opportunity to focus and coordinate existing efforts to impact youth in the community. Alignment Nashville, a nonprofit intermediary, was subsequently born out of the business community’s interest in addressing this challenge. In turn, Alignment Nashville has continued efforts to include all relevant stakeholders using an innovative annual process, called Invitation to Participate (ITP), which provides community organizations with an opportunity to propose ways in which they can align their existing resources with the goals of the collaborative.

When done well, this stage begins the formal process of developing a roadmap, which is a detailed action plan for the future, and begins to attract additional players to the collaborative.

Key discussion questions for this stage

- 1) Is my community’s history with collaboration positive or negative? How can we use either situation to our advantage?
- 2) What pressing issue or opportunity has brought us together? Will this idea galvanize leaders across sectors in my community?
- 3) Is this issue capable of attracting resources both for direct service providers and dedicated collaborative capacity?
- 4) What do we know about this issue? What data is out there to help us better understand the issue?
- 5) How does the issue identified by the collaborative fit into the broader context of our community? Are other efforts under way? Are there opportunities for partnership with existing collaboratives? In what ways is our work needed and additive to existing work?
- 6) What core group of people simply *has to* be at the table to make needle-moving change occur on this issue?
- 7) Is there a trusted, neutral, influential leader – usually an organization – that is coordinating and facilitating the collaborative? Note: This may be your organization.
- 8) How can we foster genuine community partnerships to help us understand the issue and create the necessary support for the interventions needed?

Checklist of key tasks to complete

- Bring a core group of stakeholders to the table** (i.e., those interested in and able to drive the early planning and whose engagement is fundamental to the success of the collaborative)
 - Include decision makers and funders relevant to the issue in the community; participants should be either chief executives of organizations or trusted deputies who can take responsibility for the issue and can influence chief executives
 - Start to discuss which key participants need to be at the table: For instance, consider reaching out to the local United Way, mayors or senior city officials, school superintendents, child welfare agencies, relevant nonprofit service providers, area Chambers of Commerce, community foundations, advocates, researchers and the likes
 - Ensure that this early planning group includes the core decision-makers within the community, without becoming unwieldy
 - Understand that the collaborative will evolve and gain more appropriate members during later stages

 - Conduct landscape research as necessary to understand how to build the collaborative to be effective within the community context**
 - Use or undertake research to understand what else is happening in the community, such as the cultural and political landscape and other initiatives or collaboratives focused on similar or related topics
 - Determine if a new collaborative is actually needed; sometimes the right path is to reinvigorate an existing collaborative
 - Engage in conversations with relevant community leaders, residents (including youth, if applicable), business leaders and owners, and funders
 - Aim, ultimately, to understand how the collaborative fits in the broader community context

 - Frame the challenge and the problem(s) you will address**
 - Based on the results of the landscape review, complete a visioning process with the broader group to further define the core focus of your collaborative
 - Consider creating a high-quality research report, one that can: clarify the problem in local terms, gather baseline data for your community, and create a focal point for the public launch

 - Identify funding sources for dedicated capacity of the collaborative**
 - Identify a committed source(s) of funding to sustain the collaborative throughout the Plan phase, during which time there will be no success stories to attract resources
 - Understand current funding condition of collaborative members to determine if some of their current resources can be repurposed to support the collaborative. Please refer to the “Capacity and Structure” document for examples of how other collaboratives have raised funds.

 - Work to secure the right leadership and operational support for the collaborative**
 - Select a lead convener organization that will provide significant administrative capacity and resources for the collaborative.
 - Most importantly, select a lead convener with the trust and respect of the community; one that is both sufficiently neutral and has the ability to convene a broad group of decision-makers. Please refer to the “Capacity and Structure” document for more information on selecting a lead convener.

 - Create the community engagement and participation plan**
 - Conduct a series of meetings, forums and calls to engage other potential stakeholders, such as nonprofits, government agencies, advocates and community members with an interest in the issue involved
 - Determine how and when residents, parents or youth can be involved to ensure that the collaborative has authentic engagement. Please refer to “The Next Generation of Community Participation” document for guidance on engaging your community, examples of how other collaboratives have engaged their communities, and community engagement questions to ask yourself during each life stage.

 - Complete “Community Collaborative Assessment” to make sure you have successfully completed the work required for this stage**
 - The assessment will help you understand the degree of your success in this stage; specifically, it lays out the core principles of collaborative work and prepares you for the next stage
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Engage in peer learning and secure technical assistance, if possible

- Understand what other communities are doing to solve similar problems: read about other collaboratives, set up relevant calls, visit other collaboratives, and get involved in peer learning opportunities
- Use existing knowledge in this process, an effort that will likely save time and resources
- Seek out the support of intermediaries designed to support this kind of work

Potential roadblocks

While this is one of the most exciting times for a collaborative, challenges also exist. Common roadblocks are listed below, along with suggestions and resources for addressing them.

Potential roadblock	Starter suggestions for addressing the roadblock	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our community already has other collaboratives, so necessary stakeholders are not interested in the planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine what is at the root of that reaction. Are those attempts actually working? Are there effective collaboratives you could join? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 17, “NLC New High Schools” • Source 27, “Ready by 21 Existing Efforts”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are having trouble completing the landscape review to fully understand the context of our community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review a guide on how to understand community context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 11, “NLC Comprehensive Youth Strategies” • Source 54, “NFVP Community Map” • Source 55, “Find Youth Community Assessment” • Source 63, “Keystone Constituent Mapping” • Source 69, “Harwood Institute Community Rhythms” • Source 71, “Harwood Institute Public Capital”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our leadership is not united around the identified challenge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring data into the conversation; share relevant statistics on the biggest challenges of your community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 22, “Ready by 21 Action Plan”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While we have a broad vision for what our community should be, we cannot agree on the key goal(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, bring data to the table to discuss which issues are most pressing. The numbers should point the way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 21, “Ready by 21 Goals for Youth” • Source 42, “McKinsey Public-Private Partnerships” • Source 43, “Charting Impact”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not have funding for a dedicated capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for seed funding, or try to build the capacity out of existing funding from within organizations or agencies • Also pursue in-kind resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 25, “Ready by 21 Leadership Update” • Source 66, “AccountAbility Stakeholder Engagement”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not have a clear lead convener of our collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look to other collaboratives or community leaders to find the right group or organization (specifically those that are already respected in your community) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 6, “NLC Gang Violence Prevention” • Source 23, “Ready by 21 Leadership Council” • Source 27, “Ready by 21 Stakeholders Wheel”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leader of the collaborative does not have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have one-on-one conversations to discuss who 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 46, “Ready by 21 Leadership Audit”

the clout or neutrality to convene the right participants

- We are unsure how to engage residents and youth in our community

is respected and neutral and who could best play that role

- Review case studies to understand how other collaboratives have approached engagement

- Source 2, "Mobile Blueprint"
- Source 7, "NLC Youth Action Kit"
- Source 16, "NLC City Leadership"
- Source 70, "Harwood Institute Authentic Engagement"
- Source 72, "America Speaks Voices and Choices"
- Source 73, "Unified New Orleans Plan"

Plan stage (1-2 years)

The “plan” stage is all about developing the process by which the collaborative will map its path and then measure its progress. This takes some intensive up-front effort. For instance, this stage typically entails at least monthly – and sometimes more frequent – meetings of the core stakeholder group. It is their task now to put in place the collaborative’s structure, finalize agreement on the community-wide goal(s), gather the appropriate benchmark data and set the metrics for measuring success.

During this stage, it is critical to make sure the right people are at the table, across all sectors and interest groups, and working smoothly towards the goal. Clear decision processes and a sense of mutual accountability are two critical pieces to make sure the group is aligned. Effective collaboratives can differ on the decision-making processes they use, varying from highly formal (with MOUs and bylaws) to largely informal, where Collaborative work is difficult and lengthy, usually requiring at least three to five years of committed effort to see results. This length of investment combined with needle-moving aspirations make mutual accountability all the more important, given that collaboratives’ formation are based on the belief that all members are necessary to achieve success. Though accountability will look different depending on the collaborative’s structure, two key things can promote mutual accountability: 1) choose metrics that correspond to the collaborative’s performance rather than to partners’ individual outcomes; 2) provide leadership opportunities (e.g., subcommittee chairs) in order to create a sense of ownership on behalf of partners.

This group should include a funder that is committed to supporting the collaborative in the early years. While one source of funding may have been sufficient to sustain the collaborative during this “Plan” stage, going forward, members will need to develop a sustainable funding strategy to cover the cost of the staff managing the collaborative. The collaborative also needs to make sure there are funds available for their partners’ work on the problem(s) they are trying to address. Please refer to the “Capacity and Structure” document for examples of how collaboratives have obtained sufficient funding to implement their vision.

During this stage, a concrete action plan should be developed, one that specifies the measurable outcomes the collaborative wants to achieve and the major interventions required to reach them. The roadmap breaks down each goal into actionable steps. It also provides guidance and timing for who will be accountable and when. This roadmap requires collaboratives to indicate how community resources, programs and systems will be aligned and the data metrics that match up with each desired outcome. Collaboratives should also continue to partner with future beneficiaries of this work to develop the roadmap.

As an example, underlying The Strive Partnership’s progress is its Student Roadmap to Success (<http://strivenetwork.org/vision-roadmap>) which was developed out of their “Plan” stage. The roadmap describes five life stages: early childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, transition from school or postsecondary training into a career. The map has critical checkpoints at each stage – and the indicators for tracking success all along the way. Using a common roadmap also allows The Strive Partnership’s networks to better align their community of efforts. The genesis of the roadmap served as a forcing function for the alignment of partners. Indeed, its development was a critical part of the process for creating a shared vision, along with an agenda for moving forward. Though critical, it was not easy to gain consensus. Core partners grappled with the research and Cincinnati’s data over several years before agreeing to this course of action. As in this case, data will often be necessary to bring shareholders into agreement concerning the vision and agenda of the collaborative.

When all of these elements are in place, the “Plan” stage comes to fruition with a campaign launch designed to rally the community around the efforts.

Key discussion questions for this stage

- 1) Do we have the right people at the table? Have we thought about what assets and perspectives each brings to the collaborative?
- 2) What exact change do we plan to see in five years? How will we measure our progress?
- 3) How will data be tracked and is there a data analyst or other resource available to support the collaborative in this regard?
- 4) What roles are needed to staff the collaborative? What resources are available to do this?

- 5) Do we have a funder(s) at the table willing to provide resources for the collaborative as it begins to implement its plans? What will it take to get funders on board?
- 6) Based on the assessment results, what are our collaborative's strengths and weaknesses? What steps do we need to take to address weaknesses?

Checklist of key tasks to complete

- Bring additional people to the table, as needed, and engage the community**
 - Determine what sectors need to be involved and approach relevant leaders identified in the “Develop the idea” stage (e.g., funders, business leaders, government agencies)
 - Proactively address any changes in community leadership
 - Review “Community Engagement Examples” and make sure the collaborative continues to invest in engaging with residents and youth (if applicable)

- Analyze and discuss the data around the problem**
 - Use data around the issue as a starting point to bring the collaborative to a common understanding and vision

- Finalize collaborative goals and build buy-in to the shared vision**
 - Ask the question: What are the few key goals for the community over the next five years regarding this issue? Examples include “changing dropout rates by XX% or increasing graduation rates by YY%”
 - Such goals will often be characterized by a desired ultimate outcome (e.g., increased graduation rates) and several intermediate goals (e.g., increased slots in alternative schools) that lead to the overall result
 - Determine the geographic boundaries of the goal or goals. Do they apply to the entire city, the metropolitan area, or a large neighborhood within the city (e.g., Manhattan in New York City)?
 - Get final agreement on the metrics that will be tracked
 - Analyze the data to understand your goals and create a plan for data collection and analysis moving forward. Please refer to the “Capacity and Structure” document for common uses of data and examples of how other collaborative have used data.
Create a clear leadership and governance process if not already established

- Develop a roadmap and create an action plan**
 - Devise a roadmap or logic model for what it will take to achieve the vision and targets. Please refer to “Zeroing in on Impact” for guidance on how to devise a roadmap or logic model.
 - Develop a clear action plan to create the various pathways required to achieve the goal and work to align the programs, interventions, resources and advocacy efforts around what works
 - Include milestones and metrics to help track success over the next phase; these should also measure organizational goals such as hiring X people in year 2
 - Clarify accountability for organizational goals

- Understand evidence-based practices**
 - Research existing evidence-based practices and interventions that have been proven to address the issue you are trying to solve
 - Determine if your community is currently using evidence-based practices where appropriate, and if you should shift towards those practices in any areas

- Get commitment or at least common agreement from participants on a timeline**
 - Ensure that participants are committed for the long-term

- Secure funding (or at least a committed private funder) for the next few years**
 - Consider if funds can be obtained from an existing organization, the government or other efforts—if not, work to secure new funds sufficient to cover the collaborative's required capacity. Please refer to the “Community Collaboratives Learning Examples: Capacity, Structure, Data and Funding” document for examples of how other collaboratives have raised funds.
 - Determine capacity required to manage the collaborative

- Secure the key staff required to support the work**
 - Repurpose or hire the first few staff members and start to define roles. Please refer to the “Capacity and Structure” document for guidance on hiring dedicated collaborative staff and examples of how other communities have staffed their collaboratives.

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- Start to build out the data effort for continuous improvement**
 - Determine what data needs to be collected or reviewed to understand your community's progress against your goal
 - Gather baseline data, where possible, to track your roadmap's key metrics
 - Alternatively, develop a plan for how to collect that data in the future
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- Revisit the "Community Collaborative Assessment"**
 - Review this document with particular attention to the "Plan & Align Resources" stage in order to track progress against the guidelines in this section
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- Develop a sustainability philosophy**
 - Consider long-term options for the collaborative (e.g. achieve goals and dissolve, reach milestones and transfer to existing provider)
 - Determine funding required to pursue the options considered
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- Launch a public campaign**
 - Develop a communications plan to guide how to build public interest and enthusiasm, and to manage perceptions
 - Organize a launch event to announce the collaborative and its partners; share the goals, the roadmap and the benchmark data
 - Develop related press materials detailing compelling data and local stories about the problem, as well as planned solutions and commitments from key leaders (e.g. the mayor or CEOs)
 - If you have created a research report during the "Develop the Idea" stage, consider publishing the report to both communicate the challenge, lay out the roadmap as a solution, and attract supporters and partners as a part of the public launch
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Potential roadblocks

Common roadblocks in the "Plan" stage involve failure to reach agreement on goals and missing representation. Here are some suggestions and resources for addressing each

Potential roadblock	Starter suggestions for addressing the roadblock	Resources (from inventory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We cannot agree on a final set of community goals (usually 1 to 5 goals) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorm a longer list first, and then return to the data to clarify which goals relate to the most pressing issues in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 42, "McKinsey Public-Private Partnerships"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are missing representatives from certain sectors at the table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key people representing the missing sector and have one-on-one conversations to understand people's interest • Start with those whom you have, and target interventions where you have the right participants at the table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 12, "NLC Stakeholder Engagement" • Source 13, "NLC Vital Partners" • Source 14, "NLC Violence Reduction Strategy" • Source 21, "Ready by 21 Leadership Council" • Source 27, "Ready by 21 Stakeholders Wheel"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are having challenges developing the roadmap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review case studies and examples of other communities' roadmaps • Solicit the help of technical assistance providers and facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 2, "Mobile Blueprint" • Source 68, "Living Cities Collaborative Logic"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not have the funding and/or the capacity to build data systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to public data may be enough; evaluate if you need to build out full systems • If so, see if you can share data systems with schools or 	

	other organizations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are having trouble getting data to assess the starting point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify proxy data, even if it does not exactly align with your goals Develop a plan for future data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Source 64, "Keystone Feedback Surveys" Source 67, "Keystone Constituency Voice"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders have not committed for the long-term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a key stakeholder who is committed for the long-term Use that advocate to set an example 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Source 63, "Keystone Constituent Mapping" Source 66, "AccountAbility Stakeholder Engagement"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We find it difficult to determine how to formally organize our collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review case studies on how other collaboratives were structured Discuss the pros and cons of the various options as a group to determine the structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Source 53, "NFVP Plan" Source 68, "Living Cities Collaborative Logic"

Align Resources stage (1-3 years)

The “Align Resources” stage is where the rubber meets the road and, ideally, the collaborative starts to yield early results against the goals laid out in the roadmap. Indeed, it is during this stage that collaboratives start to build momentum.

But staying on course entails making constant adjustments and improvements as the collaborative collects data and learns more about what works and what does not work in the community. These bends and twists in the road require that the collaborative’s stakeholders meet at least monthly to make decisions based on where the tracked data is leading them.

In some instances, new programs may be required. However, for most collaboratives, this stage is more about improving the alignment of existing programs and resources. This steering activity continues as the collaborative develops, receives feedback through new data, and manages its continuous-improvement processes. Done right, this iterative phase will begin to improve the effectiveness of a community’s existing programs and resources.

As the work progresses, it is a good idea to highlight early “wins” to maintain community support and excitement. Likewise, publicly recognizing participating organizations and their programs helps build cohesion.

Chicago’s Pathway to Success exemplified the “Align Resources” stage. Data has determined Pathway to Success’ strategy since the question was asked: Who is at-risk of not graduating? CPS initially relied on its partnership with the Chicago Consortium on School Research (CCSR) and later The Parthenon Group to profile the at-risk student and determine which interventions were successful in improving graduation rates. Pathways to Success then worked to move the community towards programs that have demonstrated success in helping students graduate. For example, consulting firm Parthenon found that sixteen year-old first-time freshmen who attended Achievement Academies, the two-year schools for over-age students who have not met promotion criteria for high school admission, were almost twice as likely to graduate as their peers. As a result, Pathways to Success is looking to expand the academies to a four year program. If successful, CPS can then roll out an intervention to other district schools and partners.

Finally, it is important to build longevity into the collaborative so that it can weather changes in leadership both inside and outside the collaborative. Because the issues addressed are complex, many collaboratives will outlive the tenure of any single mayor, CEO, or ED. Successful collaboratives embed their strategies and roadmap throughout the systems in which they work, so that a change in any given leader does not halt progress. Building strong consensus around the roadmap or logic model—both internally and with key groups external to the collaborative—creates strong momentum that can carry new leaders with it. It may also be wise to brief all the major candidates for elective office to be sure each one understands the issue, the roadmap, and has a chance to voice any concerns prior to taking office.

Key discussion questions for this stage

- 1) What will it take to align our community’s efforts with the roadmap? What are potential barriers? How will we overcome those barriers?
- 2) What is the data telling us about the work of the collaborative? Are we on track? Are metrics moving in the right direction? How can we improve?
 - a. Are we starting to see early changes in our community, due to the work in the above stage (this assessment may be qualitative at this point)?
- 3) Do we have long-term financial commitments? If not, how will we fund this in the next few years?

Checklist of key tasks to complete

- Execute the action plan by aligning existing programs in the community against the roadmap and creating new programs if necessary**
 - Schedule regular meetings with relevant stakeholders (form sub-committees if the collaborative is focused on multiple goals)
 - Create new programs as necessary and Realign elements of your collaborative as needed,

as you start to execute against the roadmap

- Advocate for or enact policy change in the community to change systems**
 - Develop a policy agenda/plan, in the event that you will need to influence other groups or organizations in your community to change policies
 - Include policymakers in your community to help influence the flow of resources to what works

- Test, refine, course-correct along the way**
 - Begin to collect and review relevant data points; determine what additional data points will be needed
 - Meet regularly to maintain focus on what is working, while quickly modifying what is not working, based on data and findings

Continue to proactively address any community leadership changes and to ensure the leadership group has all necessary stakeholders at the table

- Develop characteristics of success**
 - Ensure the **vision and agenda** are evolving as your collaborative learns
 - Make sure **leadership and governance** structures are clear to everyone and effective
 - Grow **dedicated capacity and the structure** as the collaborative's work expands
 - Make sure your **resources** are adequate for the size and goal of the collaborative (and continuing to grow, if necessary). Please refer to the "Framework for Community Collaborative Introduction" for more detail on these characteristics.

- Highlight early successes; give credit strategically to bolster the collaborative**
 - Determine how to share credit with specific organizations and when it should be given to the collaborative as a whole
 - Develop an accompanying communications plan and build in regular opportunities to celebrate the success of your work with the public

- Ensure your collaborative's culture is in place and being cultivated**
 - Test to see if: participants are working together offline, personal relationships have been formed, institutional agendas have melted away and people are acting for the common good. Please refer to the "Capacity and Structure" document for more information on creating a collaborative culture that will promote success.

Potential roadblocks

Common roadblocks on the way to proper alignment and execution typically involve trouble aligning your community's work or challenges tracking the data. Here are some suggestions and resources for addressing them:

Potential roadblock	Starter suggestions for addressing the roadblock	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are having trouble aligning programs, systems or resources to our collaborative's vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you have the right people at the table (people with detailed knowledge and people who have decision-making authority) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 25, "Ready by 21 Leadership Update"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We still do not have data to measure and track our progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that your data collection plan is feasible and simple enough to execute • Solicit the help of technical assistance providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 8, "NLC Evaluation Recommendations" • Source 20, "Ready by 21 Data Coordination" • Source 25, "Ready by 21 Leadership Update"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are concerned by data privacy constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the guide to data privacy; solicit help from university researchers in your community • Determine if you need individual student data or if you can use publically 	

available aggregated data sources

- Leverage stakeholders' data sources.
- For example, have the school district or city representatives provide data or report trends

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- Some stakeholders still do not agree with the shared vision

- Reevaluate whether you have the right stakeholders in place
- Go back to visioning if necessary

- Source 42, "McKinsey Public-Private Partnerships"
- Source 66, "AccountAbility Stakeholder Engagement"
- Source 67, "Keystone Constituency Voice"
- Source 73, "America Speaks Unified New Orleans"

Reflect and Adapt stage (ongoing, starting after “Align Resources”)

The “Reflect and Adapt” stage kicks in after the launch and maintains a rigorous focus on improving the collaborative’s evolving work. By this point, a collaborative typically has gathered and analyzed significant amounts of data. Many successes have taken place, along with the discovery of significant challenges. Given their track records, collaboratives often make one of two choices at this point: They either expand to better reach their goals, or they become even more intensely focused on a specific community problem.

During this stage, collaboratives also must confront the issue of long-term sustainability. What will happen to the collaborative in five to 10 years? What will be its legacy? Collaboratives must therefore begin to consider whether elements of their work can be spun off or institutionalized within other parts of the community. For example, with working models now in place, should collaboratives move their operations to schools or to nonprofits? These are questions of not only scope and scale but of mission. And they must be answered amid continually changing political and funding landscapes.

Yet some things remain constant. The need to celebrate successes continues to be crucial, as does the necessity of regularly reporting data results to the community. And as collaboratives successfully morph in response to changing needs, they usually find that community residents, parents and youth become ever more active in shaping their daily decisions and future direction.

Project U-Turn, which is now more than six years into its work, is now at the “Reflect and Adapt” stage. Several key participants from the early steering committee have transitioned to new roles and been replaced on the committee. At the same time, the group has chalked up impressive policy wins, nearly doubling the number of slots available in alternative high schools. In the current era of fiscal austerity, much of the collaborative’s work has shifted to protecting these gains and defining the next steps to further improve graduation rates. Many of the most senior participants, who had stepped back from the collaborative to let deputies push things forward, are now re-engaging to set the agenda for the next few years.

Key discussion questions for this stage

- 1) Are we starting to move the needle, i.e., see more significant changes in our data?
- 2) What is our five- to 10-year vision for this collaborative, particularly in our community context?
- 3) How do we manage our collaborative to maintain influence through turnover in participants, changes in political administrations and changing cultural trends?
- 4) Are we using data effectively to understand our progress, determine the appropriate adjustments and improve our collaborative?

Checklist of key tasks to complete

- Continue to coordinate efforts and track data**
 - Maintain the active tracking of data and report back to collaborative planners and the community
 - Continue to hold stakeholder meetings to execute against the roadmap
 - Make system adjustments to ensure that the collaborative’s impact is permanent

- Complete the continuous improvement loop between data and programming**
 - Use data actively to inform programming and to make major decisions about the collaborative’s path forward
 - Maintain accountability for reaching goals by continuously monitoring the data
 - Make modifications and changes as needed, depending on the results of the data

- Continue to proceed with the roadmap and adjust the roadmap as collaborative members have a better sense of what works**
 - Be ready, for example, to expand or narrow the collaborative’s focus to ensure that it is effectively addressing its goals

- Develop a long-term plan, specifically around sustainability**
 - Determine the required long-term programmatic elements of the collaborative, as well as its organization, infrastructure and financial-support needs
 - Decide whether the collaborative should “put itself out of business” by having its efforts appropriately institutionalized

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- **Ensure the community is still actively engaged in formal and informal ways**
 - Study examples of community engagement, specifically those described in “The Next Generation of Community Participation” document
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Potential roadblocks

Roadblocks typical to the Reflect and Adapt stage revolve around maintaining progress and addressing long-term sustainability. Here are some suggestions and resources for addressing them.

Potential roadblock	Starter suggestions for addressing the roadblock	Resources (from inventory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have become uninterested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you continue to celebrate successes to show the progress you are making towards your goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 42, “McKinsey Public-Private Partnerships” • Source 65, “Keystone Formal Dialogues” • Source 66, “Account Ability Stakeholder Engagement”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The needle is not moving as fast as expected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin your diagnosis of what is holding you back by determining if you have the right interventions, systems and resources in place in the community 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are having trouble completing the feedback loop and using data to improve the collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a feedback-loop mentality into your meeting agenda and think of ways to hold individual groups accountable • Be sure your collaborative is ready to actually act on the data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 8, “NLC Evaluation Recommendations” • Source 9, “NLC Municipal Action Guide” • Source 16, “NLC City Leadership” • Source 20, “Ready by 21 Data Coordination” • Source 64, “Keystone Feedback Surveys” • Source 65, “Keystone Formal Dialogues”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our fundraising plan is for the very short-term, but long-term sustainability is an issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on building the right team of funders for your collaborative • Start with one long-term funder and build from that catalyst 	

Decide Next Steps stage (after 4-6+ years)

It has been a long haul, but this is the stage at which the fruits of collaborative work are starting to show: You are making measurable strides toward your goals and congratulations are in order. Yet after a collaborative has been in operation for a significant period (of from four to six or more years), this is also the time to assess the ultimate success of the collaborative and determine a path forward.

Times change and the community may have too. Indeed, over the years, new external political conditions, new opportunities or even new challenges may have emerged. Now is the time for a collaborative to evaluate its role within today's context. As they take stock, many collaboratives face three options: whether to seek new ways to become more effective, whether to address other challenges or opportunities, or whether to end on a high note.

The variations on such future roles are numerous. For example, a collaborative might decide to:

- Maintain its current structure and role, as long as it can continue to have significant impact
- Utilize its structure, but change its mission to address new goals
- Institutionalize the gains made by embedding them within a public agency – such as a school or a health department – and transition out of existence

Celebrations become most poignant in the last instance, but it remains critical to regularly mark successes and thank those involved no matter what the future holds.

Milwaukee's Teen Pregnancy Reduction Initiative is now working to decide its next steps, having reduced births to teen girls by roughly 30% over the last five years. The oversight committee of the initiative believes the data will continue to improve as positive messages are reinforced both in schools and in out-of-school programs for kids before they become teens. United Way of Greater Milwaukee will maintain its support of the collaborative, but having shown its unique ability to convene and staff effective collaboratives, it is now launching a related initiative to reduce infant mortality.

Key discussion questions for this stage

- 1) Have we achieved our goal? Is there more progress that could be made?
- 2) Will the gains be maintained if the collaborative were to disappear tomorrow?
- 3) If we decide to end operations, what is the best way to communicate this and thank the community and stakeholders who were involved?

Checklist of key tasks to complete

- Assess your progress to-date**
 - Determine if the interventions are working and if you have achieved your goals
 - If unsure, discuss if you are on track and how you should proceed
 - If you have achieved your goals, decide on a path forward (options include continuing, adapting to a new form or focus, or ending well)**
 - Determine how to proceed over the next three to five years
 - List the pros and cons of each option, including how and who it will impact in your community
 - Formally create a roadmap forward based on your discussion of the options
 - Ensure that institutionalized efforts are being supported**
 - Ensure that your efforts will live on in existing institutions (such as school districts, government agencies and nonprofits), in terms of funding, public support and continuing impact
 - Work to transfer the knowledge and processes that made the collaborative successful to the new host organization
 - If ending, make sure to acknowledge successes**
 - Recognize the successes of the collaborative publically
 - Honor the community and stakeholders who led the effort
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Potential roadblocks

Taking stock can result in the following list of roadblocks. Here are some suggestions and resources for addressing them.

Potential roadblock	Starter suggestions for addressing the roadblock	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">We do not know if we are in this stage yet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This stage should only be considered if you have achieved major data milestones against your goals, or if you believe that your collaborative has been ineffectiveAsk yourself: “Is there more work we can be doing to really complete the collaborative process on our issue?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Source 43, “Charting Impact”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Our collaborative cannot agree on the path forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Determine if multiple, viable paths forward really existIf so, decide if your stakeholders can take any of these different pathsIf not, have members of the collaborative make the case for different paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Source 42, “McKinsey Public-Private Partnerships”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Our efforts have not been institutionalized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Make sure you still have the right institutional players and decision-makers at the table	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Source 21, “Ready by 21 Goals for Youth”

Resources

Organization	Topics	Website
AccountAbility	Stakeholder engagement	http://www.accountability.org/standards/aa1000ses/index.html
America Speaks	Community engagement	http://americaspeaks.org/resources/publications/
America's Promise Alliance	Knowledge center, general resources for education-focused efforts	http://www.americaspromise.org/Resources.aspx
Charting Impact	Setting goals	http://www.chartingimpact.org/complete-your-report/
Coalition for Community Schools	Range of resources for launching and sustaining community schools	http://www.communityschools.org/resources/howto.aspx
Collaboration Handbook	General guidance	http://www.amazon.com/Collaboration-Handbook-Creating-Sustaining-Enjoying/dp/0940069032
Findyouth.gov Collaboration Center	Case studies, general guidance	http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/collaboration.shtml
Grad Nation Resources	Parent engagement, research reports (i.e., dropout crisis)	http://www.americaspromise.org/our-work/Grad-Nation/Additional-Resources.aspx
Harwood Institute	Community engagement	http://www.theharwoodinstitute.org/index.php?ht=a/StartToolExerciseAction/d/StartToolExercises/tool_id/12352/project_id/12351
IDEO Human-Centered Design Toolkit	Support for collaboratives focused on educational goals	http://www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/
Institute for Educational Leadership	Support for collaboratives on community engagement	http://www.iel.org/publications/index.html
Keystone	Community engagement	http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/resources
Mobile Area Education Foundation	Sample documents about the foundation's efforts	http://maef.net/Resources/Documents/tabid/708/Default.aspx
National League of Cities: Institute for Youth and Families	Range of resources for youth and education initiatives (case studies, tools, strategy guides, research)	http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/iyef/yef-institute-publications
Philadelphia Youth Network	Research reports, policy briefs on youth-related topics	http://www.pyninc.org/resourcecenter/index.php
The Forum for Youth Investment	Case studies, general guidance	http://www.forumfyi.org/pubs
The Strive Partnership	Range of resources for continuous improvement, general guidance	http://www.strivetogether.org/education-results-resource/