

Community Collaboratives Learning Examples Capacity, Structure, Data and Funding

Introduction

One of the defining characteristics of collaboratives that really get things done is dedicated capacity. In conversations with leaders of “needle-moving” collaboratives, we have learned that this capacity – and the structure it supports – is often what differentiates the most effective efforts from other forms of collaboration. The purpose of this guide is to provide guidance and examples around how to structure and staff your collaborative. In this guide, we address several key aspects of how to organize a collaborative that we believe lead to success:

- Structure: The organization, governing body and the decision-making rules of the collaborative
- Dedicated capacity: The roles that support the collaborative day-to-day
- Culture: The norms that drive a collaborative to success

With regards to organizing the collaborative, we also recognize the importance of community participation and have provided a separate guide on this topic. Please refer to <The Next Generation of Community Participation> document for this separate guide. We also share thoughts on two other elements of collaborative organization, which are critical to success:

- Data and continuous learning: How to use data to improve and make decisions
- Funding: Profiles of how collaboratives are funded

Additionally, we have provided lists of resources in the guide’s appendices and have two other documents that can aid in the process of establishing your collaborative:

- Building or Improving a Community Collaborative – Guidance by Life Cycle Stage”: Describes the five stages of a collaborative’s life, including: including case studies, a checklist of key activities, and common roadblocks for each stage (please refer to [Building or Improving a Community Collaborative](#))
- Community Collaborative Assessment – A Diagnostic of Success Readiness: An assessment that gauges your collaborative’s readiness to implement your plan in the community (please refer to [Assessment](#))

This guide is tailored 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?

Starting with the same kind of will and planning, other collaboratives have been able to build the capacity, structure and continuous learning systems to achieve success. We encourage you to identify with the examples below, not compare yourself against them. This document will provide you with thoughts to help you learn from them.

Examples of Collaborative Structures

Our best practices grow from the experiences of three community collaboratives that have made remarkable progress: Nashville's efforts around youth and education, Project U-Turn of Philadelphia and The Partnership in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

1) *Structure or organization of the collaborative*

Let's look more deeply at the terms above. Structure encompasses how collaboratives are organized to address their goals. How they come together is important. Typically, a lead convener, which is an organization or individual, pulls the collaborative together and organizes it. This entity may also be known as the "anchor organization." Its role is central in every way. First off, the lead convener must have the trust and respect of the community. Almost always, this requires an organization with the clout to bring cross-sector leaders together and inspire them to stay engaged. The leader of this organization must command great respect, as well as be seen as having no political aims or ax to grind beyond having a positive impact on the issue at hand. This neutrality is absolutely necessary to ensure that the effort moves forward based on the data, not on any preconceived agenda. We have seen local United Ways, business leaders, university presidents, philanthropists, intermediaries and others play this role. City officials, including mayors, superintendents, and police chiefs often play an important supporting role.

Once formed, the collaborative is led by a steering or oversight committee made up of a core group of participants. In the beginning, the steering committee meetings must be held regularly and often (typically monthly). Who leads this committee? It may be the head of the convening organization, supported by his or her own staff. Sometimes, the steering committee may appoint a chairperson with staff support coming from another participating organization.

There is a range of formality in the collaboratives researched, but many trend towards the informal when it comes to decision-making. Instead, they rely on a strong culture of trust and mutual accountability among participants. Having aligned initially around a common vision and roadmap, formal decision rules become less necessary for the collaborative. In the case of Milwaukee's collaborative related to teen pregnancy, the oversight committee co-chairs have veto power over any new public awareness ads. But otherwise the collaborative operates without bylaws or formalized roles.

Subcommittees usually also form to focus on specific pathways to the broader goal or to tackle short-term efforts such as overseeing a research project. For example, if a community collaborative is addressing graduation rates, this might elicit the creation of one subcommittee focused on new alternative high schools and another working to improve students' transition from middle to high school. They typically meet more often than the steering committee. This kind of needs-based committee structure is common across the collaboratives we researched.

Examples of collaborative structures:

	Description
Nashville	<p><u>Alignment Nashville:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Operating board:</i> Alignment's Operating Board is composed of the chair and vice-chair of each committee. The board provides oversight, collaboration and accountability for the committees.• <i>Committees:</i> The collaborative developed a sophisticated committee structure to ensure its partners have a meaningful role. Each of the 22 committees meets monthly and has a chair and vice chair. Specific guidelines exist for committee membership and most have between 10 to 20 members. <p><u>Child and Youth Master Plan (CYMP):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Task force:</i> More than 50 Nashville community leaders participate, and they are divided among subcommittees focused on pieces of the plan.

Project U-Turn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Steering committee:</i> The committee started with 12 members and now has 20. It includes youth advocates, representatives of the mayor, schools, nonprofits and funders. The steering committee sets the strategy and agrees annually on a workplan for collective action. • <i>Broader partnership:</i> Other partners (roughly 40) are formally part of Project U-Turn, but participate on an as-needed basis in various committees and working teams.
The Strive Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Executive committee:</i> A 30 member executive committee meets quarterly to oversee the collaborative's work and provide recommendations on the general direction of the effort. • <i>Strategy teams:</i> The Executive Committee has formed 5 strategy teams (subcommittees) organized around the collaborative's priority areas. • <i>Collaboratives:</i> Strive's collaboratives are networks of providers and school officials ("networks") that are focused on specific goals. They recommend, then implement and track the interventions along Strive's roadmap to success. They also receive support from Strive's staff around facilitation, data and measurement, communications and grantwriting until they reach sustainability.

Variations in structure

While the above structures are most common, there are exceptions. One important variation on the structure outlined above is the "hub-and-spoke" structure. In the East Lake neighborhood of Atlanta, the East Lake Foundation acts as a hub for the collaborative, operating bilaterally with individual partner organizations. The full set of partners does not meet together. As the primary funder, the East Lake Foundation selects and recruits each partner, coordinates their efforts, and ensures integration of programs across all providers. This structure can offer advantages in simpler governance and centralized resources.

2) *Dedicated capacity*

Dedicated capacity translates into staff that support the day-to-day work of the collaborative and help move the agenda forward. The extent of this capacity ranges from two people to more than seven in the collaboratives researched for this project. In many cases, this capacity exists within a single organization, but it can also be shared across organizations. The roles generally required are:

- *Leader and Convener:* Brings key leaders to the collaborative and moves the group towards a cohesive, collective strategic direction
- *Director and Facilitator:* Manages the day-to-day work to support the community collaborative; accountable for getting things done between meetings. Guides the collaborative's meetings, with a specific eye towards moving the group to consensus and action.
 - This person often has deep skills related to strategic planning, process improvement and/or stakeholder management
- *Data analyst:* Supports continuous learning on the technical side by aggregating and analyzing data, finding trends and reporting back to groups. Rather than build this capacity, some collaboratives partner with researchers or an outside firm to play this role.
- *Policy analyst:* Monitors policy news and changes relevant to the collaborative's work, reports back to the collaborative on policy wins and obstacles, and helps determine opportunities for the collaborative to have influence on policy decisions
- *Administrative support:* Coordinates all meetings across the collaborative, ensuring that the groups are on track and committee meetings are run consistently

- *Communications lead / Development director*: Manages external communications to maximize the impact of the collaborative's work; ensures that the collaborative speaks as one entity when appropriate, coordinates with partners to ensure that their independent communications are aligned with the collaborative's agenda and maintains and develops relationships with funders

In smaller collaboratives, one individual may fill many positions. Ultimately, the number depends on the breadth of the issues, complexity of the collaborative's structure and available funding.

	Description	Overall size
Nashville	<p>Alignment Nashville:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Core staff</i>: Seven staff support the committees, including an executive director, associate executive director, associate director, program manager, collaborative coordinator, grants developer and office manager. <p>Child and Youth Master Plan (CYMP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Project lead</i>: A seasoned manager with extensive experience in corporate planning and project management headed the project. • <i>Consultant</i>: Provided by a collaborative intermediary, this staff member helped support the process. • <i>Volunteers</i>: Provided by the Mayor's Office, these are college interns who add capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment: 7 FTE • CYMP: 2 FTE and volunteers
Project U-Turn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lead VP</i>: Acts as lead convener and manages the daily operations. She creates agendas, facilitates the steering committee, pushes the work ahead between meetings, and maintains relationships within the broader partner group. She also maintains the steering committee's work plan, which allows partners to respond quickly to opportunities. • <i>Data analyst</i>: One data analyst works within the school district, responding to the steering committee's data requests with research reports and evaluations on school-based efforts. • <i>Policy analyst</i>: A policy analyst works within the Mayor's Office, monitoring policy advancements and reporting to subcommittees on policy wins and obstacles. • <i>Ad hoc support</i>: The Lead VP 'steals time' from other Philadelphia Youth Network administrators and communications staff as needed to support Project U-Turn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 FTE
The Strive Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Executive Director</i>: Oversees the work of the collaborative and works with the Executive Committee's strategy teams to develop plans around the collaborative's priorities. • <i>Program directors</i>: This includes a Director of Community Partnerships, who works on community engagement initiatives and supports the network of collaboratives, and a Director of School Support, who aligns out-of-school programs with school district efforts. • <i>Data director</i>: The Director of Continuous Improvement oversees the production of the progress report card and ongoing data reporting and analysis work, and helps collaboratives determine how to use the data. • <i>Additional support</i>: This includes a Team Coordinator, who supports other staff members, and a Strive Partnership Fellow, who works on various projects for the collaborative. • <i>Coaches</i>: Part-time coaches support the networks of collaboratives in the form of facilitation, data analysis, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6+ FTE

communications.

- *Gov't affairs*: A contracted government affairs consultant helps the strategy team focus on policy and advocacy as-needed.

3) Culture of the collaborative

Culture is the secret sauce of every successful community collaborative—it is difficult to define, difficult to develop, and yet one of the most powerful enablers of high impact. No two cultures are alike, but collaboratives that *do* move the needle on social issues display at least three similar traits. They revolve around what might be categorized as trust, modesty and maturity.

First, successful collaboratives develop deep relationships and trust among partners. This is the oil that makes the machinery of collaboration work. As one lead staffer said of the local health commissioner – who is also the co-chair of her oversight committee: “We know each other well. I can, and do, call him at home when I need to.” Helping to build these authentic relationships are both the goodwill that participants bring to the effort and the very process of grappling with data and research to unlock a solution to the issue. Having established strong relationships, ongoing communication between partners is critical to maintain trust.

Second, the lead conveners of successful collaboratives generally place partners and the collaborative out front for publicity and credit. Though some lead conveners may operate in the foreground, sharing credit helps create a sense of cohesion and mutual value among partners. Project U-Turn’s Jenny Bogoni expresses the value of sharing credit this way: “It’s better if PYN [Philadelphia Youth Network] is in the background, and partners are in the foreground getting credit for what they are doing. The partners own this campaign, not PYN.”

Lastly, in needle-moving collaboratives, participants willingly suppress their institutional or individual agendas in support of the collective good. One hallmark of a mature collaborative is that partners take a coordinated approach to funding. With money and jobs potentially at stake, this is a true test of trust. Participating organizations may write a joint application, the group might jointly agree on which organization should apply for the funding, or the lead convener may apply for funding with the intent of subcontracting portions of the funding to partner organizations. In Milwaukee, one subcommittee is a “funders’ collaborative.” It makes joint grants to support projects that United Way cannot fund. This absence of competition is a symptom of both a strong culture and a collective endorsement of the collaborative’s roadmap.

Data and Continuous Learning Examples

Using data to set priorities, drive the collaborative process, and make decisions are key characteristics that needle-moving collaboratives share. Data is often used to:

- 1) Understand the problem or issues that a collaborative is trying to address
- 2) Gain alignment around what the data is saying
- 3) Make specific decisions about the collaborative's agenda and roadmap
- 4) Learn about what is working and not working
- 5) Track the progress against community-wide goals, using relevant metrics
- 6) Publicly highlight successes to increase community and stakeholder backing
- 7) Attract funding by showing progress

Successful collaboratives routinely use data to align resources behind what is shown to work. Collaboratives may compile data from existing sources or do their own data collection. Either way, though, it must be relevant, up to date and accurate. It is, after all, the raw material for decision-making. Collaboratives may build and operate their own data-collection systems, or they may rely on partners such as school districts or health departments. In its forms, it can be as simple as an Excel spreadsheet – which tracks progress over time – or as complex as shared data systems that allow schools, service providers and other parties to jointly report on their work with an individual. Below, we highlight how some communities have utilized data in this way.

Operation Ceasefire:

Direction-setting use of data: Boston's Operation Ceasefire undertook a rigorous "problem-oriented" approach to attack the issue of gun-related youth violence in that city. This strategy required extensive research and analysis to shape both the definition of the problem and resulting actions. For example, the working team originally classified the problem in Boston as one of "juvenile gun violence." But after in-depth research on gang-related violence in Boston, the working group discovered that the majority of the youth violence offenders came from a small community of 1,300 chronic offenders involved in Boston-area gangs. Only 1% of Boston youth actually participated in youth gangs. Yet these youth generated at least 60% of youth homicide in the city. This data helped refine the group's broad focus on "juvenile gun violence" to a more actionable focus on "chronic gang offenders." Please refer to the [Case Studies of Effective Collaboratives](#): Boston Narrative for a more complete story of the Operation Ceasefire collaborative.

The Strive Partnership:

Data-informed decision making: Data is at the core of Cincinnati's and Northern Kentucky's Strive Partnership process and is one of the key reasons for the success of this collaborative devoted to higher high school graduation rates and upward mobility for the area's youth. From the beginning, data informed The Strive Partnership's strategy and shaped its operations. Each of the collaborative "networks" that make up The Strive Partnership has made a significant commitment to data collection. They collectively discuss what the data reveal and employ it for continuous improvement. Early in its history, Strive identified core metrics as mileposts for its roadmap, but the collaborative "networks" are responsible for guiding the continuous improvement process. Strive regularly reports out its progress against those metrics to the community. Then, it uses that data to make decisions about how to organize community interventions or where to focus resources. Currently, Strive is working with partners to create advanced data systems, most notably a common Learning Partner Dashboard. The Dashboard will include shared data about each student in order to make targeted interventions possible. Please refer to the [Case Studies of Effective Collaboratives](#): Cincinnati, Covington, Newport Narrative for a more complete story of The Strive Partnership.

Funding Examples

Funding is a major barrier to creating community collaboratives that drive impact. Dedicated capacity for the collaborative requires flexible, patient funding sources that understand the long-term strategy of the collaborative. It is also often helpful for collaboratives to have a diverse base of funding sources that include both public and private investments. In addition to seeking grants to fund dedicated capacity, collaboratives may be able to obtain critical capacity via donated staff time from collaborative participants. The examples below highlight the broad range of funding sources used by successful collaboratives.

East Lake:

Resources to attract more resources: The East Lake Foundation provided the funding and personnel necessary for the initial two-year planning phase, which culminated in the replacement of the public housing project with a mixed-income development. Costs of demolition and construction were split between the Foundation and the Atlanta Housing Authority. With three of its seven non-programming staff members dedicated to fundraising and a fourth focused on marketing and communication, the East Lake Foundation is able to attract resources in a diversified, sustainable manner from a variety of major partners. These contributors include the Coca-Cola Company, supermarket chain Publix, Georgia State University, Atlanta Public Schools and the Atlanta Housing Authority. The Foundation's dedicated fundraising team, combined with a patient long-term approach to investments and a commitment to tracking and publicizing progress on neighborhood metrics, attracts additional funds from local public and private funders and directly contributes to the sustainability of the collaborative's efforts. Please refer to the [Case Studies of Effective Collaboratives](#): Atlanta Narrative for a more complete story of the East Lake collaborative.

Project U-Turn:

Anchor funders: The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) began in 1999 as the intermediary convening the local Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Council to oversee youth-related WIA dollars. This administrative and political base allowed PYN to found Project U-Turn through a 2004 grant from the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) as one of five demonstration sites addressing dropout rates through community collaboratives. The YTFG grant led to many other good things. It not only provided \$275,000 annually for two years, it also came with support from the national intermediary Jobs For the Future, and access to collaboratives doing similar work in four other cities. The William Penn Foundation, a member of YTFG based locally in Philadelphia, also committed \$600,000 for the first two years. William Penn correctly saw that the issue required a long-term commitment of flexible funding and has continued to provide significant funding through three subsequent grants. While its funding requires PYN to reapply every 2 years, the foundation clearly understands the 10-year arc of such work. Their dual role as both funder and steering committee participant has been key to Project U-Turn's success. To supplement grants from William Penn and ensure their partners have adequate resources, PYN also applies for implementation funding on behalf of the collaborative and then re-grants the funds to various partners. Please refer to the Case Studies of Effective [Collaboratives](#): Philadelphia [Narrative](#) for a more complete story of the Project U-Turn collaborative.

The Strive Partnership:

Foundation of funders provides stability: A trio of Cincinnati funders – KnowledgeWorks, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and United Way of Greater Cincinnati – further helped the group's efforts by helping guide funding towards strategies and programmatic efforts recommended by the collaborative. KnowledgeWorks has continued to fund The Strive Partnership's dedicated staff through contributions of \$500,000 per year. Strive has also received commitments from two other foundations that will provide funds primarily to their partners, ensuring that they are capable of continuing their high-quality services. Despite two changes in school district superintendents and changes in the leadership of the committees, The Strive Partnership continues to function effectively and to build momentum. Please refer to the [Case Studies of Effective Collaboratives](#): Cincinnati, Covington, Newport Narrative for a more complete story of The Strive collaborative.

Appendix A: Resources on Capacity and Structure

Name of resource	What suggestions are highlighted?	Who is this tool for?
<Source 22, Ready by 21 Action Plan>	Steps for convening a strong group of stakeholders to execute a realistic plan	Collaboratives, particularly those with access to municipal officials
<Source 6, NLC Gang Violence Prevention>	Suggestions for securing sustainable streams of capacity funding	Collaboratives looking to a variety of funding sources
<Source 66, AccountAbility Stakeholder Engagement>	Steps for encouraging quality stakeholder engagement	Collaboratives determining who to bring to the table
<Source 23, Ready by 21 Leadership Council>	Thoughts on finding a neutral and respected lead convener	Collaboratives ready to choose a lead individual or “umbrella” organization to build capacity
<Source 27, Ready by 21 Stakeholders Wheel>	Tips and chart for assessing current capacity	Collaboratives that want to evaluate their current capacity and level of stakeholder engagement
<Source 15, NLC High School Alternatives>	Ideas for building local capacity through a mayor’s involvement	Collaboratives with access to government resources (financial and otherwise)
<Source 46, Ready by 21 Leadership Audit>	Steps for identifying gaps and potential in community leadership	Collaboratives that want to develop capacity within the community

Appendix B: Data and Continuous Learning Resources

Name of resource	What suggestions are highlighted?	Who is this tool for?
<Source 64, Keystone Feedback Surveys>	Reasoning and tips for using surveys to gather feedback	Collaboratives planning to gather quantitative and/or qualitative data from constituents
<Source 65, Keystone Formal Dialogue Processes>	Reasoning and tips for using thoughtful dialogue to gather feedback	Collaboratives planning to gather qualitative data from constituents
<Source 67, Keystone Constituency Voice>	Explains relationship cycle of community engagement	Collaboratives at any stage of the community engagement process
<Source 67, Keystone Constituency Voice>	Framework for assessing and implementing continuous improvement	Collaboratives interested in using constituency voice to generate continuous learning
<Source 20, Ready by 21 Data Coordination>	Suggestions for turning data into a driver for success	Collaboratives that want to promote continuous learning
<Source 8, NLC Evaluation Recommendations>	Principles to consider when evaluating a comprehensive initiative	Collaboratives at any stage of the evaluation process