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Essential Conditions for Advancing and Sustaining Cross-Sector Collaboration

A Reflection Guide for Child-, Youth-, and Family-Serving Agencies

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California Center for School Climate

Cross-Sector Collaboration: An Ecosystem Approach Toward a Shared Vision for Thriving Communities

Increasingly, child-, youth-, and family-serving agencies[1] across the nation are uniting behind a common vision to improve equitable access, experiences, and outcomes for young people, families, and communities. This vision is served by innovative models of cross-sector collaboration, with agencies from state to local levels joining efforts to align their services and thereby strengthen and expand their impact.

Cross-sector collaboration is a process in which two or more organizations or agencies from different sectors work together to *align* their efforts toward a shared, *coherent* purpose or vision. Alignment and coherence efforts may focus *internally*, *horizontally*, or *vertically* and are most effective when they are grounded in a continuous improvement approach, as the factors that influence young people, families, and their communities are always shifting.

The work toward cross-sector collaboration has never been more urgent. Over the past 5 years, young people, families, and their communities have had to navigate a global pandemic, an increasingly polarized society, intensified violence in their communities and across the world, a growing reckoning with racial and other kinds of social injustice, and a surge in the adolescent mental health crisis. In response, many child-, youth-, and family-serving agencies—including those in the education, health, mental health, social service, and workforce sectors—have invested greater resources in supporting systems improvement, including investments in cross-sector collaboration and participatory approaches to designing, implementing, and governing their efforts.

WORKING DEFINITIONS:

Alignment. Alignment refers to all policies, practices, processes, and roles in a system working together in similar or consistent ways.

Coherence. Coherence refers to integration and interconnection between the parts of the system in a way that mutually reinforces shared understanding and overall progress toward a clear vision and set of goals.

Internal Alignment and Coherence. An internal focus addresses alignment and coherence for departments and divisions within the same agency, often through strategic planning.

Vertical Alignment and Coherence. A vertical focus addresses alignment and coherence from state to local levels within the same sector, often addressed through comprehensive system improvement efforts.

Horizontal Alignment and Coherence. A horizontal focus addresses alignment and coherence across child- and youth-serving sectors at the same level of the system, often addressed through cross-sector collaboration or collective impact efforts.

Cross-Sector Collaboration. Cross-sector collaboration is a process in which two or more organizations or agencies from different sectors work together to *align* their efforts toward a shared, *coherent* purpose.

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1   In this guide, the terms "child-, youth-, and family-serving agencies" and "agencies" are used interchangeably and refer to any agency or organization that serves or advocates for children, youth, and families.

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As California moves toward a whole-person approach to serving children, youth, and families, state and local agencies are grappling with the conditions for effective cross-sector collaboration. In particular, the state's recent multibillion-dollar investments in community schools and children and youth behavioral health are compelling state and local agencies to work together across education, health, and other sectors. As these agencies collaborate with one another, their success will depend on the conditions that are in place to support their efforts.

The Focus of This Reflection Guide

This reflection guide aims to describe strategies for creating and sustaining seven essential conditions for effective cross-sector collaboration. Although the general concept of aligning efforts toward a coherent, shared vision may be clear, the implementation of cross-sector alignment, coherence, and collaboration is complex, particularly as agencies aim to collaborate across contextual differences. For example, partnering agencies may use different terms of art; may be guided by different funding incentives, policies, or accountability systems; and may offer dissimilar technical assistance to practitioners or services to communities. Organizing frameworks and programmatic approaches are also likely to differ across participating agencies. In addition to these technical dimensions, adaptive conditions—including mindsets, beliefs, relationships, and power dynamics—also influence effective collaboration. For example, influencing factors include the extent to which the individuals participating in the work and the team as a whole have a sense of agency to effect change; value the strengths and assets of a community; and are able to build trusting, collaborative relationships and navigate power dynamics such that the dynamics do not get in the way of effective collaboration.

The guide offers seven essential conditions for advancing and sustaining cross-sector collaboration. Although they are not the entire universe of relevant conditions, these seven conditions provide one way to conceptualize cross-sector collaboration:

1. Collaborative Leadership Capacity
2. Diverse and Inclusive Representation
3. Relational Trust
4. Collective Vision and Purpose
5. Clear Structures and Approaches to Teamwork
6. Continuous Improvement Routines and Infrastructure
7. Adequate Resources and Abundance Mindsets

This guide has the conditions numbered for ease of reference, but all are important and are interdependent. Further, although relational trust and continuous improvement are among the listed conditions, they are also considered fundamental to all the conditions.

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" Trust is not simply a component of collaboration—it is the essential building block on which it rests. Without trust, there is no room for partnership creation, and the conditions will falter to exert the exact opposite of optimal results. Grow trust among partners, and expect public confidence in your work.

Nora Zamora, Alameda County Office of Education

" Relationships lie at the heart of the work of community schools. ... The bedrock of effective collaboration is trust, and here at LACOE, we've been purposeful in prioritizing relationships.

Michelle Alferes, Los Angeles County Office of Education

Using the Reflection Guide

The reflection guide is designed to help child-, youth-, and family-serving agencies identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities in the design and implementation of their cross-sector collaboration efforts. The guide provides a high-level self-assessment for each cross-sector collaboration condition, which is defined by indicators of implementation. Work with your cross-sector team to review each indicator, and use the status ratings to select the degree to which the indicator is currently being implemented. The status ratings are defined as follows:

» Pending = Nothing has been developed or implemented yet.

» Emerging = Some areas of the indicator have been developed and are starting to be implemented.

» Implementing = The indicator is being fully implemented.

» Sustaining = The indicator is being fully implemented and is sustained.

The guide also offers a few tips and resources for how to begin or strengthen each condition.

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CONDITION 1
Collaborative Leadership Capacity

Leadership is fundamental to the ability of a group to work together toward a common goal. Leaders help set a vision, champion the work to build broad support, secure resources, and keep the bigger picture in mind as they provide guidance to the team on design, implementation, and continuous improvement. Leaders are also key to making strategic decisions along the way that can advance cross-sector initiatives, including decisions about resource allocation strategies, programmatic priorities, and partnerships. The most effective leaders of cross-sector collaborative efforts are guided by the vision of the work rather than their own priorities and are committed to addressing complex equity challenges. This means that they center the collaborative purpose, prioritize equity consciousness and action, value the wisdom of the team and the community they serve, communicate transparently, lean into discomfort, and adapt the collaborative approach when needed. In this way, leaders of cross-sector collaboration efforts have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for navigating the complexity of equity and other challenges, sustaining relational trust, and promoting effective collaboration across agencies and sectors.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
1.1 Leadership representation and influence. Each agency has a designated participant who has the positional authority to make shared decisions on the agency's behalf. Decisions are made collaboratively and effectively across agencies to help move the work along. Further, each team member participates consistently in cross-agency meetings and contributes to shared deliverables.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
1.2 Distributed leadership. Each team member (and their agency) has clear responsibilities for carrying out the work of the group. The work is delegated and balanced so that no one person or agency bears more than their share of responsibility for getting things done.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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Indicator	Status	Notes
1.3 Leadership as service. Leaders of the collaboration are guided by the vision and purpose of the work. They honor the experiences, expertise, and wisdom of the collaborative team and the community they serve. They take a facilitative approach to allow the right answer to emerge from interest holders rather than needing to be the smartest person in the room.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
1.4 Leadership for Equity in Complex Systems. Leaders of the collaboration demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for recognizing and addressing the complex landscape of equity and other challenges posed by complex systems, including maintaining equity consciousness, cultivating adaptability, navigating uncertainty, and promoting a culture of continuous learning (National Equity Project, 2019).	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
1.5 Collaboration competencies. Leaders of the collaboration demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for collaboration, including learning from multiple perspectives, fostering trust, managing conflict, aligning motivations and values, and building a sense of community among team members.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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THINGS TO TRY

Start here

» Cocreate a role description or set of expectations for agency leaders who will make decisions on behalf of participating agencies.

» Ask your team to reflect together on literature related to cross-sector leadership.

» Connect with your team members, their partnering organizations, and all your interest holders to learn about their hopes for the work, the strengths and talents they bring to the mission, the obstacles they have had to overcome, and their most urgent and important needs.

Go deeper

» Offer capacity-building workshops or peer learning sessions from a third-party provider on effective, equity-centered leadership and cross-agency collaboration.

» Ensure that you are continuously listening, especially when what is being shared makes you uncomfortable. Listen beyond what is being shared to discern the messages at the root of the information and why the information is being shared. Remember, too, that behavior is communication.

» Reflect with your team on *The Essential Skills of Cross Sector Leadership*.

» Reflect with your team on *Leadership in the Age of Complexity*.

> " We hear the term, "servant leadership" used quite a bit, but it is not as common to see in practice as it requires deep humility, flexibility, and the confidence to acknowledge what you don't know. Servant leadership starts with a strong vision and transparency and the ability to engage in empathetic listening, step outside yourself knowing we all have blind spots, and lead with the mentality that authentic feedback and input is not an option but a requirement for collective success. And if the leader's thinking is in conflict with what people are bringing to them, they must have the ability to be nimble and rethink because adapting is not an indictment of you as a human.
>
> **Melissa Spadin, San Diego County Office of Education**

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CONDITION 2
Diverse and Inclusive Representation

Ideally, the collaborating team includes representation from all interest holders: young people and their families, community leaders, and partners from a variety of mission-aligned organizations and agencies across systems and sectors. When teams reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, then the vision, approach, and outcomes of the collaboration are more likely to be relevant and equitable. Further, diverse and inclusive teams are better able to inspire and engage their own networks and communities to work toward the shared vision. Finally, the team culture should clearly convey that each team member is valued for their wisdom, insight, and experience.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
2.1 **Relevant representation.** Your cross-agency team represents the broad range of experiences and expertise relevant to the initiative and necessary to bring a full perspective to all deliberations. It includes young people, families, communities, and professionals from a broad variety of disciplines and professional affiliations.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
2.2 **Attention to power dynamics.** You have explored the role of power dynamics on the team and actively designed processes, protocols, and structures to ensure that all participants know that their insights and contributions are welcomed and valued in the work. Further, all team members are clear about their roles, influence, and decision-making authority.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
2.3 **Resourced participation.** Young people, families, community partners, and all other team members are equipped with everything they need to participate meaningfully and to share their wisdom, expertise, and experiences. Your team culture, processes, and resources are designed for inclusion and belonging and encourage everyone's participation and contributions.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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THINGS TO TRY

Start here

» Begin by reading an article on understanding why diverse and inclusive representation supports your work.

» Explore *Six Principles of Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement*.

» Explore this toolkit on understanding and improving belonging in your team, organization, or community.

Go deeper

» Reflect with your cross-agency team on the role of power dynamics in systems change efforts, and consider how you might attend to power dynamics throughout your collaboration.

» Reflect with your team by reading and discussing together this article on implicit bias and structural inequity.

" For our partners in Kern County, authentically engaging youth means first knowing what role you want them to play to avoid tokenism. Will it be collaborative, where young people and adults make decisions together? Will it be information gathering? Or will they have a real opportunity to lead?

For example, our homeless collaborative's Youth Action Board has their own projects and the chair sits on our collaborative's governing board to have a voice and a vote. For leadership to occur, you need professional advisors, meeting them where they are at, to give them the tools and structure they need to make their ideas a success. Systems and those they serve may not always agree, but as you learn to listen to, understand, and respond to each other, actionable ideas will be developed to improve systems.

Curt Williams, Kern County Office of Education

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" Our organization has leaned into the work of Liberatory Design and Street Data, acknowledging the importance of deep listening and diverse voices in truly understanding the experiences of those interacting with our schools and districts. We have employed these principles and practices at all levels, from state-level accountability to school-level improvements. One example is from our Differentiated Assistance work where we led our districts through NIRN's [National Implementation Research Network's] Initiative Inventory Process to have a clearer picture of all of the activities they engage in to support students, and to what extent those activities are effective supporting students. In designing the process, we adapted the NIRN organizer to require the collection and analysis of Street Data. We ask, "What artifacts can be examined to determine evidence of impact?" "Who have you engaged to collect input and feedback (implementers and recipients)?" and "Whose voice needs to be heard to learn more about the implementation of this initiative?" Our systems are typically designed for, not with, while our communities have answers but are not asked. The results of the inventory then feed into their LCAP [Local Control and Accountability Plan] design as it is part of the requirements for educational partner engagement.

Melissa Spadin, San Diego County Office of Education

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CONDITION 3
Relational Trust

Relational trust is fundamental to the ability of child-, youth-, and family-serving agencies to collaborate toward meaningful, lasting change. Collaborating agencies must attend to building community and growing relational trust with one another throughout their work together and especially when new partner agencies join the team. Further, relational trust extends beyond the collaborating agencies to include individual members of the collaborating team. It is important for team members to connect in authentic, human-centered ways first, before engaging in collaboration. Relational trust is sustained by creating routines for interpersonal connections, designing shared spaces that center belonging, and practicing active listening and learning across sectors and unique agency contexts (Valdez, Cerna, & Hashmi, 2023).

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
3.1 Opportunities for relationship building. Your cross-agency team creates regular opportunities (informal and formal) for relationship building across staff from participating agencies. These opportunities center learning, connection, and belonging.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
3.2 Understanding one another's agency contexts. Your cross-agency team creates opportunities to learn about one another's contexts across agencies, including the system conditions (e.g., policies, practices, resource allocations, relationships) that agency staff experience, navigate, and are influenced by as they conduct their work (e.g., agency strengths and barriers).	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
3.3 Space for listening, learning, reflection, and emergence. Your cross-agency team creates the space for listening, learning, reflecting, and adapting (e.g., through debriefs, inquiry and reflection processes, creative problem-solving). These opportunities help to build understanding, generate new ideas, and promote a sense of possibility.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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THINGS TO TRY

Start here

» Meet in person at least occasionally, to help build connection.

» Start each meeting with a simple community-building activity that allows participants to connect their personal experiences and perspectives with the shared purpose of the work. Consider these linked community building activities.

» Create an opportunity for everyone to share something about the context in which they do their work. Consider using a constructivist listening process.

» Reflect with your team by reading this article on the relational work of systems change.

Go deeper

» Recognize that building and sustaining relationships takes time. Expect to offer one-on-one conversations and send personalized emails to ensure that key leaders from participating agencies understand the value of collaboration to their own work and priorities.

» Assume that when challenges in the work happen, addressing them together strengthens the response, demonstrates commitment to collaboration, and deepens understanding. Adopt protocols for addressing problems together that begin with reflection and listening (also see Condition 6 for resources on addressing unproductive conflict and moving toward healing).

» Actively identify opportunities for team members and partnering agencies to advance their own work. When you demonstrate that you are invested in your partners' success—not just the success of your collaboration or your own agency's success—you build trust.

> " Even with vision, purpose, and relational trust, the need to attend to core missions of agency partners can cause relationships to wander. It's important to identify the person who can hold those relationships when the going gets tough—even if that is an agreed-upon third party.
>
> **Curt Williams, Kern County Office of Education**

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" We have taken deliberate steps to foster connections by organizing community-building activities and providing opportunities for genuine interactions. Rather than rushing into transactional relationships, we see the value in recognizing each other as human beings first. Understanding one another on a personal level is important for us. It offers insights into diverse perspectives beyond our professional roles or titles.

Michelle Alferes, Los Angeles County Office of Education

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CONDITION 4
Collective Vision and Purpose

Effective collaboration across child-, youth-, and family-serving systems depends on having a shared vision and purpose. These two ideas are distinct but related. While vision is long term and aspirational and articulates what you are hoping to achieve, purpose is more concrete and specific and describes your motivations and actions toward achieving your vision. Partnering agencies can more effectively align their policies, practices, and resources when they are organized around a shared vision and purpose (Walrond & Romer, 2021). Further, when a vision is shared by the young people, families, and communities you serve, and it is grounded in a deep understanding of community experiences, strengths, needs, and aspirations, it has greater potential to guide meaningful, equitable, lasting change.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
4.1 Shared vision, shared purpose. Your cross-agency team agrees about what it is aiming to accomplish together and can clearly and compellingly articulate how the initiative you lead serves a broader vision for equity and well-being in the communities you serve.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
4.2 Aligned vision, aligned purpose. Your cross-agency team can clearly and compellingly articulate how the vision and purpose of the initiative you lead is aligned *internally* (across departments or divisions within the same agency), *horizontally* (across child- and youth-serving sectors at the same level of the system), and *vertically* (across state and local levels within the same sector).	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
4.3 Community-centered vision. Your cross-agency team has partnered with the young people and families you collectively serve to create the vision for your initiative.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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Indicator	Status	Notes
4.4 Alignment and coherence routines. Your cross-agency team has regular routines of meeting across agencies to align your vision, purpose, implementation efforts, and strategic communications.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

THINGS TO TRY

Start here

» Ask your interest holders—including young people, families, child- and youth-serving professionals, and community-based organizations—about their vision for well-being. Remember that you do not need to start from scratch. Start from places where you may already be collaborating.

» Cocreate agendas with everyone at the table to ensure shared investment in the purpose and strategies of the work.

» Consider adapting this protocol to generate a mission and vision.

» Read the chapter on establishing a shared vision in this alignment and coherence guide and consider how you might apply its ideas to your work.

Go deeper

» Engage in a design process to codevelop a shared purpose and vision with the communities you serve. Remember that this process is iterative and that participants may move in and out of the process as the vision and purpose become sharper. Consider applying the mindsets and modes of Liberatory Design.

» Continue to revisit your vision and purpose as a team and with the communities you serve. Doing so is important because context and team composition change over time.

» Invest in bidirectional strategic communications throughout the duration of your collaborative work. Ensuring that you are engaging transparently with your interest holders and providing them with authentic opportunities to learn about and contribute to the work is essential. Consider working through this strategic communications guide.

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" To authentically grasp and understand needs and assets, and subsequently formulate goals and activities to address those needs, a collaborative effort involving students, families, educators, and community partners is imperative.

Michelle Alferes, Los Angeles County Office of Education

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CONDITION 5

Clear Structures and Approaches to Teamwork

The work of serving children, youth, and adults is complex, requiring a multidisciplinary team with clear roles, responsibilities, and processes as well as a team culture rooted in relational trust (also see Condition 2). When teams attend to both the technical dimensions (e.g., policies and practices) and adaptive dimensions (e.g., relationships, power dynamics, mental models) of their collaboration, it promotes efficient and smooth collaboration resulting in decisions that reflect the best thinking of the entire team. Further, collaboration occurs within the cross-sector team, with leaders and colleagues in the partner organizations, and with community-based organizations that are also involved in the work. Cross-agency teams should work together to consider the trade-offs of different working structures and agreements, including the following:

» decision-making—how and by whom decisions are made

» accountability—how and for which outcomes team members are held accountable

» structures for leadership and governance

» guidelines for effective communication

» processes for managing conflict

» potential benefit from engaging an external facilitator

Finally, people on the team will inevitably disagree about something. Disagreements create opportunities to fortify your partnerships by deepening understanding and building trust. Productive conflict can also lead to better decisions.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
5.1 **Memorandum of understanding.** Your cross-agency team has a clear and thorough memorandum of understanding (MOU) that supports cross-agency collaboration. Team members review the MOU regularly to calibrate expectations and to ensure that the document reflects the current understanding of the team.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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Indicator	Status	Notes
5.2 Clear roles, responsibilities, and working agreements. Each team member understands both the roles and responsibilities of the team and the expectations for their individual contributions. Roles, responsibilities, and expectations are clearly documented, and team members have easy access to support when they have questions and needs. Further, your team has community agreements in place to guide how you work together. These agreements describe what you need from one another for the work to be sustainable, joyful, and effective. You frequently revisit these agreements as you conduct work together.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
5.3 Leadership and governance structures. Leadership and governance structures are designed to balance and share power, promote transparency, and embrace change. These structures are clearly defined and understood by your team.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
5.4 Communication routines. Communication is reliable, transparent, and bidirectional, creating routine opportunities to both share information and gather essential feedback. Your team also has tools and resources in place for managing unproductive conflict, including processes that support leaning into the discomfort of conflict and committing to an outcome that strengthens the partnership and respects the needs of all those involved. These routines inspire partnership and are clearly defined and understood by your team.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
5.5 Decision-making processes. Decision-making processes are designed to center the vision and purpose of the collaboration and strive toward equitable access, experiences, and outcomes for those closest to the work. These processes are clearly defined and understood by your team.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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Indicator	Status	Notes
5.6 Support infrastructure. Your team has the support infrastructure in place to coordinate and facilitate the work of the collaborative. Depending on the scale of your initiative, this infrastructure may be in the form of a third party facilitator, lead agency, or backbone organization.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

THINGS TO TRY

Start here

» In an MOU, clearly articulate expectations for the work—including scope, standards of quality, and collaboration agreements.

» Start by forming your team. Consider this activity on getting started with implementation teams and the activity on forming your team in this alignment and coherence guide (pp. 17–24).

» Consider rotating leadership roles and creating incentives to engage in the work.

» Generate a set of community agreements to guide your work together. Revisit these agreements regularly and revise them as needed. Tips for developing community agreements and guidance for implementing, monitoring, and repairing community agreements are available.

» Decide and document your communication agreements as a team; this resource provides an example of communication agreements.

» Work with your team to establish clear accountability and decision-making responsibilities using a DARCI Grid.

Go deeper

» Adopt a protocol or strategy for having courageous conversations to address conflict.

» Review this conflict workbook and identify opportunities to apply some of the practices in the workbook to your own work.

» Use this tool to assess the effectiveness of your team's decision-making processes.

» Reflect together on the indicators of an effective team.

» Reflect together on the dimensions of a great team.

» Review this article on effective children's cabinets and consider how its ideas apply to your team.

» Review these resources on the value and role of backbone organizations and identify opportunities to apply these concepts to your collaborative's support infrastructure.

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> " As Kern County was implementing the state's requirement for a Foster Youth System of Care under Assembly Bill 2083, certain core agencies were required to develop an operational agreement that included an interagency leadership team comprised of heads of agencies or their designees, an implementation team comprised of middle and upper management, and a working team of supervisory or line workers that reviews cases and makes recommendations regarding the placement of high-needs children in foster care. The goal was to align procedures and protocols across agencies to better serve children and families involved in the foster care system. The Interagency Leadership Team felt it was an important part of the operational agreement that there be shared leadership and genuine engagement from all agency partners. To that end, both the leadership team and the implementation team have chairs and vice chairs that rotate off every year with the vice chair transitioning to the chair role to give every agency a voice and opportunity to lead.

Curt Williams, Kern County Office of Education

> " If you've ever looked at what makes a team effective, a major component is diversity in strengths and ways of working, even though on the surface that may seem like a cause for conflict. We use StrengthsFinder and Deloitte Business Chemistry to understand our talents and the ways we can use those talents for more effective teaming. We've found that if we can identify the main strengths of each potential team member while composing a team, and creating a blend of those talents, we're much more likely to have an outcome that not only meets deadlines but is innovative, reflects current

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research, ensures all team members are proud of the work, and can be communicated to a variety of audiences. An integral part of effective teaming is also a "sponsor" with enough positional power to move the work along at a leadership level, who will champion the project but not claim sole ownership.

Melissa Spadin, San Diego County Office of Education

" We know that relationships must be fostered through a communicative approach, dependability, and consistent follow-through on our commitments. This foundation ensures that when conflicts or disagreements arise, we can engage in open, productive dialogue and work towards resolutions collaboratively.

Michelle Alferes, Los Angeles County Office of Education

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CONDITION 6

Continuous Improvement Routines and Infrastructure

Participating agencies should engage in continuous improvement routines to understand the impact of the initiative on the communities they serve and to make meaningful improvements along the way. The quality and effectiveness of the collaboration itself should also be measured and continuously improved. To this end, data sharing and common measures across agencies are critical for understanding the fidelity and impact of a cross-sector initiative and for informing continuous improvement efforts.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
6.1 Data sharing. Cross-agency data sharing agreements are in place to facilitate efficient and relevant data sharing that strengthens the ability of participating agencies to continuously improve their shared and respective work to serve children, youth, and families. Data privacy requirements and data sharing practices are documented, are ethically sound, and are understood by all participating agencies and by those whose data are being shared.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
6.2 Expansive notions of credible data. Your cross-agency team uses a broad range of data, moving beyond surveys and quantitative data collection to prioritize a fuller, more vivid depiction of the system. Data gathering may include empathy interviews, focus groups, storytelling protocols, and other qualitative methods.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
6.3 Common measures. Participating agencies share a set of common measures—including process, outcome, structural, and balancing measures (Institute for Healthcare Improvement, n.d.)—to help them understand the impact of their work on communities and to continuously improve. Measures are also in place that help cross-agency teams understand and improve the effectiveness of their collaboration.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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Indicator	Status	Notes
6.4 Feedback loops. Your cross-agency team has instituted feedback loops to regularly gather input from the community on the design and impact of your initiative and how it can be improved.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
6.5 Improvement routines. Your cross-agency team has routines in place that support continuous learning, reflection, and improvement (e.g., plan-do-study-act cycles, improvement reviews, after-action reviews, data talks, peer consultancies).	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

THINGS TO TRY

Start here

» Inventory existing data sources that are relevant to your initiative, including publicly available data and data that are available through each partner agency. Identify opportunities to share and analyze these data across agencies and with the broader community.

» As you get started, review these recommendations on centering equity in data-based decision-making.

» Review this resource on ways to gather street data and consider how you might apply some of these data-gathering methods to strengthen your understanding of community strengths, needs, and aspirations.

Go deeper

» Together with your cross-agency team, read and reflect on this article on the ways that systems can be redesigned for equity.

» Consider how your team might apply Liberatory Design to aim for equitable access, experiences, and outcomes with and in the communities you serve.

» Consider applying one or more of these continuous improvement protocols to help improve the implementation and impact of your shared initiative and the effectiveness of your cross-agency collaboration.

» Review this resource on competencies for supporting implementation and consider opportunities to build or strengthen the infrastructure support for your collaboration.

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» Review the [Model for Improvement](#) to explore possible improvement measures and strategies for iterating and scaling change ideas.

» Get some inspiration for your evaluation approach by reviewing [this article on evaluating collective impact](#) and [this guide for evaluating collective impact](#).

" Quantitative data yields some ephemeral insights, but words paint a picture that clings to our hearts and stands the test of time. Through storytelling, our ancestors captured inspirational morals that helped to shape our character and culture. We are wired to remember stories, so let's not let the numbers do all the talking! Consider qualitative data when adopting a continuous improvement mindset.

Nora Zamora, Alameda County Office of Education

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CONDITION 7

Adequate Resources and Abundance Mindsets

Adequate resources—including time, funding, technology, facilities, partnerships, networks, staffing, and community resources—are necessary for implementing and sustaining cross-sector collaboration efforts. Cross-sector efforts also need the infrastructure in place to carry the work forward, including lead agencies, fiscal sponsors, and coordination support. Further, an abundance mindset is key to securing adequate resources for the work. Applying this mindset involves generating innovative resource allocation strategies, considering ways to leverage existing resources to secure additional resources, and tapping into existing partnerships and networks to contribute to the cause. When partners are generous with their resources and work together to do more with less, services can be more aligned, coherent, and impactful.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
7.1 Resource inventorying and alignment. Your cross-agency team inventories the resources available across participating agencies to support the work and aligns these available resources to maximize impact and sustainability.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	
7.2 Resource gap analyses. Your cross-agency team conducts resource gap analyses to understand and anticipate how these resource gaps might impact the work in the short and long terms. Your team also examines the use of untapped resources across participating agencies, partners, funders, and other networks, including how these resources might be accessed and leveraged to support the work.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

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Indicator	Status	Notes
7.3 Early and ongoing sustainability planning. Your team is engaged in sustainability planning as the initiative is being carried out from start to close. Doing so involves generating sustainable funding, implementation, and other strategies to ensure that the work lives beyond the current funding or legislative period or phase of work.	Pending Emerging Implementing Sustaining	

THINGS TO TRY

Start here

» Start by planning for sustainability. Make a strategy for when funding may be tight.

» Inventory existing resources across participating agencies so that you have an understanding of the existing resources that can support your initiative.

» Conduct a gap analysis to understand the resource gaps for implementing, sustaining, and scaling your initiative.

» Read this brief on coordinating resources across agencies to serve children and youth.

» Review some of the resources in this guide for advancing and sustaining well-being initiatives.

Go deeper

» Identify opportunities for braiding funding streams across agencies to maximize reach and impact.

» Identify opportunities for sharing or blending resources, such as staffing, capacity-building efforts, and facilities.

» Strategically expand your ecosystem of partnerships so that you have a growing network of partners supporting and contributing to the work over time.

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" When the Dream Center, Kern's one-stop resource center for foster youth, was founded in 2008, leaders in Kern County knew something had to be done to change the life trajectory for youth leaving foster care. Tom Corson from the Kern County Network for Children provided seed money from a grant offered to him through the county superintendent for the first building. Partners like child welfare, probation, and mental health came alongside to [provide] a few staff using money they would have used for overhead costs and staffing to provide services in a new and unique fashion.

In 2017, collaborative successes led to partners making a broader investment. The county superintendent bought two buildings for a resource center and a collaborative building, and partners all agreed to place entire teams at the center and share in operational cost through formal agreements to form the comprehensive center we have today.

Curt Williams, Kern County Office of Education

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