National Results and Equity Collaborative

Turning Curves for Children, Families and Communities

Concept Overview

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Founding Members:
American Association of School Administrators
BCT Partners (Technical assistance providers for Choice Neighborhoods)
Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Coalition for Community Schools
Literacy Funders Network
National League of Cities
Promise Neighborhoods Institute
Results Leadership Group
United Way Worldwide

Introduction

A newly formed collaborative initiative seeks planning and development support for a game changing approach to accelerating positive and equitable results for children, youth, families and communities throughout the US.

This approach will enable networks of funders, technical assistance providers, intermediary organizations, public and private civic and service organizations, government and others working to help more young people succeed from birth through adulthood more effectively and consistently to:

- define a set of common and powerful results and measures to which communities and initiatives add their unique indicators of progress; (With this results and indicators framework, we'd have a common language about what the most important results are for children, families and communities, and agreement about what indicators are strong predictors of progress.)
- tracking progress through a data aggregator in ways that add up and demonstrate both the costs and benefits of improved results;
- recognize the importance of investing in community capacity – the necessary skills and knowledge – to do the results work; and
- tap into the collective knowledge base, tools and technical assistance in support of evidence-based strategies proven to lead to results.

Landscape/Challenges

We are at a time in the United States when:

- we understand that long-term national, state and local economic success depends upon a healthy and well-educated workforce;
- too many children and young people are not able to achieve their full and healthy development, and the gaps in educational achievement, health and other indicators of well-being by race, ethnicity and income are growing ever more severe;
- there is broad acknowledgement that twentieth century institutions need to be re-formed to meet twenty first century challenges, and states, communities and federal and philanthropic initiatives have begun this process; and
- we know more than ever before about how to address the complex issues that prevent too many children, youth and families from realizing their full potential.

At the same time, a game plan about how communities can mobilize all of their resources – public, private, formal, informal, grass-roots and grass tops – has generally not been developed in intentional, coordinated ways that support and encourage leaders to:

- agree on a common vision – a set of key results;
- build the community capacity necessary for sustainable success;

- document proof of effective strategies, including the true costs (human and capital) of getting results; and
- take effective strategies to scale across neighborhoods, communities, states and the country.

Rather, funders, community leaders, policy makers and others continue to require communities to collect, track and report data using a variety of (often re-invented) tools and strategy development approaches, challenging communities to understand what is required of them. And technical assistance to communities is rarely coordinated among funders, policy makers, intermediary organizations and networks, even though technical assistance efforts often offer similar forms of help, strive to help communities achieve the same outcomes and ask for almost the same information – further challenging community efforts to change conditions for vulnerable children, youth and families.

While the notion and nomenclature of *collective impact* has recently inspired many communities working on education, health and economic development issues to address specific challenges (e.g. school readiness, grade level reading, early chronic absence, high school dropout, health, housing or other related issues) in coalitions or partnerships, many of these partnerships are not sure how to work together to change conditions that prevent or impede student success.

For communities that are successful at achieving measurable improvements in child and family well-being, a key driver of change, maintainer of momentum and fuel for helping partners know how they can contribute and account for their contributions to the community's goals is their capacity to use and share the right data, develop and implement promising strategies, measure progress towards results, and use what they are learning (what works, what doesn't) to engage in continuous improvement. And we know that this capacity is essential. *Scaling What Works, Implications for Philanthropists, Policy Makers, and Nonprofit Leaders* from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and Bridgespan makes this point about organizational capacity, and it applies to communities seeking to achieve results at scale as well:

> **Scaling a nonprofit's programs without investing in its capacity is a recipe for failure.**
> Building organizational and human capacity – putting in place the strategy, systems and, above all else, the right people in the right jobs to convert money into results – is as important a factor in bringing a program successfully to scale as the money itself. Yet many funders view investments that would be virtually automatic for a growing for-profit company—such as hiring talented senior managers or acquiring an information system to capture performance data—as unnecessary overhead. If the same reasoning were applied to for-profit enterprises, airlines wouldn't invest in maintenance and companies everywhere wouldn't bother to attract, retain and develop a cadre of leaders and managers. The effect of this bias is an organizational form of chronic fatigue syndrome that burns out nonprofit leaders and compromises their ability to address social problems.

Finally, across multiple efforts to improve results for children, families and communities, as Mark Friedman, Author of *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough*, notes, "we lack *interlocking agreements*

about standard ways of doing things that exist in many other arenas, from the railroad system to how computers can talk to each other." He goes on to note that, "*national and state tax systems talk to each other and many states have made progress on standardizing social benefit application forms across programs. But social systems lag far behind. Agreeing to use a core set of principles is the basis for an accountability compact…much like the railroad or computer agreement. It would not restrict content. It would simply give us a consistent way of working together.*"

Opportunities

A group of philanthropic, research, intermediary and technical assistance-providing organizations with nationwide and often overlapping constituencies or memberships working on improving outcomes for children, families and communities have come together with a powerful idea.

This idea is to achieve greater coordination and even some integration among initiatives trying to improve results for children, families and communities. Given the high stakes involved, the field is too fragmented, and if we are to get impact at greater scale, we need more cumulative impact from multiple initiatives.

This work has begun with leaders of a group of initiatives that have a lot to share and learn from each other. Two of the strongest common elements among this group are:

- **A results-or-outcomes-based focus**, which includes an emphasis on collective impact, investing in community capacity building, data-driven strategy development and a systematic process for measuring progress and results and adjusting strategies based on what is learned; and

- **A cradle to college to career approach**, a perspective of promoting full and healthy development across the developmental lifespan or, with some initiatives, a segment of the lifespan.

We think it makes sense – and, in fact, is increasingly essential - for multiple initiatives to define what's common in terms of an overall results-based approach. By working closely together, and recognizing that we are all in the same enterprise, we can get alignment on several important dimensions of a results-based approach, including:

- A results and indicators framework that can serve as a common core (or "skeleton") to which communities and initiatives can add their unique additional indicators and/or language.
- A shared commitment to building community capacity, allowing multiple initiatives to generate evidence about how community capacities contribute to results;
- A willingness to share tools and materials that support strategy development and an ever-increasing knowledge base; and
- A common "results and data aggregator" tool. The participating initiatives have agreed on a common approach and tool for capturing the impact of their results process: the

Results Scorecard, which embodies the language and principles of Results Based Accountability. This tool not only supports useful data collection but helps guide its users in using a results-based approach.

A core group of initiatives have begun working on alignment on all of the above points. These partners are committed to moving forward together, becoming increasingly aligned as they share approaches, align their results and indicators, and share common tools of data collection, aggregation and technical assistance. This group will launch the initiative with select states and communities invited to participate as Phase I Design and Development Partners.

We are working closely with other initiatives/stakeholders that agree generally with this approach, want to pursue alignment on at least some of these dimensions, but want to take more time to decide on how much alignment is feasible on use of specific tools (such as a data aggregator tool or use of a single data platform). These stakeholders will contribute to, and share in, the knowledge base that is built.

To keep all potential partners informed, involved and able to take advantage of the shared knowledge generated by the initiative, the founding group of partners will also host a set of learning community activities, including webinars, in person meetings, and other activities that stakeholders will be invited to participate in.

This work will take place over the next 5 years, beginning with a collaborative development strategy that includes:

A planning phase in which partners will work with their constituencies, national experts, advisors and others to define:
- A results and indicators framework or a common "skeleton" to which communities and initiatives add their unique additional indicators and/or language;
- A framework to build community capacity and share technical assistance;
- A methodology to share tools and materials that support strategy development and an ever-increasing knowledge base; and
- A business model that sustains the work over time.

A design and development phase in which national partners work together with leaders in selected states and communities to:
- Focus on turning a specific curve and using consistently defined common indicators;
- Help expand, adapt and test the platform; and
- Inform the development of technical assistance, best practice resources and shared learning.

A scaling phase in which additional intermediaries and networks will be invited to continue the use, refinement and development process, facilitated by a growing (and dynamically led and curated) learning network;

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An ongoing research and refinement phase, including leadership to incorporate the best 21st century thinking and technology (such as collaborative gaming as teaching tools) and working with funders, institutional data users and technology vendors to create inter-operability standards for sharing data.

The inaugural partners in this exciting and promising endeavor see this as a legacy moment, in which together we can begin to build a 21st century foundation for success for pipelines of cradle to career success for children, youth and families.