

COLLECTIVE IMPACT: STRONGER RESULTS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Cross sector cradle-to-career initiatives are increasingly central to communities' strategies to support children and youth. StriveTogether Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure provides a framework for how a community comes together around a vision; improves and builds upon those efforts over time; and invests the community's resources differently to increase impact. This brief uses lessons learned from TASC's ExpandedED Schools, a national effort that aligns youth-serving community organizations and schools to add approximately three hours of learning time to the conventional school day, to describe the role of non-profit organizations in the StriveTogether Framework and provides recommendations for expanding and enhancing their role in achieving collective impact.



Introduction

In communities across the country, people are recognizing the importance of *collectively* supporting the success of every child which often requires a new way of working together. In these communities, multiple sectors, including: school district leaders, businesses, early childhood educators, health practitioners, post-secondary leaders, funders and parents are coming together to share, collect, and analyze data on youth outcomes. Partners in these communities acknowledge that in order to do things differently, infrastructure is needed to ensure supports are coordinated along the entire length of a child's education journey, from cradle to career.

Non-profit youth organizations contribute to this collective work by providing services at nearly every step of the education continuum including: early-childhood education, expanded learning opportunities such as after-school and summer programs, educational enrichments, youth mentoring services, tutoring services and job training. As the on-the-ground experts, serving the very students collective impact efforts are aiming to impact, these organizations often contribute to and execute the necessary strategies to achieve improvement. Furthermore, these organizations often contribute to system-building efforts, such as advocating for policy changes, setting quality standards, and raising public and private funds for youth programs. These youth-serving organizations are often referred to as community-based organizations (CBOs) and for purposes of this paper we will use that terminology. While many CBOs serve critical roles in communities with collective impact initiatives, we see additional opportunity for high-quality CBOs to engage in deeper ways for the benefit of local partnerships and students.

Current policy conditions present opportunities to expand and deepen the role of CBOs. More than a decade of system-building work¹ in the out-of-school time field has resulted in more rigorous quality standards, coordinated professional development strategies, data collection and management systems, and consistent funding models.

The implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards has set a much higher bar for the skills that students need to be college and career ready. As states have transitioned to more rigorous assessments reflecting the Common Core Standards, we have seen precipitous declines in proficiency rates among students (Tennessee proficiency in grades 3-8 dropped 63% in Math and 44% in ELA when the tests were changed in 2010²; Kentucky's proficiency rates dropped more than 45% among elementary school students and more than 30% among middle school students in 2012³; and most recently, New York City's ELA scores declined by 45% in 2013).⁴

In order to meet the new, higher standards, districts and communities are changing the way they look at education. They understand that a siloed approach to education cannot impact a broken system and that the collective effort of the entire community is needed to see real systemic change. This means connecting education supports across the education continuum (Early childhood to K-12, to Post-secondary) as well as connecting out-of-school supports (often led by CBOs) to in-school curricula and accelerating the pace at which content and materials

¹ For more, see The Wallace Foundation, [Better Together: Building Local Systems to Improve Afterschool \(A Conference Report\)](#)

² TN Dept. of Education, [State Report Card](#)

³ Education Week, [Scores Drop on Ky.'s Common Core-Aligned Tests](#)

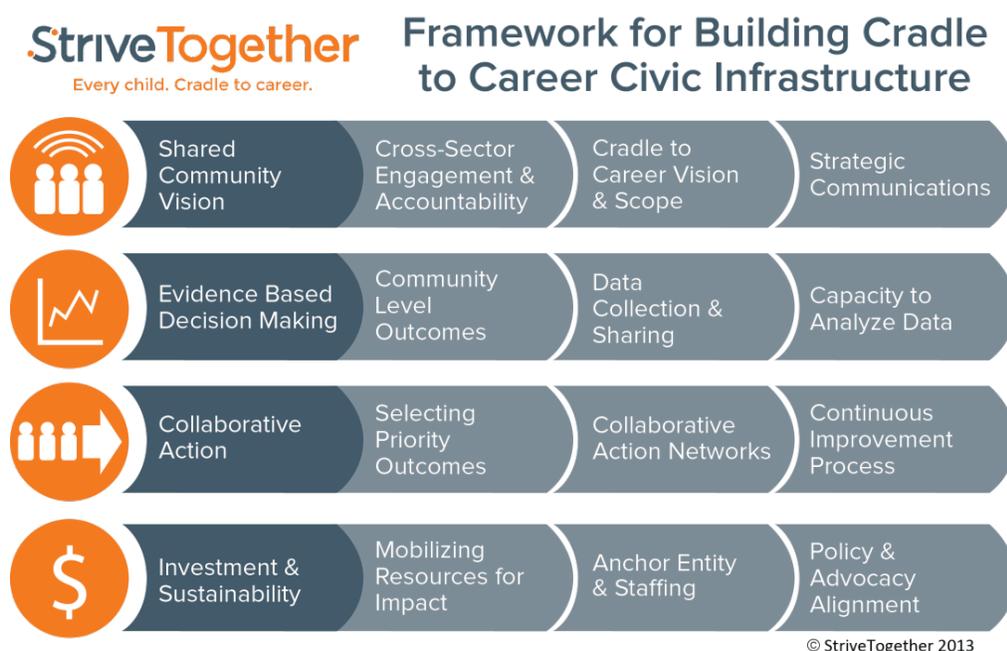
⁴ NYC DOE, [New York City Results](#)

are covered in schools. One strategy that some districts, including New York City, have implemented is to expand learning time in collaboration with CBOs to deliver a longer, better school day to students. Other districts, such as Boston, have turned to CBOs to co-design and lead enriching summer learning experiences.

This brief describes the ways in which CBOs can participate in and support collective impact efforts and provides recommendations to build increasingly effective relationships among CBOs and other partners working to support youth outcomes in communities.

Community-Based Organizations and Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure

StriveTogether has articulated a framework for building the Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure that is necessary to support the community partnerships taking on this collective impact work. The sections below identify the various roles that CBOs play within this Framework.



Shared Community Vision

Schools alone do not make up the full education equation – many partners contribute to a student’s success. Communities convene cross-sector partners to come together around a vision for improving educational outcomes beginning at birth through post-secondary education/training until securing a meaningful career; many of these partners are CBOs. As service providers to many students, the involvement of CBOs is imperative to the success of a collective impact partnership. This involvement could take place at the leadership table of a partnership, a group of high level community leaders that often set the direction of the partnership, or in collaborative action networks, which are groups of appropriate cross-sector practitioners and individuals who organize around a community level outcome and use a continuous improvement process to develop an action plan with strategies to improve that outcome.

CBOs typically have strong relationships with other community leaders, organizations, funders, schools, students, and residents, making them expertly positioned to help build necessary relationships with potential partners. One executive director of a cradle to career partnership noted that, “partnerships move at the speed of trust” indicating that the strength of the partnership is only as strong as the relationships built between partners. CBOs can play a big role in helping to strengthen this trust, building off of the relationships that they have already established, often with schools, parents, and students- all necessary partners in a collective impact effort.

In addition to trust building, CBOs can play a critical role in using their relationships to help build awareness of the work of the partnership and communicate progress. Coordinating a consistent message across partners to the broader community about complex work can be a challenge in collective impact partnerships. Often CBOs already have communication channels and followers built in that can extend the reach of the partnership’s communication efforts.

Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Rather than coming together to support promising educational programs, in a collective impact effort, communities come together to identify the most important outcomes for children and commit to finding the best ways to drive improvement in those outcomes. Organizing around outcomes, identifying indicators for the outcomes and collecting local data to determine areas of need and promising practices/activities make this work fundamentally different than other collaborative approaches. As partnerships progress in the work, the collection of data moves from aggregated community-wide data to program and student level data. A substantial role of the partnership is to make data available on a consistent basis in order for those serving students, like CBOs, to have the data they need to continuously improve their services; this includes the use of systems, processes and people.

Identifying what outcomes the community wants to hold itself accountable for improving is a tremendous feat; however it will require CBOs and partners alike to identify their role in helping to impact these outcomes. This may require connecting data that CBOs are already collecting (like the impact of their program on pre- and post- test scores) to a higher level outcome (like third grade reading proficiency) that the partnership is tracking. This shift might also re-define what success looks like for individual community-based organizations. Rather than measuring success by accomplishments of one program, the partnership will be measuring success by the collective impact on the identified outcomes and the success of the students.

The ability of the partnership to enable the connection of academic and non-academic data is crucial to effectively practice continuous improvement. Connecting aggregated student-level data with non-academic data on the support services students receive can be used to identify practices, combinations of practices, or key activities that are having an impact on student success. While school district partners nearly always control student-level academic data, it is often CBOs that possess the essential non-academic data on student supports outside of school. As more foundations and government contracts require results-reporting for their grants, CBOs have grown more accustomed to collecting data and using that data to drive program decisions. Federal and state education policy has also increased transparency on school-level data and schools across the country are using formative assessments and inquiry teams to inform instructional strategies. CBOs, when collecting robust data related to program outcomes, can play a critical role in painting a more holistic picture of a child when they are able

to share their programmatic outcome data with schools. In return, CBOs can utilize academic data to identify programmatic practices that are having an impact on students' academic achievement, behavior or attendance. This type of data sharing, often facilitated by cradle to career partnerships, can be significant in understanding the unique needs of an individual child as well as connecting them to impactful supports outside of the classroom.

Collaborative Action

While many different types of action take place throughout a collective impact partnership, Collaborative Action is specifically about community partners coming together to use data in a disciplined manner to collectively move an outcome. Collaborative Action uses a process of continuous improvement and requires participation from both practitioners and leadership. Building on the existing assets and resources of a community, networks are engaged or formed around an outcome or indicator. The network then develops a charter and action plan using disaggregated student level data and ultimately identifies practices/ activities that improve community level outcomes. Through their work, networks identify opportunities for partners to improve outcomes.

Collaborative action networks present one of the biggest opportunities for CBOs to engage in the work of a collective impact partnership. Collaborative action networks are made up of individuals from organizations providing direct services to children, like community-based organizations. Involvement in a collaborative action network builds a CBO's ability to use data not only collectively as a group trying to impact an outcome, but also as an organization seeking to improve their services and practices. Most importantly, coming together with other CBOs and community experts to impact an outcome ultimately helps more kids succeed, the ultimate goal of most CBOs.

Involvement in a network, does require some shifts in the way CBOs typically operate; the first being that the process of continuous improvement needs to be embedded into the work of the CBO's employees, rather than an additional piece of work on top of their daily work load. Continuous improvement is an on-going effort to use local data in a disciplined manner to improve efficiencies and effectiveness of processes and action. This can be a challenge for already capacity-stretched CBOs, and partnerships need to look for ways to add value and build the capacity of their crucial CBO partners. Additionally, the continuous improvement process may uncover that certain practices or a combination of practices have more impact than others CBOs need to be prepared to incorporate data-driven practices into their programs or partner with other CBOs that may provide an essential service that should be paired with their program. This can be a challenge for many CBOs as funds are often tied to specific activities and a change in those activities could be a breach of grant requirements. This commitment to continuous improvement is essential and is becoming more institutionalized in the CBO field through widely adopted self-assessment tools and coaching provided by intermediaries and funders in many communities throughout the country.⁵

⁵ For examples, see the New York State Afterschool Network's [Quality Self-Assessment Tool](#) and the Dallas AfterSchool Network's [Program Quality Initiative](#).

Investment and Sustainability

In order to sustain the partnership over time broad community ownership for building cradle to career civic infrastructure needs to be established and resources to support the work of the partnership to improve student outcomes need to be obtained. This type of sustainability usually requires a shift to initiate or redirect resources (time, talent and treasure) toward data-based practices on an on-going basis, particularly in regards to funding and policy.

Identifying and advocating for necessary policy change to enable the work of the partnership is a necessary piece to ensuring long-term sustainability. These policy changes could influence the way public dollars are spent or influence state assessments for student achievement or preparedness. Community-based organizations often hold the intimate knowledge of specific policy barriers to driving the work forward (such as the lack of a consistent kindergarten readiness assessment, or the inability for federal funds to be shifted to support an evidence-based practice). The opportunity for CBOs (especially through the work of collaborative action networks) is to lift up these policy barriers for the partnership as a whole to advocate for and ultimately change.

A central premise of the cradle to career collective impact work is that it requires the collective effort of an entire community to really achieve the systems level and institutional change that is necessary to support every child, from cradle to career. Inherent in this, is the engagement, involvement, and mobilization of the community around this cradle to career vision. Community-based organizations have the unique advantage of already being directly connected to the community they serve, impacting their lives on a daily basis. This close connection with the community provides an essential bridge between the partnership and the broader community. Serving as communication ambassadors for the partnership to the broader community is an excellent role for CBOs, especially in the early stages of a partnership. Eventually, the mobilization of the community to take action to improve student outcomes (become a tutor, vote for a policy change, etc.) will be necessary and CBOs are, once again, expertly positioned to lead these mobilization efforts, using their strong relationships and community networks to actively involve community members in the work of the partnership.

Demonstrating the use of data not just for evaluative purposes, but to continually improve the services provided to students, is a shift that many funders are interested in supporting. If the collective impact partnership builds the necessary relationships with major funders in the community, funding practices often shift to reflect the priorities of the partnerships. Rather than engaging in legacy funding, philanthropic partners shift their funding strategies to support data-driven work around the outcomes which the partnership is tracking. Participation in a cradle to career partnership or collaborative action network provides an opportunity for CBOs to build the capacity to use data to get better at what they are already doing, as well as appeal to funders in a different way because of their use of data.

CBOs in (Collective) Action: Case Examples

The following are case examples from a national effort, [ExpandED Schools by TASC](#), in which partners CBOs and schools to provide a longer, more effective school day that supports students' academic, social, emotional, and physical development. This model embodies the principles of collective impact, and the case examples below illuminate the four pillars of the cradle to career framework.

Four core elements of Expanded School's success:

MORE TIME FOR
A BALANCED
CURRICULUM



SCHOOL-
COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS



ENGAGING AND
PERSONALIZED
INSTRUCTION



SUSTAINABLE
COST MODEL

Shared Community Vision

- Many ExpandedED partners serve as hubs for communication and action in the neighborhoods. For example, Baltimore's Child First Authority (CFA) not only works directly with students to offer science, art, entrepreneurship, and other classes in partnership with schools, but also serves as a parent organizing entity. CFA's work with families builds consensus around a set of youth supports that are then part of an advocacy agenda promoted across the city. This broader role engages parents in their students' schools, with most parents volunteering their time or donating goods to support progress toward student outcomes.

Evidence-Based Decision-Making

- Baltimore's CBOs rallied around the focus areas of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading: summer learning, attendance, and school readiness. Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL) is working to support progress in these areas in its partner schools. For example, at Harlem Park Elementary and Middle School, the BELL team assesses student attendance and engagement and deploys staff accordingly, using a team of teachers, community educators and University of Maryland social workers to diagnose why a student may be absent. Targeted interventions are then applied, such as meeting with parents who are not supporting high attendance or finding school supplies and clothing for a student who doesn't have basic necessities to be ready for school each day.
- Recognizing that the arts are popular among students of all ages in New Orleans, Young Audiences of Louisiana engages students in education through structured art experiences. Qualitative data suggests these enrichment opportunities engage students in meaningful ways, therefore helping the school to increase attendance and students' motivation in school. Young Audiences capitalizes on students' love of art by embedding arts enrichment into the school day at its partner schools such as McDonogh #32 Literacy Charter School.

Collaborative Action

- Last year, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC) in Brooklyn, NY received a federal Promise Neighborhood planning grant to lead a strategy that provides a network of services for students in two elementary/middle schools and four high schools. This web of programs and supports allows the organization to follow students from K-12 and implement data-driven interventions across all of its programs that are aligned to a common set of outcomes. At PS 89, the school and CHLDC align their staff resources to teach literacy skills, share leadership of assessing students' social emotional learning competencies and developing a coordinated positive behavior system and jointly implementing family engagement strategies.

Investment and Sustainability

- NIA Community Services Network draws from six separate public and private funding sources to support expanded learning for over 500 students each year at P.S. 186 in Brooklyn, NY including AmeriCorps, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and the Carol White Physical Education Program. This is done through careful coordination to ensure that all funder requirements are met while ensuring the initiative focuses on the school's overarching goals and performance targets. NIA manages these grants and builds support from funders to support sustainability year after year.

Recommendations

FOR CRADLE TO CAREER PARTNERSHIPS

Cradle to Career Partnerships should tap and build upon the strengths of community-based organizations by:

- *Incorporating CBOs in collaborative action networks to maximize the assets of their programs and relationships*
- *Building the capacity of CBOs to participate in collaborative action networks and creating opportunities to learn from the expertise they bring to the work*
- *Supporting continuous use of data to improve individual organizations*
- *Working with funders to encourage CBOs to be involved in a network or connect to one of the partnership's outcomes*
- *Providing the structure to enable sharing both academic and non-academic data*
- *Advocating for necessary policy changes identified by CBOs as barriers to the work*

FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Community-based organizations should support collective impact efforts by:

- *Engaging in collaborative action networks or other groups in the partnership*
- *Using their communication channels to build awareness about the partnership*
- *Aligning their work with the outcomes that the partnership is tracking*
- *Participating in the sharing of academic and non-academic data*
- *Implementing continuous improvement processes organizationally (e.g., willing to make continuous improvement part of staff job descriptions)*
- *Being flexible to shift practices or partner with other CBOs*
- *Identifying necessary policy change*
- *Engaging and mobilizing the community*

FOR CITIES OR COMMUNITIES

Cities and communities should support collective impact efforts by:

- *Seizing the opportunity of Common Core Learning Standards implementation to deepen alignment between CBOs and schools (e.g., establishing student-level goals by grade for all CBOs offering educational programs in a community)*
- *Creatively braiding and blending resources with CBOs and other collective impact partners to maximize impact*

Additional Resources

- *You can learn more about the StriveTogether approach in communities via our Theory of Action and recent case studies that highlight the work in local communities.*
- Watch these videos to learn more about how schools and CBOs are building a longer, better school day aligned to common goals through a blended staff of teachers, coaches, artists, and other youth development specialists and a blended budget inclusive of diverse public and private resources.
- Is your community ready to bridge schools and CBOs to create a seamless educational experience for students? Use this tool to find out.

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