



Lessons Learned

Key Criteria for Selecting the Right Player to Lead Characteristics of an Anchor Institution

An anchor institution is one that provides leadership, commitment and engagement to the partnership, specifically supporting members through commitment of resources, convening partners, and contributing to the knowledge base of transforming education. Choosing the right anchor institution for the partnership is one of the earliest and most important decisions guiding the partnership forward. In order to have an efficient and effective impact, there are seven key criteria that a good anchor should have.

1) The anchor institution has to be neutral; it can't be driven by a biased agenda. Although it can be assumed that every organization has its own ideology, the focus of the anchor institution has to be the children. This focus drives the purpose of the partnership. Once the shared purpose has been defined, partnership members can take actions that focus on the goals of the partnership rather than their individual organizational interests, leading to a student-centered agenda.

2) An anchor institution with convening power can influence key leaders to consistently come to the table, despite whatever challenges there may be. By bringing people together who respect and listen to one another, information can be shared, relationships can be built, and there is a greater possibility to acquire resources that might influence partnership progress and sustainability. When remembering that the cradle-to-career civic infrastructure needs distributed leadership and horizontal and vertical alignment across all sectors, the value of convenings can't be overstated.



Lessons from the Frontline

In both Seattle and Boston, a community foundation was seen as a neutral party that had the convening power to effectively lead and support the partnership initiatives in their early stages.



Lessons from the Frontline

As cradle to career partnerships emerged in two communities, Indianapolis and Richmond, it became apparent that CEOs for Cities Talent Dividend initiatives were emerging at the same time. The Talent Dividend and Cradle to Career work is complementary, thus the two efforts in both cities quickly became aligned.

3) The anchor institution must be able to work with existing efforts, and clearly communicate the partnership's shared purpose and vision to others. Being neutral makes it easier to communicate and work across sectors. Strong communication and collaboration allows the partnership to deliberately eliminate silos and deliver results.

4) The anchor institution must stick to the work. The long-term nature of the work calls for focus and commitment, so it's important that the anchor institution has a reputation of sticking with projects through all of the hard work in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

5) A successful anchor institution must have a strong relationship with others. It must be able to recognize others' interests and act in a politically savvy manner in order to build trust. And because of this relationship with others -- in addition to its willingness, reputation, and neutrality -- a successful anchor institution will have convening power.



Lessons Learned

6) An anchor institution needs a commitment to evidence-based decision making in order to continuously improve. It should embrace and be committed to the idea of data-driving action, from its inception. And although it doesn't necessarily have to be in place yet, the anchor should be committed to the idea.

7) The final characteristic of a successful anchor institution is its capacity for sustained staff. Dedicated staff is necessary in order to maintain and sustain the work of the partnership. It's important that the anchor either provide or engage partners to fill these roles, and that the core team be in proximity to each other.



Lessons from the Frontline

As an example of committing to using data to drive all decisions, the partnership in Portland has disciplined themselves not to prioritize work that was already happening on the ground until it could be validated by the data, thereby setting a precedent for evidence-based decision making.

In order to best communicate the shared community vision, and engage the broad, cross-sector partnership around the community vision, it's essential to choose the right anchor institution.

The anchor that is best equipped to lead will be neutral; willing to work with existing efforts; willing to stick to the work of the partnership; relationship focused; have convening power; be committed to evidence-based decision making; and have capacity for sustained staff.