



# StriveTogether Collaborative Improvement

## Collaborative improvement includes four elements:

StriveTogether's collaborative improvement methodology helps communities working toward better cradle-to-career outcomes for every child.

Collaborative improvement combines the best thinking from across the field of social change and the health care sector's approach to continuous improvement. Collaborative improvement starts with the premise that change can only begin with action. Equity is a core guiding principle that helps ensure communities go beyond universal strategies and focus on youth and families facing the greatest barriers due to the color of their skin or poverty.

The methodology includes learning from nearly 70 network members who apply this approach as they advance through the StriveTogether Theory of Action™ toward systemic community change.

### Equity

Changing systems to improve outcomes for every child drives the work. We focus explicitly on race equity and equity for youth and families living in poverty. We tailor strategies that connect people to opportunity, remove structural barriers and eliminate disparities.

### Results Count™

Pioneered by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Results Count™ helps leaders and groups move from intention to action by building the following leadership competencies:

- Being results based and data driven, honing their ability to take aligned actions to advance a population-level results agenda;
- Acting on disparities to address equitable opportunities, recognizing that race, class and culture affect outcomes and opportunities for vulnerable children;
- Using themselves as an instrument of change, believing that individual leaders are capable of exerting influence across systems and sectors to move multiple stakeholder groups and serve as catalysts for positive change;
- Honing adaptive leadership skills, understanding that deep system reform and complex community change happen only when leaders can employ skills to impact key stakeholders' values, beliefs and habits; and
- Collaborating with others, understanding that the capacity to build group consensus enables leaders to align their actions and administer resources strategically in service of advancing results.

### Continuous Improvement

Centered around Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) continuous improvement cycles, we use the simplest of tools and protocols that support communities from identifying results they want to achieve to quantifying improvements and spreading successful practices. At the heart of this practice is an unwavering commitment to using data — quantitative and qualitative — to understand the impact of strategies or practices. This component of the approach also encourages communities to consider opportunities to adopt, adapt or abandon efforts based on their results.

### Human-Centered Design

This user-centric, creative problem-solving approach provides tools and techniques for engaging the people you are trying to impact by authentically involving them at every step in the process. It also provides resources on how to collect, analyze and use qualitative data to inform action and refine processes.



#### ABOUT STRIVETOGETHER

StriveTogether partners with nearly 70 communities across the country, providing coaching, resources and rigorous approaches to create opportunities and close gaps in education, housing and so much more. Together, the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network impacts the lives of more than 11 million youth.

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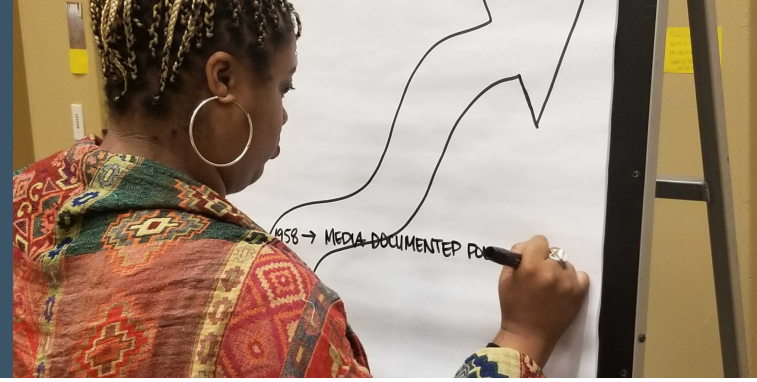
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Collaborative improvement is used by government, foundation, nonprofit, school district and other leaders as well as by those working directly with youth and families like case managers, health care workers and teachers. The process includes eight steps where participants ask questions, apply tools, develop strategies, analyze results and more..



## steps

## sample questions

# 1

### RESULT

Create a call to action around a population-level result to align actions across the community.

- What overall result(s) do you want?
- How will you know a change occurred?
- How does this demonstrate a commitment to racial equity?

# 2

### CURRENT CONDITIONS

Review qualitative data and disaggregated, trend data. Complete a population analysis and identify target population. Consider what partners should be involved to achieve results.

- What disparities exist?
- What do youth, parents and direct service providers think about the problem?
- What partners are engaged in the work?

# 3

### TARGET(S)

Set a global target and a one-year SMART target for the population you want to impact.

- How does the target focus on improving the outcome for a demographic population or eliminating a disparity?

# 4

### FACTOR ANALYSIS

Uncover the root causes contributing to trend data, the story behind the curve. Develop a universal factor analysis and a targeted factor analysis. Get below surface-level explanations. Beware of mental models and cognitive biases, apply systems thinking and involve those closest to the experience to analyze factors. Refine and prioritize a few factors for focus.

- What factors would impact your focus area?
- What stakeholders have you engaged to understand how the factors are affecting your target population?
- What beliefs and values have led to the disparities that exist today?

# 5

### IDENTIFY STRATEGIES

Consider which factors if shifted would constructively disrupt systems and increase equity and population-level change. Identify practice- and systemslevel strategies that have the potential to change prioritized factors. Include targeted and universal strategies that address mental models, system structures and behavior patterns. Avoid silver bullet thinking and use PDSA cycles to iterate and improve strategies.

- What partners do you need to engage to change systems, policies and practices?
- Which interventions are universal? Which are targeted?
- How will you involve those most adversely affected by the problem?

# 6

### TEST STRATEGIES

Use PDSA cycles to adapt and adjust strategies and ensure they are having the desired impact on your target.

- What data will show a change has occurred?
- Who do you need to engage to ensure intervention(s) reach the target population?
- What feedback from stakeholders would improve the intervention(s)?

# 7

### MONITOR AND IMPROVE

Reflect on the results, generate insights on patterns and develop hypotheses to apply learning to future work.

- What are you learning from your targeted strategies about what it takes to improve outcomes?
- What adaptive challenges are you overcoming?
- What are you learning about building a culture of equity and results?
- How are you tracking your work in order to know an improvement is being made? How frequently?
- Are your strategies impacting the target and the population you have selected?
- How do you know disparity gaps are closing?

# 8

### SCALE AND SPREAD SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Make and complete clear, measurable and aligned action commitments to identify and own immediate contributions.

- What is your plan for scaling and spreading effective practices?
- How will you communicate this work to the community?
- Who do you need to engage in order to scale your work?
- What specific population effective strategies emerged?

## Applying Collaborative Improvement in Salt Lake City, Utah

Collaborative improvement shifts the focus from an individual organization to multiple organizations working together on systems-level challenges. Through the process, communities build a common language and approach to using data for improvement. This builds trust and impact.

In Salt Lake City, Utah, StriveTogether and the United Way of Salt Lake are using this approach to tackle chronic absenteeism in grades K-3. The United Way of Salt Lake supports the Promise Partnership of Salt Lake, which is part of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network.

Between January and November 2017, United Way of Salt Lake and StriveTogether held seven learning sessions that included six teams from three school districts. Teams included parents, school staff and AmeriCorps volunteers. Teams learned how to use collaborative improvement tools and shared what was working and not working. When teams discovered that students with disabilities didn't feel like they belonged in school, the teams tested different strategies to increase the sense of belonging. They applied what they learned and developed strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism.

As a result of their efforts, chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities decreased significantly from the prior school year compared to the average of other students. At the same time, more third-grade students began meeting and exceeding the benchmark for reading proficiency — from 8% to 17%.

This work also built an improvement culture among Promise Partnership staff and community partners. The work continues as they tackle chronic absence in six school districts and apply collaborative improvement to other community-level challenges like food insecurity and the social service sector.