StriveTogether first released the Theory of Action (TM) in 2013 to provide communities with a road map for changing systems to improve outcomes for youth and families. This framework for change is rooted in how the work happens in communities across the Cradle to Career Network. The framework evolves as network members fail forward and learn together, building the civic infrastructure critical to getting better outcomes for youth and families.

This latest iteration, the fifth revision to the Theory of Action™ in eight years, was developed with network cradle-to-career partnerships. It strengthens the focus on racial and ethnic equity and places an even greater emphasis on systems transformation. Systems transformation occurs when communities build civic infrastructure that enables every Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian youth and family and those experiencing poverty to have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, cradle to career. This is a result of partnership with system leaders in making fundamental and institutionalized shifts in policies, practices, resources and power structures to eliminate structural racism and advance equitable outcomes.

Cradle-to-career partnerships are formal groups consisting of cross-sector organizational and system leaders (e.g., education, business, government, nonprofits, etc.) as well as grassroots organizations, neighborhood leaders and individual members of affected populations, especially youth and families who come together around a shared community vision. With support from backbone staff, the partnership group works together to define population-level challenges, develop and implement strategies to address those challenges, and hold systems accountable for results.
A cross-sector partnership, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian youth and families and those experiencing poverty, defines a geographic scope and organizes around an equity-driven cradle-to-career vision. The partnership establishes a diverse, cross-sector leadership table and accountability structure. The partnership develops a set of messages aligned to the equity-driven cradle-to-career vision, and communicates these messages across the community.

The partnership identifies core indicators for the cradle-to-career outcomes to share accountability for improving equitable outcomes. The partnership collects and publicly shares data for core indicators disaggregated by race, income, gender and other priority demographics. The partnership identifies, collects and publicly shares systems indicators.

The partnership adopts a framework for collaboration. The partnership establishes collaborative action networks with cross-sector representation and a clear call to action, effectively applying its collaborative framework. Collaborative action networks identify underlying factors that lead to inequitable systems. The partnership builds collaboration skills among backbone staff and the community.

The partnership establishes a backbone with daily management capacity, revenue sources to cover operational expenses and demonstrates commitment to hiring and retaining diverse staff. The partnership engages with local, state and/or federal leaders who influence policy. The partnership engages investors to support the operations and collaborative work of partners to advance equitable outcomes.

The partnership operates in alignment with the accountability structure. The partnership builds authentic relationships with youth, families and diverse community partners and publicly communicates progress toward shared goals. The partnership establishes a diverse, cross-sector leadership table and accountability structure. The partnership develops a set of messages aligned to the equity-driven cradle-to-career vision, and communicates these messages across the community.

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