Facilitation

for Community Change

BRIDGING RVA

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The editor is indebted to many individuals who are part of a national and regional community of practice, particularly those pioneers in the field of collective impact and effective group facilitation. We ask that you please also cite these authors for approaches and tools that are referenced with their names in the guide.

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Community Change Leaders,

First, thank you. If you are reading this, you are most likely already overextended because you have been acting to make your community better. We recognize that your time is precious, and we don't take for granted the opportunity to support you in improving outcomes for the people you serve.

Facilitation for Community Change is a resource for people who want to apply facilitation tools and techniques at the intersection of collective impact and continuous improvement. Our hope is that, whether you are new to one or several of these frameworks, you will find the language accessible and helpful for making connections between what are sometimes disconnected communities of practice. The guide also introduces several tools and techniques from each frame that might accelerate your work.

This guide was initially conceived of as a way to address challenges with common language and facilitation capacity between two partnering organizations, MSR2020 and Bridging RVA. Our community, not unlike others, is set up to get the results it is currently seeing. If we have a vision for something different, new behaviors will need to start with us. Facilitation is sometimes viewed as one dimensional or as something that almost everyone can do already. Yet moving from "Ideas to Action" is not easy—especially when the changes proposed are about improved practices and systems and not just more programs. Strong facilitation to impact this space will require courage, resilience, results focus, and emphasis on moving to and improving action.

Many people and organizations deserve to be acknowledged for their contributions to this resource and my own continued learning about facilitation, continuous improvement, and collective impact. We have done our best to give credit to these sources throughout instead of listing them here. I am particularly grateful to Kelli Parmley and Barbara Couto Sipe, former Executive Director of Bridging RVA and Executive Director of MSR2020, respectively, who also identified and advocated for funding to support this resource for the community.

I am also extremely grateful to the author, Saphira Baker, who has captured core aspects of our blended facilitation approach in very welcoming language. Her own experiences and expertise have been a great contribution to the guide and have already informed our work. Together, Saphira and I are honored to share the work of improving lives with so many committed and thoughtful people. We hope that aspects of this guide will strengthen and accelerate the work of improving lives with your community.

Appreciatively,

Jason W. Smith, PhD
Interim Executive Director
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Preface

You've just been given an assignment: to help a group of people who have never worked together come up with a plan. Not a plan of modest goals, but one of major proportions—to reduce the city's high school dropout rate or decrease homelessness statewide. Or perhaps you are working in a neighborhood and the task is more immediate: to bring a high quality after-school program to one of the area's middle schools or to improve the quality of neighborhood child care.

This guide is intended to arm you with the tools and understanding you need to facilitate successful community improvement efforts.

You've been called in to facilitate, and expectations are high. How do you know you've personally got what it takes to succeed at this task? Do you have the right people in the room? What steps will keep this group on track to achieve the desired results? Can you get this group of busy, opinionated, and well-intentioned people to trust each other and begin working as a team?

This guide is intended to arm you with the tools and understanding you need to facilitate successful community improvement efforts. It is written for practitioners and citizens involved in all levels of organizing change, with guidance for each phase of development, and it can be useful no matter when you become involved.

Facilitation for Community Change is organized so that you can pull out the insights and templates you need on the way to a meeting or read the book cover-to-cover ahead of time to confirm or develop your own approach to facilitation. There are new insights in the guide, which have been informed by years of facilitating community change in organizations and communities. The guide is also a compilation of some of the best resources in the field, pulled together in a simple format. Each section begins with a list of the intended results so that you may quickly go to the materials you need.

There is no one right way to facilitate groups, just as there is no one way to teach effectively. So much will depend on the content, conditions, and individuals involved. Yet there are skills, techniques, and frameworks that make it more likely to come up with a meaningful and realistic plan, to build the ownership of those in the room, and to provide the tools for the group to proceed without you to advance the work.

The method described in *Facilitation for Community Change* is particularly focused on helping facilitators integrate data into a collective action planning process. The guide includes tools that are easy to adopt and explain to groups, will accelerate and focus efforts, and will help work groups identify, achieve, and measure the results they seek.

We invite you to use this guide whether you are a newcomer to the field or a seasoned professional who has run meetings effectively for years. Consider reading this book as if you were having a conversation with a fellow professional who is sharing what he or she knows to be winning strategies in bringing about collective community change through a structured planning process.

This guide will provide methods, tools, and templates so that a reader achieves the following objectives:

- ✔ Understands and has increased capacity to facilitate collective impact models from planning to implementation
- ✔ Anticipates and manages six phases of facilitating and implementing collective action
- ✔ Integrates the use of data and measurement tools in facilitation to accelerate and focus action where it is needed

The method described in *Facilitation for Community Change* is particularly focused on helping facilitators integrate data into a collective action planning process.

CHAPTER I: Conditions for Success

Upon completion of this chapter, the reader will be able to do the following things:

- ✔ Understand the six phases of development for building effective collective impact efforts and the role of a facilitator in each phase
- ✔ Assess the readiness of a group to begin planning for collective action
- ✔ Have access to specific facilitation techniques for an inclusive, interactive, and accelerated start-up
- ✔ Be prepared to select a method of decision making that reflects your group's purpose, time frame, and level of authority

Is there a pattern to the way groups move from observation to action? What conditions make it most likely they will achieve their goals? What does it mean to have "collective impact"?

In the first part of Chapter I, collective impact is defined with an overview of the general phases that committees follow when seeking to achieve shared goals. There are tools to assess whether your committee is ready and to determine the steps you can take if they are not. The second part of the chapter addresses your role as a facilitator in helping a group achieve a shared vision.

Collective impact: people coming together in a structured way to achieve social change

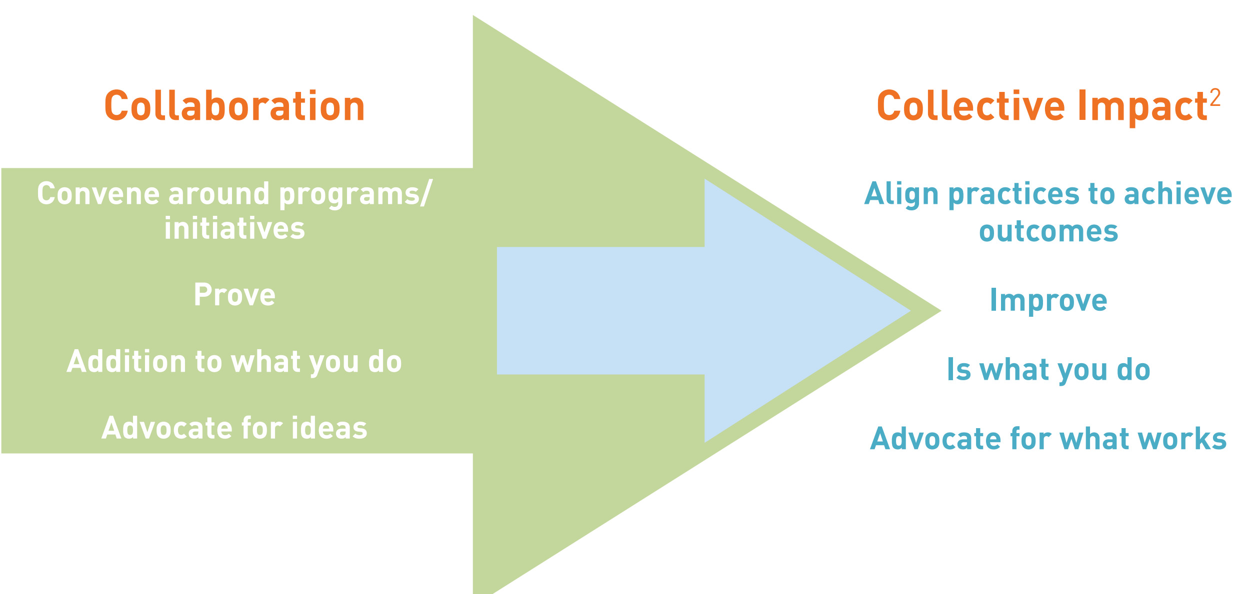
Collective Impact

What is "collective impact," and how is it different from assembling any coalition with good intentions? The distinction comes with the group's development of a shared vision from the start—one that is measurable and achievable only if group members align the resources of multiple organizations to get it done.

Collective impact is defined as people coming together in a structured way to achieve social change.[1] Participating organizations and individuals in collective impact efforts are like musicians in an orchestra—they are all responsible for the end product and have the trust and communication to rely on other participants doing their parts. At the same time, participants in these work groups and committees often share very different perspectives. Members may be residents, state or local public agency staff, business owners and private sector managers, school personnel, large and small non-profit representatives, higher education and city government officials, or members of grassroots and civic groups. Good facilitation of collective efforts requires bringing together diverse organizations and people and finding ways to leverage the assembled talents, resources, and passion for focused work.

People in successful collective impact models value their work with the others in the venture and view their unity as fundamental to achieving a greater scale of change. Depending on their stage of development, some work groups find it appropriate to develop an organizational infrastructure and staffing model that formally supports and sustains the cross-agency partnership. This entity, often referred to as a "backbone organization," has staff members who serve as conductors or conveners to focus and channel individuals' best work.

In the early stages of a collective model, one organizational leader may play the convening role informally by hosting and organizing planning sessions at his or her organization. In the latter stages, the convening backbone organization may be up and running, with staff serving to advance the committees and members actively participating in planning and implementation.

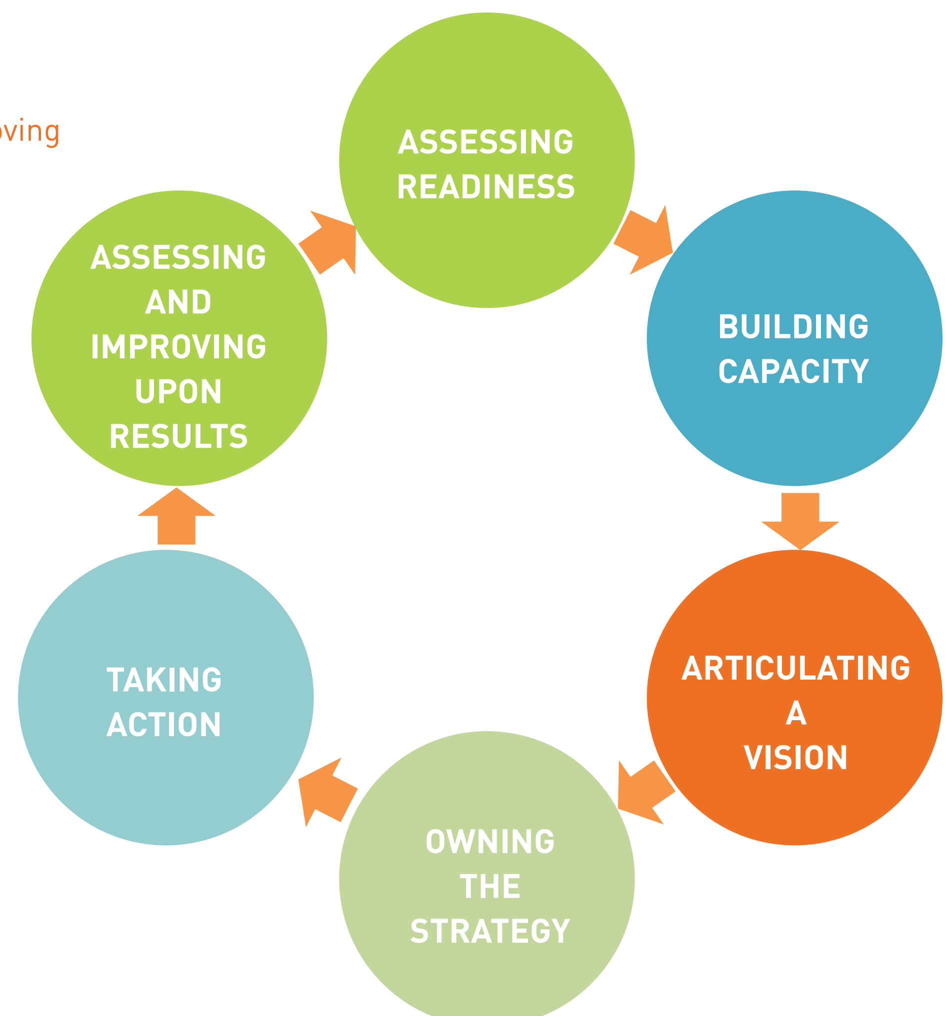


Phases of Development

How do you guide a group of individuals from meeting for the first time to achieving trust and cooperation to having a collective impact in a community or neighborhood? The end goal of a planning effort is to build sufficient ownership and commitment to action by the individuals on the team so that they can collectively achieve change on a scale not possible by any one or two organizations or individuals alone. Are there milestones and guideposts along the way?

You are beginning a journey, and like every trip, it is helpful to know some of the steps along the way. There are generally six steps in a collaborative planning process, from assessing the conditions for moving forward, to building trust among committee members, to establishing and implementing a shared vision and approach. For the purposes of this guide, the phases are identified as

1. Assessing Readiness
2. Building Capacity
3. Articulating a Vision
4. Owning the Strategy
5. Taking Action and
6. Assessing and Improving Upon Results.



In this section, we will discuss the first two phases—Assessing Readiness and Building Capacity. Both rely substantially on the facilitator and are essential for developing a strong working group.

1 Phase One: Assessing Readiness

The first and critical phase—before facilitation begins—is to assess whether the group has what it needs to succeed.

Successful work group efforts involving busy people start with an assumption that they have or will obtain the influence to bring about the results. The credibility of the table itself matters: the people sitting at it should be positioned to help achieve the goals and be prepared to contact and invite those who can assist along the way.

Participants must feel that their time will be valued and used productively. This is not code for suggesting that the group must be composed of heavy-hitting elite leaders and staffed heavily. There is an art in selecting people with a blend of positions, talents, and time and in creating conditions that result in real improvements. Here are several of the critical elements that help:

- ✔ **HAVE A CHAMPION.** This individual has visibility and credibility among the participants at the table, is seen as someone who will get things done, and motivates others in positions of influence to jump on board. He or she supports the committee by attending the meetings, committing to act on the final results, advocating for attention, and dedicating resources to the issue throughout the planning and implementation process.

- ✔ **ADOPT A SENSE OF URGENCY.** Participants need to feel that there is no time to waste. The work is more likely to be done quickly and well if there is a community and group sense that if they do not act, things are likely to get worse, and that the consequences of inaction are unacceptable. This ethic may be contrary to how many view planning efforts; the champion and the facilitator are key in conveying and modeling the urgency of the work.

- ✔ **OBTAIN PRE-COMMITMENTS TO ACT ON THE RESULTS.** A commitment to act upon the results of a planning process will fuel participants' energy and make them choose committee work over other pressing demands. This can be a promise from funders to seed the effort; a commitment from a governor, mayor, or other leader to consider the results in a budget; or the lead up to submitting a promising grant opportunity or program design.

- ✔ **RECRUIT BY CHARACTER, NOT POSITION.** When given the choice, recruit a "guiding coalition"[3] of strategic thinkers who are respected among their peers, have experience at all levels of an organization, or who may be active residents in the community or neighborhoods. They will bring increased credibility to the group, help the group have continuous insights, share news of the progress, and facilitate getting others involved and invested in both the plan and its implementation.

- ✔ **PLAN FOR STAFF SUPPORT.** Anticipate that your committee will need support, communication, and information between meetings. In addition to the facilitator, consider assigning a staff member to review and prepare data for the meetings, keep records of decisions, and help identify and invite subject matter experts to assist committee members.

While committee members will often take the lead on completing tasks between meetings, they need to know that meeting time will be used efficiently. A staff member can keep the momentum going so that the plan progresses and strengthens each time the group meets.

- ✔ **CONFIRM THE NEED.** Have the data to back up your assumptions that a work group is needed and that this approach is the right way to address it. Sharing background research early with participants will make it easier for them to define their own vision and intended results. Participants will then be less apt to become stalled in their deliberations by seeking definition or steering the conversation toward another issue. Before your first meeting, have the research evidence ready to answer two questions: why are we bringing people together, and what do we hope to change?

If you don't have these conditions and can afford it, wait to start until you do. In some cases, participants may already be selected for the planning effort, or the committee is well underway. In these instances, there may be value to assessing individuals' interests and motivations to be able to manage them more effectively throughout the planning process and anticipate potential conflicts and opportunities.

A simple way to assess capacity and potential investment is to conduct an inventory of what each member stands to gain or lose from participating in your work group. Are there participants who will seek to promote a particular program within the collective effort? Anyone whose job is at risk if the recommendations go one way or another? Are there others who may benefit from the access and information within the group? These personal motivations do not necessarily counterbalance participants' altruistic reasons for being at the table. Yet understanding the reasons can help a facilitator anticipate roadblocks, assess the potential level of investment in the room, and help build connections and relationships among participants.

Participants need to feel that there is no time to waste

Ten Questions to Assess Readiness of the Group for Action

1. Has the group been given **authority** and **independence** to prepare a final recommendation?
2. Is it clear where and how the group gets its **influence to act** and recommend?
3. Are there resources that have already been dedicated to the **final product**, including funds, in-kind support, and staffing?
4. Are there one or more members who can serve as a **champion** and who have community visibility, authority, and credibility to advocate for and advance the final results?
5. Are members **ready to commit** to attending meetings and completing homework?
6. Are members clear about and inspired by what will happen to their **recommendations** and who will receive them once they are complete?
7. Is there a **sense of urgency** to act?
8. Is there **diversity** among participants' viewpoints, level of experience, type of organization, race, and ethnicity that will contribute to a full understanding of the issue?
9. Is there **sufficient volunteer or staff time** assigned to help with logistics, data analysis, and advancing work between meetings?
10. Is there sufficient time allocated for completion of a thorough **planning and deliberation process** that will lead to collective action?

What do you do if, as the facilitator, you assess that the conditions for action have not been met? There are some non-negotiable conditions:

- Without a champion and an influential audience for the final report, the group will flounder.
- If a majority of members do not appear ready to attend regularly and roll up their sleeves in and outside the meetings, you will be driving the process alone.
- If the group is homogeneous, you are likely to come to quick decisions yet stumble when moving them to communities for implementation.
- If there is little data confirming the task to begin with, there is a risk of stalling as members seek to research, understand, and define the problem themselves.

In all these cases, urge your colleagues to wait to begin the planning process until you can meet these criteria. However, some conditions can evolve with the process.

- ➔ If resources have not yet been committed, you will want to be sure there is a realistic plan to obtain them.
- ➔ If staffing is not available immediately, you will either want a commitment to recruit a staff member or volunteer or be prepared to serve in this role yourself, but ensure you understand the time it will take.
- ➔ If there is not a sense of urgency at the first meeting, you can often bring that about with effective education, a passionate champion, and a compelling vision for change.
- ➔ If the reason for convening has not been verified by data, have staff conduct an analysis and share the preliminary findings in accessible language that will invite participants to revise or refine the task.

The Facilitator's Role

What role does the facilitator have in helping a group achieve its goal? What kind of skills and characteristics are helpful in bringing out the best in participants? In this section, we present the broad attributes of an effective facilitator and how the role he or she plays shifts over time as the group's work becomes more defined and closer to implementation. This is followed by more specific tools and techniques for running effective meetings and planning processes in Chapter II.

The facilitator's role in this stage is to support and advance the process of discovery, focus, and resolution. From the beginning, the facilitator wants to establish conditions that make it more likely the group will achieve change through structured and focused action. Initially, you will be the glue that guides the group through this process.

The facilitator is at once a coach, a convener, a synthesizer of the group's ideas, and when the terrain gets murky, the keeper of the vision and inspirational flame. The facilitator will ground people in why they are there and need to stay.

Groups are not well served by a facilitator who takes charge, sets a direction, and seeks to get majority support from the group for his or her individual approach. The humility of the facilitator—and the extent to which he or she gives the work back to the group graciously and effectively throughout a planning process—is an essential ingredient for long-term traction. That is not to be confused with being noncommittal or detached. The courage and clarity of the facilitator—and the ability to observe and name challenges, tension, or opportunities—is essential to building trust and retaining momentum. Yet the effective facilitator also has the ability to bring the group to a consensus, vote, or closure. This ability to spot and manage when a group is united and when there is dissension helps the group make decisions, take action, and accelerate the envisioned results.

Understand the boundaries of your role, your authority, and what you can accomplish as a facilitator. You may seek to steer the conversation, make decisions, advocate for your preferences, or otherwise put aside a more neutral role and become an active participant in the work group. Yet as the facilitator, you hold the trust of the group. In most cases, demonstrating strong preferences or reactions will undermine your future effectiveness to find common ground. Still, there are times, as noted in the roles below, when it is appropriate to step out of your role consciously and share your expertise and opinions. When this happens, what is important is that you state clearly to the group that you are shifting your role in sharing this information but not crossing the boundary of advocating for or steering the group in your preferred direction.

A strong facilitator has an excellent ability to listen carefully, appreciate and draw out people with a range of learning and participation styles, and communicate with clarity and objectivity the progress, findings, and conflicts underway. He or she has the flexibility to adapt an agenda or direction based on the interests and passion in the room while ensuring that the group remains true to its vision and identified goals and timeframe.

As a facilitator, you are likely to assume one or all of these four roles at various points in a planning process, largely depending on when you enter and what is required. In all roles, it is important to state that role clearly at the beginning of any work group process and to acknowledge when you are stepping outside of that role to express a personal opinion, share your expertise, or otherwise add to the discussion without retaining neutrality. Read each for guidance on the perspective to adopt as a facilitator to see which best fits your assignment:

Participant Observer

A facilitator needs to be a keen observer of the moods, opinions, and expertise of all those in the committee at each moment of the meeting. He or she must have a pulse on the energy and attention of people in the room at all times, as well as picking up on dwindling or growing enthusiasm as the work evolves over weeks and months. An effective facilitator observes the ways in which individuals participate and relate to each other and draws out all voices for an inclusive process. A facilitator is engaged and present in the discussion as an active participant and understands how to run meetings objectively, making sure everyone is heard, no one is marginalized, and the conversation is valued.

Convener or Expert

A convener may be part of an organization or group that has invited a group of individuals to come together. In a role of facilitator, the convener may be perceived as less objective than an outside facilitator. However, there is also an advantage for the work group in knowing that a convener will likely be around to help manage the product once it is complete and will have a vested stake in its development. Similarly, an individual or convener in the work group may have substantial background in a topic and seek to add this learning to the conversation, thus needing to shift his or her particular role. In either case, it does not mean that you lose your voice. When you feel the need to contribute, step out of the facilitator or participant role—and let the group know explicitly that you are doing so—before sharing your opinions and expertise.

Synthesizer

Acute listening and analytical skills are essential in capturing the content and the direction of the conversation, as is being able to identify and bring to light the underlying issues that may be behind a discussion. This may include pulling out themes for clarity or affirmation, recognizing and managing conflicting viewpoints, synthesizing conversation threads, and posing questions the group needs to answer to move ahead. A synthesizer also reminds the group of decisions that have been made and uses decisions as milestones to move the group toward action. The ability to synthesize can be exercised by listening and capturing what people say, recording actions and decisions on a flip chart to show movement and validate progress, asking strategic questions, and using inclusive methods where all have an opportunity to contribute.

Coach

As the committee moves from planning to implementation and more happens outside of meetings, the facilitator may transition into a coach for the work group. A coach can help remind participants of the original vision and guide the team in sketching out various implementation methods. The facilitator's goal here is to make the team completely self-sufficient over a period of time and provide individuals with the tools and knowledge they need to proceed on their own. It is important that the coach role be a clear final phase of the work group planning and not linger indefinitely. Facilitators retain their objectivity and credibility, in part, by not confusing their role with those of staff and by delivering on the original charge on time as assigned.

TIPS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Introduction to Results Based Facilitation identifies the importance of asking effective questions and suggests preparing questions in advance to "engage people, focus discussion, and move conversations forward toward meeting results."[4]

"The Effective Question ignites the conversation and engages people in sharing information and listening to each other. Effective questions are:

- ✔ open-ended (i.e., not answered merely with yes or no)
- ✔ inquisitive (i.e., as what or how?)
- ✔ you-oriented (i.e., what do you think about...? Or how do you feel about...?)
- ✔ appreciative (i.e., trusting that the person has the answer)"

Guidelines for Effective Group Facilitation[5]

- Manage the time and talents of the group respectfully
- Model effective meeting management
- Set clear objectives
- Keep meetings on track
- Provide structure and context
- Encourage individual participation
- Address confusion or conflict
- Synthesize and document learning

Results of Effective Group Facilitation

- Safe and productive deliberation
- Productive use of time and expertise
- Sense of purpose and urgency
- Focused and progressive discussions
- Understanding of purpose with clear decision-making processes
- Interactive deliberation
- Open management and resolution of conflict
- Focus on causes and solutions vs. symptoms

A strong facilitator supports the process of discovery

2 Phase Two: Building Capacity

As a facilitator, you will learn over time to make yourself nonessential, gradually and steadily building the ownership and leadership of participants until the team is fully underway and can move ahead without you. One of your gifts will be to model facilitation and build that capacity in others so they may take this over as the group moves through from planning to implementation.

This fourth part of Chapter I highlights several techniques facilitators can use with planning committees seeking to bring about social change through collective action. While there are volumes written on effective facilitation, these are valuable techniques to building the trust and commitment needed to sustain efforts shared by multiple partners and individuals.

Essential Facilitator's Tools and Techniques

What are the most promising techniques to guide a group forward? How does a facilitator keep the conversation grounded in real life conditions and resources? What can a facilitator do to encourage passion, deliberation, and ownership by participants while keeping the effort on track, realistic, and producing timely results?

A facilitator has the capacity to create something out of nothing. People walk into a room with the hope that their time will be spent doing something of value. There may be little more than a piece of paper on the table. The way the facilitator structures and runs the meeting sets the tone for future meetings. While much of a group's identity and focus is also shaped by who is around the table, the facilitator is managing the conversation to capture and build upon the experience in the room.

Beginning with the basics, arrange the room so that people can easily talk with one another and are in close proximity to each other. Keep in mind that the way you arrange a room can, for some, serve as a visual reminder of the shared agenda that is emerging. As you develop the vision and purpose documents, this metaphor becomes even more vivid. The facilitator can encourage a sense of progress and community by posting a flip chart with a common vision or mission on the walls of a meeting room, allowing participants to see their goals in working together.

Classroom style seating or a large board table with multiple empty chairs encourages more passive listening. In these settings a facilitator can fall into the role of lecturer, and participants can fall into private conversations with those they know already, easily check their phones, or otherwise disengage. Use small tables arranged in a semi-circle or arrange chairs and tables into a U shape to make sure that participants will not need to turn their backs to listen, speak, or watch a presentation. There are multiple books and articles on setting up rooms appropriate for the size of the group and the activity. Often a good meeting begins with heavy lifting and re-arranging of chairs and tables by the facilitator and whoever is there to lend a hand. Where possible, check out the room ahead of time and arrange the space for the exact number of work group members.

A facilitator has the capacity to create something out of nothing.

Now imagine that you've got the group assembled. There is a sense of purpose and urgency, as well as excitement, about who is in the room and the change you can bring about together. It may seem counterintuitive, but this is the right time for you to talk about process—specifically, how you are going to work together. As the facilitator, you will want to create space on the agenda to outline how decisions will be made, the roles of committee members, the length of the time together, and the charge of the group. Just as the builder needs the architect's drawings, the committee benefits from a road map for its work together. And though this can feel very basic, it is never a waste of time.

Similarly, inviting all committee members to speak early and often about why they are there in the first few meetings has immediate benefits. When facilitators bypass engaging participants or talking about process in favor of efficiency, they risk ending up with deadening presentations, silence, and confusion about whether things have been decided several meetings down the line.

Below are six techniques for initiating a strong planning discussion. In Chapter II we will provide more detail on how to manage the first few meetings, where developing a charge, sketching out a joint vision, and setting up and implementing a structure to complete the work is getting underway.

Set an Agenda

An effective facilitator develops two agendas: (1) a simple agenda that is designed in consultation with an executive committee or leadership team in advance and sent to all participants ahead of time to be clear on the content and (2) an annotated agenda that serves as a "playbook" outlining the methods, techniques, and remarks the facilitator and other presenters will use throughout the meeting. This is kept for internal use and often shared with the client or host organization prior to the meeting (see Appendix I for samples).

The simple agenda begins with a welcome and a statement of the intent of the meeting, where the facilitator or convener provides the context of the project (how far along committee members are, what's at stake, what to expect, etc.). She or he describes not only the results for the specific meeting that day but also the contribution to the larger effort (where the group is going and how the exercise today will help). This is also a time to ask questions. Mark times on the agenda that allow for enough deliberation to understand and move forward without getting bogged down.

✔ If more time is needed than the agenda indicates, an effective method is to address the issue: "We're scheduled to move on from this item in five minutes, but it looks like we might need a few more. Would you be able to spend more time on this and shorten our next item by the same amount of time?" In general, facilitators gain credibility and increase attendance when they keep to the agenda and end on time.

Beginning a meeting with high energy is important. It is often useful to begin each meeting with a time to share strategic updates and check in with the group.[6] Ask questions that help focus people on the results you seek and connect the work in the room with their knowledge and experience outside of the meetings. Ask, "Is there anything that has happened since we last met that is important for people to know as we do this work?" or "Have you had the opportunity to talk to anyone about this work since we last met, and if so, what did you learn?" With these questions, meetings develop a rhythm that is trusting and inviting. Participants may begin to look forward to the first 5–10 minutes of checking in on relevant news at the beginning of each session. It allows the team to keep in touch with news in the local community, and participants who speak early in the meeting are more likely to continue contributing later on. Are people sharing for too long? Make it clear that the update can be no more than 30 seconds and have participants pass around an hourglass timer or stopwatch to add some humor and speed to the conversation.

Saving five or ten minutes to wrap up at the end of the meeting has value in letting the group see progress that has been made and what is to come next. With brevity and precision, an effective facilitator can sum up the themes of the discussion, review the decisions that were made, and confirm or request action commitments to complete work before the next meeting.

An annotated agenda is a script for the facilitator. It will include the times, handouts, and activities for each segment of the meeting as well as remarks and instructions for exercises. When there is more than one convener, co-facilitator, or expert who is planning to speak or lead a part of the meeting, the annotated agenda also provides a script and/or delineates a time and objective for their contributions. The benefit of an annotated agenda is largely in determining a reasonable pace for the meeting, planning in advance the materials and time needed, and on the day of the meeting, allowing the facilitator to place all of his or her attention on those in the room rather than on how he or she will manage the flow. See Appendix I for a sample.

Participants

When a group is first assembled, there are many schools of thought as to how to open up a conversation and create a trusting environment. The term "ice breaker" has been used to signify breaking the silence that can come upon a room when individuals are unfamiliar with each other and are then asked to put their best ideas forward. Typical activities to connect those in the room include asking individuals to pair up, interview each other for a few minutes each, and then "introduce" the other to the crowd. Another common activity is for each individual to share his or her favorite movie or book or to describe themselves as a commercial product, animal, or food. Some facilitators plant small toys around the room to lighten the environment, initiate conversation, and encourage people not to take themselves too seriously. These types of activities have the benefit of introducing humor and collegiality into a meeting space early and creating a way to quickly find out about and enjoy the preferences and personalities of people in the room. They are generally used for groups that do not know each other in hopes that the exercises can foster new relationships.

In collective impact work, because the topic is often serious and there is urgency to act quickly, opening questions that cut to the heart of the matter work well. Questions that open up a dialogue about why people are assembled, where their passions are, and what they hope to accomplish (or sometimes what they fear won't happen) are good ways to get committee members' identities and core values out in the room early and to begin building a team. These more contextual questions help participants understand who is on board to help them with the task. Sharing insights briefly (limiting comments to 30–60 seconds per person) builds both credibility and pride. Another method of focusing people's energy on the task and building knowledge is to send participants a relevant article or handout ahead of time and ask for their brief takeaway as to what they learned and how it relates to the results they seek in the work group.

Opening questions and statements that can generate thoughtful responses:

?

- **"What history brought you to this table to address this issue?" (Not the résumé history—your personal journey.)**
- **"My one big hope for this collective effort over the next year is..."**
- **"What is one of your biggest fears that will hinder the success of this group?"**
- **"Can you describe ways in which individuals, organizations, or communities have benefited from the work so far?" (For meetings that are part of an ongoing effort.)**
- **"What do you think are the top two considerations for this group when it comes to the issue we are addressing?"**
- **"What is your motivation for wanting to be at this table now?"**

Establish Ground Rules

When a group is first assembled, there is value in asking participants what it would take for them to have an honest and productive dialogue where their best ideas are shared and they can fully and safely participate. This need not take more than ten minutes, yet it is generally time well spent. These "ground rules," or guidelines, can help people who are reserved to relax, those concerned about hierarchies to feel free to speak, and keep talkative people from dominating the conversation. To support the guidelines, the facilitator may bring them up from time to time as needed during meetings in order to remind the group of their aspirations for the conversation and conditions for the time together. Some facilitators keep these posted on the wall each time the committee meets.

Sample Ground Rules or Guidelines

- We are all equals in the room
- Participation from everyone is encouraged and welcomed
- We are honest and direct
- We are focused on finding solutions
- Plans work best when everybody owns them
- There is only one conversation at a time
- What takes place in this room is confidential

Confirm Decision-Making Methods

Imagine you have worked steadily with a group over time, come up with a vision and recommendations, and are a couple of weeks away from finalizing your report, when you hit an impasse. One of your colleagues brings up a concern and states that it must be addressed in order to obtain his or her support. Few of your committee members agree, yet you have adopted a consensus form of decision making. Even finding time to discuss this concern, let alone getting agreement, could take weeks, given everyone's busy schedules. What do you do?

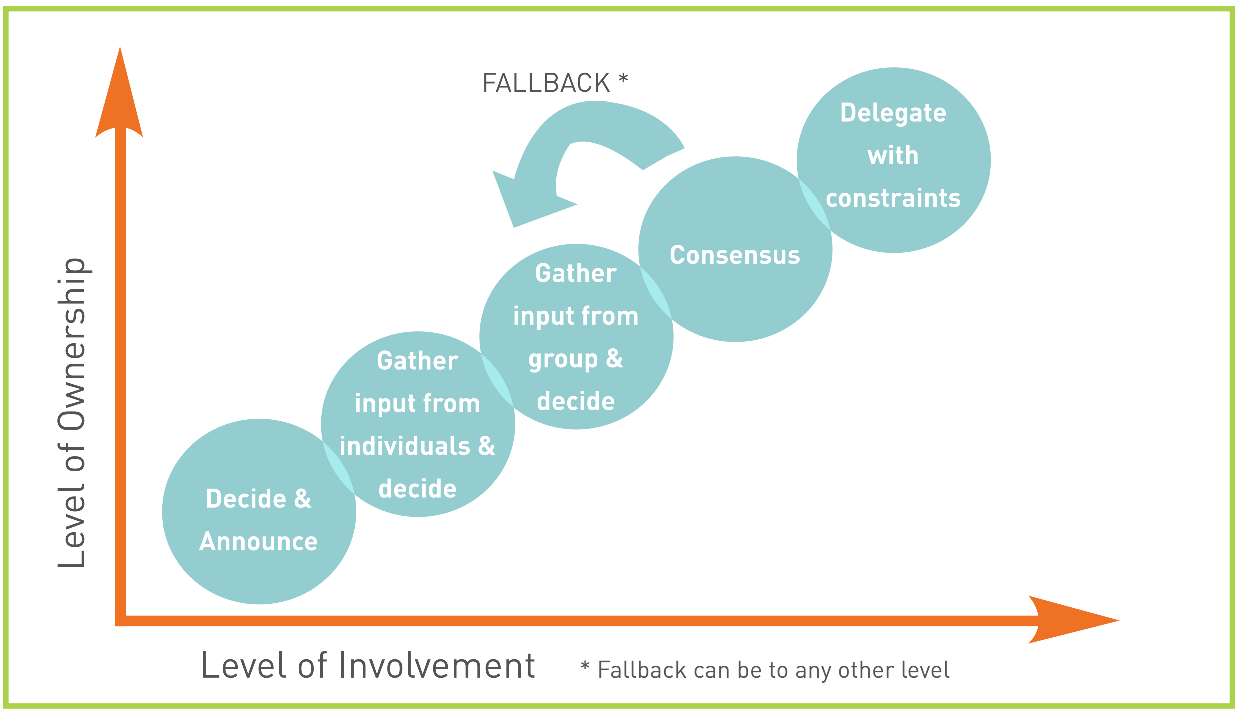
In the eleventh hour, there is little you can do except hear the participant out and hope, through deliberation and sharing options for consensus decision making, that he or she will choose to live with the overwhelming agreement in the group and not block the report's passage. Yet there is much you can do as a facilitator to anticipate and avoid this kind of situation in the first few meetings.

Select a decision making model early. Get the group's commitment to adopt the method and use it consistently. Consciously adopting a decision-making approach will save you time, build credibility and interaction, and allow you to be inclusive and engage people with diverse and passionate viewpoints at all stages of the work.

Interaction Associates identifies six factors to consider when selecting a decision method: stakeholder buy-in, time available, importance of decision, information needed, capability, and building teamwork.[7] Interaction Associates' chart below shows the relationship between the decision-making process you select and the anticipated level of ownership and involvement of the group. It also identifies the role and expectations of the leader. For example, if the leader is a city manager accountable for having a plan in place within three months, she may want to seek input from the committee and make the final decision herself about the recommendation rather than delegate all authority to the group or rely on what might be a lengthy consensus-building process. This is reasonable; the important step is to be explicit about the decision-making process you'd like to adopt from the start and to stay with that process when the pressure is on.

As a facilitator, you are likely to be more of a neutral participant rather than a leader, where your primary purpose is to advance the process of a highly invested group. If the group is convened by a neutral facilitator, where all members have a high stake in the outcome and the focus is on developing content, the consensus decision-making process is often the best approach to adopt.

Levels of Involvement in Decision-Making Process[8]



✔ "Consensus is a group decision making process which attempts to ensure that everyone involved is an equal participant, all opinions are considered and the final decision comes about through extensive discussion and the constructive resolution of critique and dissent. Consensus is not unanimity, nor is it compromise. It is a decision that everyone in the group accepts (even though people may have concerns, reservations or prefer other options to that which is decided), and should be what the group considers the best possible decision in a given context."[9]

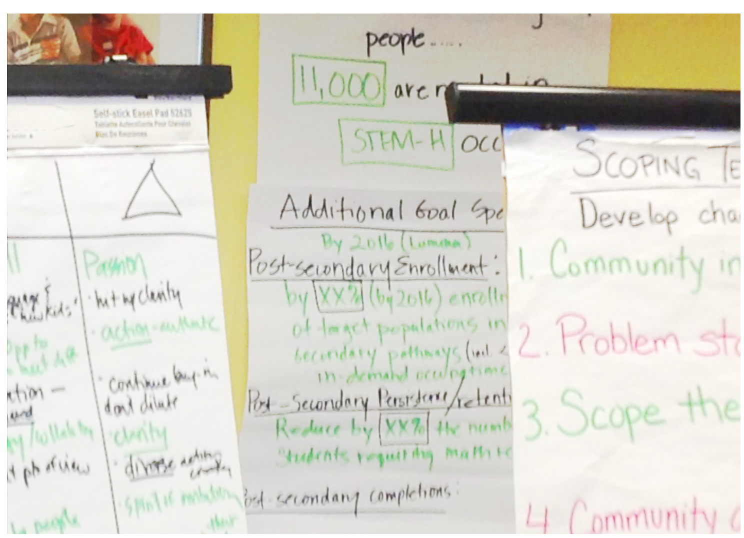
There are three options in consensus: "support, stand aside, or block."[10] Committees working to improve social conditions often do well with consensus because it is inclusive and allows for equal sharing of power and ideas. However, most groups will also want to choose an alternative if the committee has stalled and must come to a decision. Options include agreeing to a vote that must carry the majority, two-thirds, or 75% of the members of the committee.

There are arguments that introducing voting into a consensus model is divisive and can be destructive to the team ethic that has developed; thus, it is important to use voting only when all other options within consensus have been explored, and there is significant risk of losing cohesion, focus, and precious time.

SUPPORT a proposal if you	**STAND ASIDE** from a proposal if you	**BLOCK**[11] a proposal if you
✔ believe that the proposal agrees with the basis of unity and is the best decision possible at this moment and ✔ are committed to following through with it.	✔ do not have enough info but trust that others do; ✔ will be unable to follow through for personal reasons; ✔ are unable to make up your mind about the decision; and/or ✔ disagree but can live with the decision.	✔ believe it is against the basis of unity or ✔ could not in good conscience live with the group making this decision.

Use Flip Charts

Flip charts play a large role in work groups: they record the body of the decisions, reflect the main points of the conversation, and provide a clear and legible record that demonstrates that people's ideas are being heard. White boards and smart boards can also play this role, so long as individuals at the table are able to view the full progress of their ideas from the beginning of the meeting until its conclusion and have an ongoing record of decisions made.



Facilitators who use flip charts effectively are skilled in the logistics as well as the art of recording. While there are books written on using flipcharts, the main logistics are simple enough:

(1) number the flip chart pages so that participants can see the order and notes can follow;
(2) use alternating colors and large letters so that they are easy to see from a distance;
(3) write legibly; and
(4) capture individuals' ideas and phrases using their own language.

The art of using flip charts has to do with capturing enough of the intent of a phrase or idea so that it is immediately recognizable to those in the room as their own language. It is not the facilitator's role to re-phrase or articulate but to document and synthesize conversations in bite-size statements. A second and related talent has to do with being able to recognize and identify themes, ask and post questions on the chart, and otherwise use the flip chart as a focal point to help the conversation evolve and focus. This must be done while the facilitator's main attention is on the group (as a participant observer), rather than on the flip chart itself. For a full orientation to the effective use of flip charts, consult "The Very Basics of Chart Writing," in the *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*.[12]

A good flip chart can act as a first draft of an evolving constitution for the group. Scribing what is taking place elevates, documents, and advances collective thoughts and progress. A thorough set of flip chart notes can form the basis for a final report or set of recommendations. A room filled up with logical and progressive flip charts displayed on the walls can demonstrate productivity and follow-through to those at the table. Make sure that flip charts are translated into meeting minutes with a quick turnaround so that participants continue to see themselves and their collective progress in the process and move directly into the next phase of work at the subsequent meeting.

SELECTED BENEFITS OF USING FLIP CHARTS[13]

(Excerpted from The Big Book of Flip Charts, Robert Lucas, 1999)

- ✔ Signals shift from expert or presenter to facilitator
- ✔ Reinforces or provides opportunity to clarify what was heard
- ✔ Actively involves multiple learning styles
- ✔ Participants can refer to their work without interrupting to repeat
- ✔ Participants can make decisions more quickly
- ✔ Improves ability to reach consensus
- ✔ Presentation seems better prepared and more convincing

Once a facilitator has worked to bring participants on board, understand their motivations, and structured meetings to be interactive and productive, the next step is to build trust and confirm a clear vision and charge. Chapter II describes ways to build the group's ownership and investment in obtaining realistic, grounded, and aspirational results.

CHAPTER II: Planning for Impact

Upon completion of this chapter, the reader will be able to do the following things:

- ✔ Understand how and when to use and integrate data into a planning process
- ✔ Have common language for the data and metrics that can form the backbone of a collective plan
- ✔ Learn facilitation methods to help groups articulate a shared vision with measurable results
- ✔ Review effective methods for incorporating community and other voices into your work

How can a vision be both aspirational and easy to measure? Are there promising methods to moving a work group from planning to action? What role does data play in the organizational phases of collective action?

This chapter spells out ways to set clear expectations for participants in work groups, to articulate a shared vision, and to use data and community input to sharpen recommended solutions. The first part of this section provides an overview on the kind of data that is generally most useful to collective planning and implementation and introduces language for metrics that will be used throughout the guide. The second part of this chapter highlights effective facilitation techniques that engage multiple stakeholders, including partners and residents outside of the work group's membership.

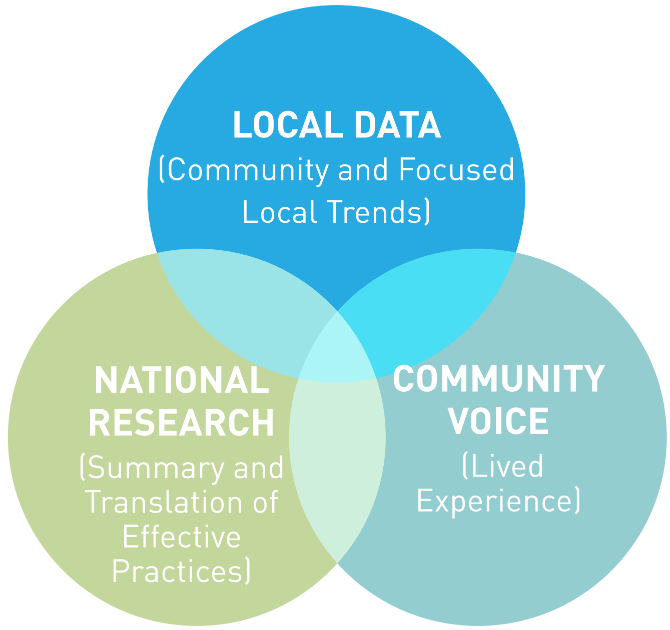
As a facilitator you are aiming to achieve collective impact—guiding participants to work together in new ways that align and draw upon the resources of multiple individuals and organizations. Your objective is to move a group from planning to action that meets the needs of the community. To do this well, clarity of purpose will be essential, and data will be an important resource for you and your team. Research and data, presented and interpreted simply, will confirm and challenge participants' assumptions and opinions and assist them in becoming more precise and focused as to the change they seek.

While it is easiest to begin planning with a group from the start, a facilitator coming into the process mid-stream can also benefit from revisiting whether the group has confirmed a charge and has developed a shared agenda—two early and important steps. Has your group followed a rigorous process to produce its vision and strategies? Is the group still uncertain or imprecise as to where it is headed or how it will know when it is successful? At any stage of development, the facilitator can introduce modified versions of these formative visioning exercises to confirm and strengthen the group's purpose and provide a stronger framework for future work.

Use of Data to Facilitate Results

How can a facilitator help work group members deliberate and agree upon where they are headed? How does your work group distinguish between the aspirational long-term results participants want and the painstaking and patient steps to get there? Who has time to pull together a multitude of sources and make sense of all the available research?

As a facilitator, you will want to encourage your work group members to rely on different sources of evidence and data throughout the planning process. Integrating data into your meetings and work not only increases the rigor and quality of your approach, it makes it much more likely that your actions will be focused where they are needed in the community. Data also helps participants align the work with a time commitment and move from theory and design to achieving the results.

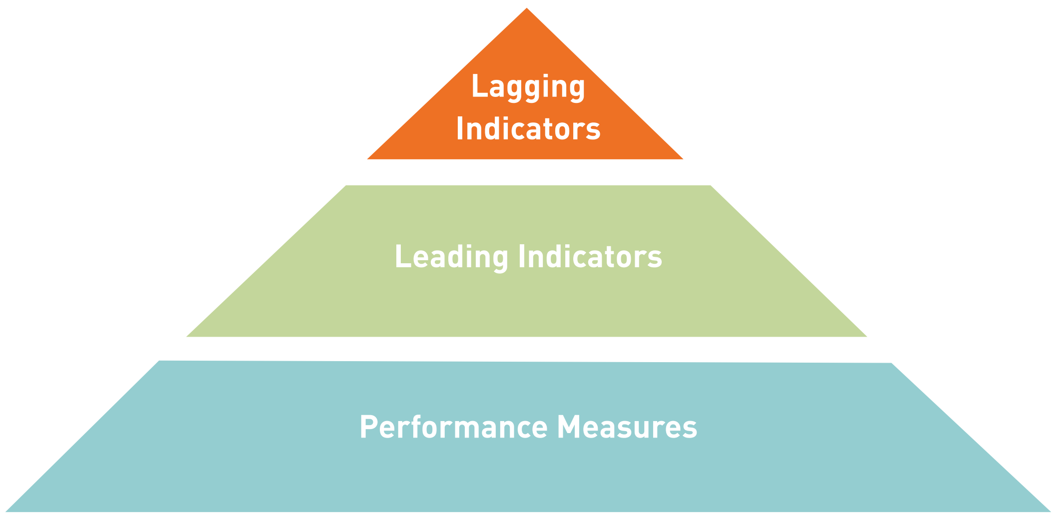


Bridging RVA, in Richmond, Virginia, has adapted the diagram (right) from StriveTogether to represent three sources of information essential to collective action efforts: local data, national research, and community voices. These are described in more detail in the following pages using language Jason Smith at Bridging RVA developed with the community.

Rely on different sources of evidence and data

Local Data

For a planning group, local data can come in the form of census data, child and family well-being reports, health rankings, school achievement trends, recent surveys, and available assessments of needs and assets from the region or locality. Smith has suggested a pyramid framework for organizing and using the reams of data and evidence available to a group. The intent of the framework is to help groups create a common language that demystifies data and gets everyone on the same page. Smith's suggested terms are used throughout this guide and represented below: lagging indicators, leading indicators, and performance measures.



Lagging Indicators

Lagging indicators are the measures that will be most useful to your group in developing its shared vision—they are the results the group intends to achieve. Mark Friedman, who created the Results-Based Accountability method, describes these measures as "community indicators"[14] that can help inform the desired long-term result or condition for a particular population. These long-term community level measures are also referred to in logic models as either the ultimate outcome or the long-term impact. There are several comprehensive guides on logic models and other publications on outcome-based evaluation and program development that provide more detail on this topic.[15]

The term "lagging indicators" implies that it takes time to change conditions and that movement forward will require contributions from multiple parts of the community. Lagging indicators are broad enough that they can also be dependent on policies, economic conditions, or social trends that are outside of a work group's ability to influence. Socio-economic and demographic data from the United States Census, district reports on education, and national ranking reports are most likely to be your initial sources in identifying a community's lagging indicators. By reviewing these broad indicators of the well-being of your population—and then digging down to specific populations, neighborhoods, or organizations—your work group can begin honing in on those populations most central to its work.

Leading Indicators

Leading indicators reflect a change in conditions that contributes to achieving the lagging indicators. Changes in leading indicators can be accomplished more quickly and are more likely to be within a group's capacity to influence and analyze. StriveTogether, in its work with communities, refers to these indicators as "contributing indicators."[16] According to Smith, lagging indicators "break down the complexity into actionable bites" and allow groups to target strategies to specific populations or pinpoint components of a problem where a group can make headway. For example, if a group is assessing how to improve access to post-secondary education, attempting to change the rates of post-secondary enrollment for a region (a lagging indicator) may be overwhelming. Instead, digging into the data and analyzing the completion rates of federal financial aid forms by the region's low-income students (a leading indicator) can open up possibilities for getting started.

Leading indicators are similar to interim outcomes on a traditional logic model: they represent the interim change a group can influence with its collective resources and activities. Leading indicators reflect changes in behaviors and conditions that logically tie to the intended community result.

Performance Measures

Performance measures are essential for measuring the direct contribution of a particular program or practice within a portion of the population. To understand contribution, it can be important to measure efforts, quality, participation, and outcomes. People familiar with logic models will be accustomed to thinking about inputs, outputs, and short-term outcome measures that reflect changes in behavior or conditions that result from a program or service. Others familiar with Mark Friedman's results-based accountability will think in terms of quantity, quality, and "is anyone better off?"[17]

No matter what language is most familiar to you, the important thing is to understand what each of these pieces of information can tell you and how they are logically linked. For example, knowing how much effort or action is being taken can give the group a sense of how close it is to reaching all the people who could benefit from the practice, is essential to understanding return on investment, and can be combined with other information to better understand quality and outcomes.

Quality performance measures can come from audits, observations against criteria, participant accounts, administrative data on clients' participation, and surveys. Quality can also be measured in response to how well a program or practice reaches the priority population.

The aim of all these measures is to demonstrate improvements in people's lives. Sometimes a program or practice can reasonably be thought to directly improve a leading indicator for participants. Often, however, there are many things that contribute to those indicators, and a more appropriate measure is at the program level—a performance outcome that reflects a change in behavior, knowledge, or attitudes among participants—and leads logically to the desired result. In these cases, there is frequently an assumption that the new behaviors generated by the collective group's program or practice will transfer beyond the immediate environment to another setting (e.g., homework completion in an out-of-school time program will assist with academic preparation during the school day). These types of leading indicators can be called "transfer outcomes." A skilled facilitator can help a group consider how to use different forms of measurement and how far they can reasonably go with a claim of contribution.

National Research

What is often most useful to groups, particularly in the early planning stages, is to explore what has worked in other communities. Groups can benefit from national research that deepens their understanding of a topic and helps them get at the drivers of a particular issue. To help formulate their own strategies, work group members may want to review available evaluations on the impact of interventions they are considering; national trends among specific populations, localities, or services; and scholarly or policy papers on the causes and solutions in a field. Few communities are entirely unique in addressing social and educational issues, and your group will generally be able to find a scholarly article, policy brief, or like-minded community where similar issues are tackled. In some cases, members of the work group will possess this kind of information and expertise at both the local and national level and will be able and willing to present a synopsis to the group themselves.

Facilitators can help the work group use national research to answer the question, How can we apply the lessons learned to our particular community, given the results we seek? For example, a group designing a citywide after-school system will want to look at the structure of collective models across the country that have the highest participation rates, achievement gains, and most effectively aligned and coordinated systems. National data can be used to help the group move to action, to develop a clear understanding of where they are headed, and to determine how best to get there.

Community Voice

There is always the risk that work groups will come to conclusions too quickly with readily available research, data, and personal experiences at the expense of hearing valuable information from others. In any improvement process, one of the first questions to ask is, who are the customers? These may be youth, parents, providers, teachers, or administrators. How do you know that the work groups' ideas will have resonance with multiple levels of customers in the community? Will leaders and providers in the neighborhood advocate for and implement the recommended changes? An effective planning process will engage the voices and experience of the people the work group has chosen to prioritize from the beginning. What follows are a few ways in which a facilitator can incorporate residents' voices and the input of stakeholders into the planning and implementation stages.

What is key for effective citizen engagement is to provide multiple choices and levels where people can participate, given their availability, time, and interests. Individuals are most likely to become involved when they see that there will be tangible results that will benefit them or their families. As a facilitator, the following techniques may be helpful in advising work group members on incorporating community voices:

Listen

Encourage the work group to find informal ways to listen to those who are the focus of the effort. The goal is to understand the needs and motivations of the recipients of the services or initiatives (residents, students, parents, etc.) and to begin building the relationships and trust that will be necessary for full implementation. This is a reciprocal relationship, where the work group is learning as much as they are listening. While it is often easier to reach out through nonprofit or public organizations in a neighborhood (e.g., a school), a facilitator must take care that sessions convened to gather community ideas and concerns are free of the potential bias of an organizational agenda or affiliation.

Create Options

Provide a range of low-cost, low-effort ways for residents to get involved in work group planning at each phase of development. Give residents the flexibility to participate at whatever level they desire. Consider these venues:

- ✔ Decision Making—Involve residents as members of the work group that is driving the planning and decision making.
- ✔ Focus Groups and Community Conversations—Hold small facilitated group discussions in neighborhoods and schools.[18]
- ✔ Surveys—Conduct surveys to understand local assets, needs, and perceptions and to gauge receptivity or prioritization of work group recommendations.
- ✔ Town Hall Meetings—Advertise and facilitate large group discussions that share information with residents about the issue and seek their input.
- ✔ Leadership Training—Provide training to prepare or support residents' involvement in the approach, including leadership development, advocacy and mobilization, and use of data.

Manage Expectations

Use your work group's vision and charge to be clear with residents in communicating the change you seek, using a realistic time frame and scope based on available resources. Pragmatic goals up front will decrease the possibility of disillusionment or disengagement later, should the change take longer to achieve or not achieve the impact originally intended.

Management and Analysis of Data

Where can work groups find the time to do this analysis and research, and is all of it necessary? As a facilitator, is an emphasis on a rigorous process realistic given your time commitment and expertise? Are there simple methods for integrating data into the planning that don't call for scholarly research? This section presents options on delegating and managing research.

The facilitator will want to encourage the use of data that the group can easily interpret without asking the group to become analysts themselves. Given that most work group members are not researchers, it is often not the best use of their time, or of yours, to spend time identifying data sources and parsing through the findings to find the most appropriate measure of success or a particular insight. Participants may also not be in the best position to understand what measures they can influence, the range of options out there, or the distinct community, program, and service level outcomes involved in a community improvement project.

Here it is helpful to have an analyst or a member of the work group who can help the group understand the data and research. For some organizations, this has included professional staff, ad hoc data work groups, and contracted services. Even with this kind of bench strength, there is often an ongoing need to translate the findings into meaningful and concise information to help a work group understand the relevance of the data for their work.

In the following grid, a range of options are presented for staffing and managing the process of gathering and analyzing data and research in a community improvement project. Being clear about how this task will be completed, and by whom, facilitates effective collective action.

DATA COLLECTION LEAD	PROS	CONS
Staff Analyst	Timely, expertise, consistent interpretation, encourages learning of members	Risk of passivity among members, demanding analyst role
External Researcher	Quality, expertise, independence, academic	Takes longer, less accountability to group, detached from process
Work Group Members	Ownership, encourages learning, awareness of data used by practitioners	Variation in quality, format, uneven participation and expertise
Facilitator	Timely, encourages learning	Risks losing objectivity, complicates neutral role, limited expertise, adds time-consuming role

3 Phase Three: Articulating a Vision

Work groups can vary as to the length of time they meet, their focus on planning or operations, and their size and composition. Sometimes a work group's task is finite and may result in the completion of a report or a set of recommendations. At other times, a work group is not only charged with developing a plan, but with testing assumptions and strategies together, collecting data on the progress of these efforts, and implementing a unified and aligned approach over the long term. The focus of a group may be on changing a large system or policy, or it could be on developing a detailed operational plan aligning multiple parties; the time frame might last from two months to two years.

In a variety of settings—and whether you enter the process midway through a work group's development or at the beginning—developing a vision is one of the most important tasks you facilitate. Done well, it will bring clarity and a sense of purpose to the group and provide a structure for aligning participants' work and ideas.

Shared Vision

How do you translate all of this data to come up with a vision and a plan for action? What are some facilitation techniques that help a group find a common agenda? In this section, you will find ways to mobilize your work group around a vision and formulate strategies to get at results. The process of developing a charge, vision, and strategies to achieve results is presented sequentially. However, the process will be useful to you as a facilitator at whatever point you enter into the process.

Having a shared vision and charge not only unifies participants and clarifies outcomes but also saves time and energy during implementation. When participants are clear on the end result and their role in the process, they are less likely to take on more and broader topics than initially intended or to be paralyzed by analysis trying to find data to answer a multitude of questions—not all of which are central to their work. Work groups can get stuck if they become overwhelmed with the scope and complexity of the issue, do not have enough staff capacity to analyze and interpret the meaning of the research, or struggle with a loosely constructed and open-ended charge.

Spending time to develop and adopt a charge for the work group is a good first step. A second step is to create a vision—the intended result of the change your work group seeks to bring about. In both of these steps, strategic use of available data will accelerate and focus the discussions.

In complex alliances, participants may take this phase a step further and build a charter that encompasses the vision, mission, strategies, and scope of the work and spells out roles and expectations for each participating entity. Asking participants to literally sign a charter commits them and conveys the seriousness of their commitment to take action and align their efforts. This is described in more detail in Chapter III as a means for sustaining and managing collective impact efforts. Tips for establishing a charge and shaping the vision are presented on the next page:

Establish a Charge

Starting out with a clear description of a group's task, complete with deadlines and expected responsibilities, lets people know they are in the right place, clarifies the problem they are assigned to address, and answers the question about the amount of time they will be asked to contribute over time.

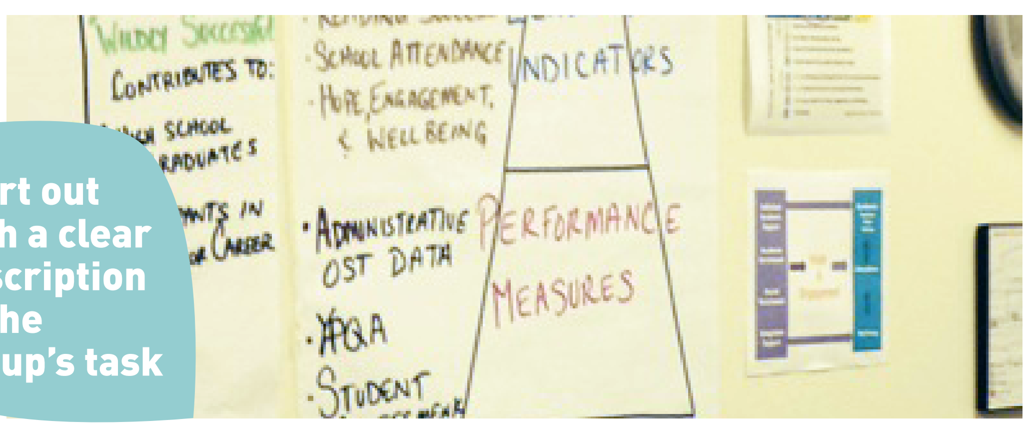
A facilitator can help get everyone on the same page with a simple exercise to review and adopt a work group charge in the first or second meeting. This step also increases ownership and builds relationships.

Presenting a draft of a charge can help speed up the process of getting everyone on the same page. Even at this early stage, you will want to introduce some data and research on the topic to help participants be more precise in what they are setting out to achieve and make the case for why they should be there in the first place.

For example, if you are looking at the issue of workforce development, you might want to share trend data on lagging metrics such as degree attainment for all the jurisdictions in a region or high school graduation rates for a particular geographic area. You might also want to present research that points to contributing factors, such as high school seniors' application rates for post-secondary institutions. This initial research is likely to help refine the charge from something general (increase the rate of young people heading to college) to something specific (increase the number of high school seniors enrolling in post-secondary education with financial support). Precision comes about as participants become immersed in the data to see what is driving the issue and understand what is within their ability to influence.

A work group charge can be simple—one half page to a page—and include the following components (see Appendix II for samples):

(1) Name of Group and Members
(2) The Scope—the deliverable members are responsible for producing
(3) Specific Responsibilities—the steps members are expected to take
(4) Meeting Time Commitment—the estimated number of meetings, schedule, and completion date



Start out with a clear description of the group's task

Create a Vision

By the time participants have adopted their charge, they should understand the intent of the work group and be clear about their roles. They have also established guidelines for decision making, put forth "ground rules" for a safe and honest conversation, and begun to interact with each other to build relationships. In some cases, the vision is already clearly articulated by the organization or charge.

One Large Group or Smaller Work Groups?

✔ Facilitators may find themselves having to decide whether to do all the planning in a large group setting or to organize into smaller work groups or task forces that address distinct aspects of the vision, while still coming together with a consolidated and coordinated approach. This may be particularly relevant if a group is assembled to address a broad community goal affecting multiple populations, disciplines, and sectors. Similarly, if a group is designing a broad system, such as out-of-school time, responsibility for coordinating action may take place at different levels, including at the district level, within the school building, and among the nonprofit, private, and public providers serving young people.

✔ Smaller work groups are appropriate if the issues are too complex for one large group to provide precise and meaningful recommendations. This allows the larger group to receive more refined information, consultation with experts in the field, additional research, and focused time to become familiar with aspects of the problem. To align the pacing and focus of multiple small work groups, facilitators can provide groups with common templates and unified time frames for milestones along the way.

Whether in a small or large group, the most effective way for a facilitator to lead participants in establishing a shared vision is to ask members to tackle two tasks—defining results and priority populations. This requires answering a set of questions. This approach is informed by the methods used by StriveTogether and in Mark Friedman's *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough*[19] and is consistent with the reflective thinking used to develop a theory of change and logic model.[20] The guiding premise is to anticipate the change you are intending to make.

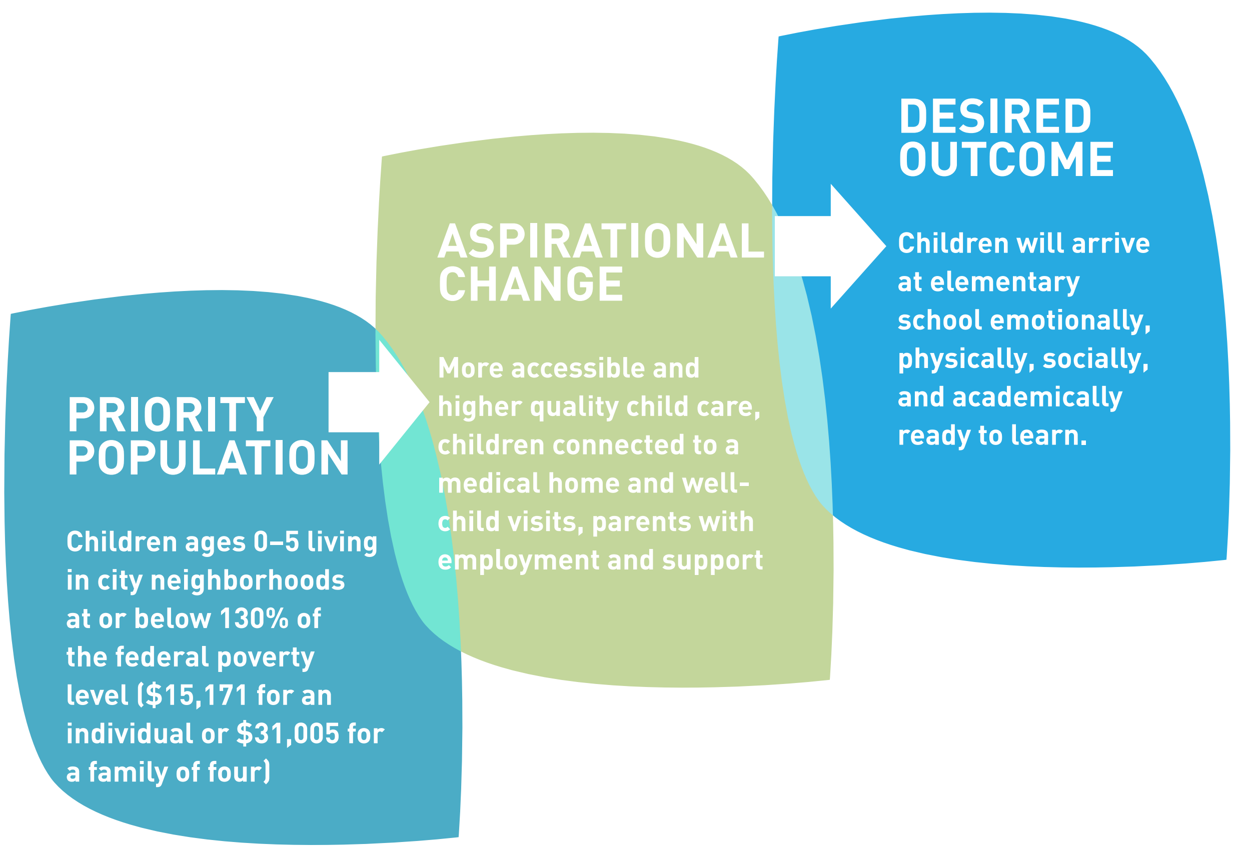
(1) **Defining Results.** What does the community or population look like once the work group has been successful? How will we measure this change at the community level?

(2) **Defining Priority Populations.** Are there one or more priority populations that are important to support to improve community outcomes? What can we learn from the data when considering demographic or contextual factors?

A work group may be able to answer these questions about their vision in one meeting. Yet it is more often the case that participants want more information to identify priority populations and dig deeper into the data. They may seek available information on the experience and perspectives of distinct groups of people in neighborhoods. They may also want to unpack an issue to understand what is causing the problems to begin with and whether the results they are seeking will address the real drivers behind conditions.

Work group members all bring a set of experiences, organizational resources, and expertise to the planning process that they want to put to good use. The role of the facilitator at this early juncture is to help the group focus exclusively on the vision and to hold and capture implementation ideas for future meetings where the group will develop strategies. This can be done by creating a flip chart, identified as a "bike rack" or "parking lot," to record all proposals and bring these ideas back when the work group is ready for them.

Sample Vision for an Early Childhood Development Work Group



4 Phase Four: Owning the Strategy

You've got your vision, you are clear on the population you are going to serve, and you seek to bring about change. At this juncture, you are ready to begin identifying strategies—the steps which detail how you will propose to address the problem. There are excellent guides to developing strategies that can inform your work, and much of the pace and content will be determined by the amount of time you have, the immediacy of the problem, and your resources.

An important role of the facilitator in this phase is not only to help the group develop strategies but to guide members to prioritize which strategies are ready for action. A report with a laundry list of recommendations does indeed sit on a shelf, and a collective model with extensive goals and directives will not get used.

Strategy Development

How can a facilitator guide work groups from the study phase to committing to action? When do work group members have enough information to develop a proposal?

This section describes ways to immerse work group members in developing thoughtful, logical, and realistic proposals that take advantage of the collective resources in the room and the community. Strategies will only be successful if the assumption, or logic, behind them is sound. Strategies are more likely to succeed if there are capable community partners—in the private, nonprofit, philanthropic, governmental, and educational communities—that can align and support the same approach.

Organizing a process where you can ask work groups four central questions will help them verify the logical thread between their intended result, the level of potential support, and their final selected strategies. In the previous phase on vision, your work group will have identified lagging indicators that represent the change they want to bring about. From here it is useful to identify the contributing factors that are influencing the current results and the strategies most likely to bring about improvements. The following questions, answered in succession, will help:

(1) **DEVELOPING A PLAUSIBLE HYPOTHESIS.** What is the group's hypothesis about the barriers, patterns, assets, or inadequate conditions that contribute to the situation?

Answering this question about root causes can help to identify leading indicators and effective strategies. A facilitator can help a work group discuss why trends might be occurring and ask work group members to look hard at causal factors that may contribute to the current state. Stepping back to reflect on contributing factors often creates an opening for innovative and fresh approaches.

The following steps help to first open up and then narrow the strategy conversation:

- Identify potential root causes
- Use data to confirm that the root causes have a relationship to key outcomes

- Estimate the impact of contributing factors
- Identify which contributing factors can be influenced by the group
- Prioritize causal factors to address

(2) **MEASURING SUCCESS.** What leading and lagging indicators will help you know when you are successful?

An important consideration for a group in aspiring to change one of these leading indicators is whether they have enough bandwidth to influence results at this level for a whole community or priority population—in short, the plausibility of the link. The second practical set of considerations is whether the selected metrics are good proxies for the change the group wants to communicate to the public and whether they can regularly collect, verify, and convey the results to influence and track change. Groups may choose to identify leading indicators (rather than lagging indicators) so that they can assess their potential impact in the near term and identify lagging indicators as the intended end result over time.

(3) **ACQUIRING NATIONAL AND LOCAL EVIDENCE.** In these particular areas of focus, what does national research tell us about what works? Does the data point to bright spots in the local community where promising practices might be explored?

(4) **IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY SUPPORT.** What resources and assets does the work group have locally that are aligned with these results and potential practices? Are there natural allies and partners that would be available to help advance a particular strategy? If so, do these agencies have a track record of results and a culture of collaboration, which make them good partners? Which partners are most likely to add capacity to the strategies and accelerate results?

(5) **DEFINING STRATEGIES.** Finally, what conditions are related to current results? Which ones are or could be within our sphere of influence to change? What proposals are we most likely to achieve that will get us to better results?

Asking these questions and choosing a method that helps the group refine the focus is an important early step in identifying lagging and leading indicators and formulating workable and targeted strategies that will bring about changes over time.

TIP FOR ORGANIZING THE WORK

✔ Provide an action planning template to your work groups with blanks for the components that make up a solid vision and set of strategies, as well as a definition for each. This will facilitate the alignment of each group's approach to drafting final recommendations. A facilitator can request that work groups limit the number of strategies to three or four for each intended result. See Appendix III for sample tables and templates.

A promising template for documenting the group's target populations, results, and strategies looks similar to that of a strategic plan.[21] As the group becomes more operational, this format can evolve into a collective work plan with clearly designated roles, deadlines, and anticipated changes in metrics. A sample is shared below:

VISION:					
MISSION:					
DESIRED OUTCOME AND INTENDED POPULATION:					
GOAL (3–5 PER PLAN):					
What? Strategy (2–5 PER PLAN)	How? Action Steps	By When? Time Frame	Measure of Success? Outcome	Who? Responsible Lead	How Much? Level of Investment

Once members have generated ideas for strategies, the facilitator can guide the group so that members propose and commit to priority actions within their control. The following section provides some facilitation tips to refine the strategies while increasing ownership of the proposed direction.

Strategies are more likely to succeed if there are capable community partners

Set Criteria

Before engaging in strategy development, ask participants to set criteria for what will be acceptable for them. Adopting a list of criteria can serve as a screen for vetting the final recommendations and for helping accelerate decisions about prioritizing actions. A focused list will help the group take responsibility for developing realistic, well-informed, and practical recommendations that meet their own credibility test.

Sample Criteria for Community Planning Group[22]

- **Demonstrated Results/Rigorous.** Must be based on programs and initiatives with demonstrated outcomes.
- **Impact and Depth.** Must address issue over the long term, have a high impact on individuals involved, and have measurable results.
- **Financially Sustainable.** Must use low-cost and no-cost options or reinvestment of savings to address long-term financial sustainability.
- **Documented Need or Gap.** Must collectively address a documented need that no other local organization can do on its own.
- **High Value to Residents.** Must incorporate and reflect local input.
- **Political Will.** Must have local leadership and capacity to bring about change.
- **Supporting Community Partner.** Must have other entities identified to help support financially and institutionally.

Weigh Your Priorities

One of the best methods for getting a group to prioritize among competing strategies focuses on four simple elements, offered in a book by the American Society of Association Executives.[23] The authors suggest creating a table with competing strategies and the following criteria, with clear definitions, in columns next to it:

- Impact
- Consequence
- Immediacy
- Likelihood of Success

Ask members to rate the strategy for each of the criteria:

- 5 = Criterion met exceptionally
- 4 = Criterion met well
- 3 = Criterion met
- 2 = Criterion met poorly
- 1 = Criterion not met

Tabulate the rankings for each strategy to arrive at those that your group sees as most practical, time-sensitive, and important (see Appendix IV for sample table with definitions). This exercise often clarifies what is most important to tackle first and why and can be completed in a 30-minute segment of the meeting. Recording the numerical rating in a spreadsheet or other tabulation software will accelerate reporting the findings.

Use Interactive Methods

There are books dedicated to participatory facilitation methods and hundreds of examples of methods that seek to bring out people's best ideas and encourage them to make thoughtful collective decisions. Here are two that work well with collective action efforts:

The World Café method works particularly well for developing strategies, as it allows full participation of members and builds and sharpens collective ideas in a lively, interactive format.

World Café[24]

The world café method works particularly well for developing strategies, as it allows full participation of members and builds and sharpens collective ideas in a lively, interactive format. It is a fun, high-energy method. A cross between "speed dating" and reflective brainstorming, the method allows a large group of people to weigh in and discuss substantive issues in a compressed period of time in a series of small, intense discussions at café-like tables. In collective action planning, each "table" can be given the assignment of developing one strategy toward the shared vision. Participants spend a short period of time (15–20 minutes) at each table developing strategies. These are recorded by a volunteer scribe. The group then moves on to the next table and repeats the discussion on a different strategy. The scribe stays behind to update the next group, which builds on and refines the strategies. Expedite this process by giving the groups a template so that strategies are defined. For a full description, see Appendix V.

Small Groups

Inviting work group members to break into small groups for an extended period of time (20–25 minutes) also has many benefits for developing strategies. On the interpersonal side, it gets people moving and energized. Small groups allow those who are more private to speak in a less public setting, and the discussion can build relationships and ownership of the overall task. On content, small group discussions let members delve into topics more deeply, give the full group the opportunity to work on multiple issues at once, and share important insights and opinions that may not come out in a large group format.[25]

Your work groups are developing strategies, integrating all forms of data into their deliberations, and identifying community partners to help accelerate the work. Participants know where they are going and are aligning their own resources and practices to address the gaps they've identified. People from the community are engaged in the work at a variety of levels. As a facilitator, how do you help the group sustain and evaluate this engagement? Chapter III describes simple ways to commit and launch strategies, to troubleshoot, and to build systems that will allow you to continuously learn and improve upon your process.

Chapter III: Committing to Action and Improvement

Upon completion of this chapter, the reader will be able to do the following things:

- ✔ Gain facilitation techniques for helping a group move from planning to implementation
- ✔ Find ways to sustain momentum and achieve results on schedule
- ✔ Be able to encourage groups to test and evaluate ideas in the early stages
- ✔ Continuously improve a process by integrating metrics into implementation

When is it time to get to work? By now your work group has laid out its game plan and written up the strategies. You are likely to have an action plan with dates, anticipated outcomes, and assignments to cover. Your work group may be at the stage of forming a new network or transitioning from a work group to a working coalition. New members may be joining who have additional authority to direct and manage the resources needed.

For some groups, the shift from planning to implementation coincides with the facilitator passing the baton to a new individual, who is hired, trained, or coached for the purpose of convening and continuing to advance the work. For others, the facilitator stays on board and shifts his or her role. Here is where the shared ownership you've been developing all along as a facilitator should pay off and be reinforced. What does a facilitator do once the group is ready to implement?

The main role of the facilitator during this period is to transfer ownership and lodge the initiative firmly in the hands, operations, and approach of the collective group. There are at least six approaches that a facilitator can use to help build the skills of an implementing work group, pave the way for a smooth transition of facilitation, and set the team up for future sustainability.

The main role of the facilitator during this period is to transfer ownership and lodge the initiative firmly in the hands, operations, and approach of the collective group.

- ✔ **PROCESS IMPROVEMENT**
- ✔ **PROJECT MANAGEMENT**
- ✔ **SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY**
- ✔ **CAPACITY BUILDING**
- ✔ **VERIFICATION**
- ✔ **COMMUNICATION**

Each of these elements is described in this chapter, along with strategies to sustain and build momentum as the work evolves from planning to operation.

Transfer Ownership and Skills

What are the key roles of a facilitator during the formation of a network and the transition to implementation? Are there techniques that help to build relationships and commit participants to their shared agenda? How can a group develop a work plan that is flexible enough to respond to community needs while meeting benchmarks along the way?

As a network gets underway, the facilitator helps to strengthen participants' relationships with each other, builds their ability to govern themselves, and keeps participants on track with their selected measures.

How do you know when ownership is achieved?

When each member

- ✔ can articulate the intended results and adopted strategies;
- ✔ defines a vision of success using the same language;
- ✔ has signed an agreement to achieve a collective outcome;
- ✔ takes full responsibility for reviewing and achieving collective outcomes;
- ✔ understands the norms of the group and can facilitate inclusive discussion; and
- ✔ integrates the collective approach into his or her organization's operations and management.

5 Phase Five: Taking Action

Process Improvement

In the implementation stage, the role of the facilitator continues to be setting context, managing expectations, and helping the group complete what it needs to achieve before moving onto the next stage. Whereas the planning phase has risks of "analysis paralysis" due to the abundance of information, the action phase has a different sort of risk—taking on too much action too quickly. Work group members may try to implement many strategies at once, without the capacity to test their hypotheses and see what is really working. Or a work group may try to implement a large-scale pilot and be unable to confirm whether it is meeting project goals until years have passed. The facilitator can help groups manage their work by reminding work groups of their previous decisions and priority strategies and helping them assess the feasibility of achieving intended results.

What should you do when groups move too quickly?

With some simple steps, facilitators can help work group members stay focused on a vital root causes and potential solutions:

✔ **Assess Risks**
Ask work group members to revisit the scope and charter, which defines the boundaries of what they have set out to do. Then engage participants in a discussion about the opportunities and risks of extending their roles beyond the charge.

✔ **Refer to Decisions Made**
Keep flip charts with decisions from previous meetings on the wall or have table copies of the charge, charter, and/or work plan for the group to reference or draw their attention to at each meeting.

✔ **Conduct a Modified "Value Stream Map"**
This process is a component of the Six Sigma approach, which documents the way a process flows. Creating a map entails identifying the outputs and outcomes generated by the work, finding a way to collect and analyze the data, establishing baselines, evaluating progress, and making "quick hit" improvements.[26] Reviewing the data at each phase of work can help groups gauge successes and breakdowns so that quick improvements can be made to the process without a delay in waiting for final outcomes.

Project Management

If the first stages of the work have gone well, the group will have a road map for implementation. This written work plan will include a set of strategies, supplemented by actions that can be taken in each area, with dates for completion and corresponding indicators. The facilitator serves to keep members connected and aligned with their plan and helps them troubleshoot, innovate, and execute the tasks.

Managing a project with multiple agencies, areas of focus, and deadlines requires setting up a tracking or project management system. Some individuals may simply use a spreadsheet, while others may plot the work on a Gantt chart or use customized software for this purpose. The goal for the facilitator in this phase is to help the group use the management system to organize, assess, and improve upon their work. This requires creating a culture where members hold each other accountable and monitor their collective work on a regular basis and where "failure" or poor results are discussed openly. The facilitator will want to set aside time to encourage participants to learn from their experiences, review the preliminary results, and tackle any problems or unexpected circumstances as a team.

Project management is an improvement process that links the action on the ground with real-time learning so that better outcomes are accelerated while trying out promising practices. A facilitator can encourage the use of and sharing of formal and informal data as a regular component of meeting facilitation.

Shared Accountability

A facilitator can help set expectations for performance among work group members and build a sense of joint ownership and participation in meeting shared goals. One effective way to do this is to develop a standing agenda with plenty of time to discuss strategic issues, review available data, troubleshoot barriers, and take advantages of opportunities that come up. Meetings that devolve into reporting by committee will not fully engage participants. Issue-focused discussions led by members of the group and informed by the most recent data and experience are more likely to draw people out.

Developing a charter, which formalizes commitments and states the purpose and accountability structure of a network, can help a group get focused quickly. Getting members to sign it—with the endorsement and approval of their board of directors or appropriate governing body—helps to integrate the collective work into their daily practices and performance goals. While it is one thing to agree to work together on improving after-school programs, for example, it is another to be responsible for specific performance outcomes for individual children in a school building. It is best to articulate the explicit responsibilities of each member, in as much detail as one might give to a job description or contract within a single organization, to help define and create the collective network and its components.

Capacity Building

When planning moves into action and improvement, there will likely be more than one group or set of meetings requiring a convener or facilitator. Some participants will be terrific at attending, presenting, and participating in

Living Documents for Organizing Results

From the STRIVETOGETHER Theory of Action, 2013

These two documents can help to create a road map with shared accountability for members of a collective network.

- **Charters**
  "A tool for collaborative action network members to hold each other accountable to shared measurements and to the partnership. This contains a purpose statement, problem statement, project scope, membership and operating principles."

- **Action Plans**
  "A document that outlines the strategies that a collaborative action network will work on during a given time frame. This should be updated regularly and contains: long and short-term targets, measures, projects, and action steps."

See Appendix VI for a sample charter.

meetings yet may not have the results focus, listening skills, knowledge of methods, or the trust of the group to be an effective facilitator. For the purposes of the collective endeavor, it is essential to build this capacity within the participants along the way and give those interested and able to facilitate the opportunity to do so. Whether this involves residents seeking to play a greater role in decision making or organizational members asking to lead a subgroup or presentation, the facilitator can be a coach, mentor, and guide to build the facilitation capacity among work group members.

The facilitator will want to share the techniques he or she has used throughout this process with others through individualized training, train-the-trainer sessions, and coaching and observing those who seek guidance. Having a cadre of effective facilitators in the agencies and organizations who are part of the effort will help ensure high-quality deliberation and sustainability as the network relies on a growing group of experts to manage and facilitate the work.

Verification

Crafting a community update report, a dashboard, or brief report for the public that is easy to understand and summarizes emerging results goes a long way to sharing the value of the effort. A report on performance measures or leading indicators will convey the intent, scale, and progress of the work to the public—whether they are part of a school community, fellow organizational leaders, or funders.

As a facilitator, you can help create a culture that supports the use of data for continuous improvement. The facilitator's primary contribution in this phase is to integrate data into

TIPS FOR VERIFICATION

- ✔ Keep the measurements simple, understandable, and focused on priorities.
- ✔ Make sure data is useful to the people collecting it.
- ✔ Identify the owner for leading and reporting on each measurement.
- ✔ Build in incentives for performance.
- ✔ Dedicate meeting time for tracking progress.
- ✔ Build a culture of transparency and teamwork where failure is a learning experience and progress is celebrated.
- ✔ Confirm that the team understands and aligns practices with the action plan and adopted measures.
- ✔ Align organizational, operational, and programmatic tasks across agencies with the plan metrics.
- ✔ Budget and staff for collection, implementation, and continuous improvement.

The facilitator often serves as an interpreter, helping participants connect across the work groups

meeting agendas, engage members regularly in reviewing emerging information, and help the group develop a unified interpretation of the meaning of the results. If the group has an analyst, this will be one of his or her most useful roles—to present an analysis and set of options for the group to consider, act upon, and communicate. Another resource might be an individual trained as a coach in the "Six Sigma" approach borrowed from a local industry partner.

Particularly in multi-sector endeavors, it is important for the group to use the data as a tool to improve but not serve an end in itself. Balance the use of data with the need to provide excellent service. Consider the data to take stock, test and assess assumptions, and make course corrections where necessary, always keeping the priority population in mind.

Celebrate when your team reaches milestones, and share news of progress on performance measures or leading indicators in the context of the broader goals. As the keeper of the history and the facilitator focused on keeping the effort on track, celebrating wins is especially important as it energizes the group and provides tangible evidence of the results.

Communicate

The facilitator often serves as an interpreter, helping participants connect across the work groups and understand and build upon each other's work. Because individuals in collective action work often come from different fields and sectors—government, nonprofit, private sector, school divisions, and universities—they may have distinct professional languages, expectations, and ways of working on project. With diverse groups, there will be cultural distinctions among people of different races, ages, and sexual orientations.

A facilitator creates space for reciprocal communication throughout the process and the network.

Inside the work group, the facilitator must be able to guide people with multiple viewpoints and experiences to value the collective work and communicate with each other effectively and respectfully. This requires a facilitator who is at ease in many settings and can help people understand one another and find common interests.

Outside of meetings, the facilitator can assist with developing, communicating, and championing a message to stakeholders and citizens who are part of the community. A facilitator creates a space where participants can bring messages in and get messages out so that there is reciprocal communication throughout the process and the network.

For example, retaining the check in at the beginning of meetings and the feeling of a safe and productive space is as important in this stage as it was in the beginning when members were beginning to get to know one another. Meetings can be a time of connection and deliberation and an opportunity to hear from others in the community about news or developments related to the collective action and the individuals involved in the work. The facilitator wants to create a forum where work group members can fashion a message and determine how they will talk about their work together outside of the room. This will help build support, engagement, and awareness of the collective action.

In the beginning of the work group formation, the champion was critical to have at the table to convey influence and urgency and to connect the group with essential stakeholders and voices. He or she helped underscore the value of the work and the importance of being at the table for alignment. At this later stage of development, the champion can communicate the value of the work, share the emerging results, and engage a broader group of individuals and organizations in supporting and understanding the intent of the project. In some cases, the facilitator may play this role—of advocate and emissary—for the change underway. In other cases, the facilitator may provide the work group chairs, or other participants, with the information and guidance they need to be successful in this role.

For both internal and external purposes, it is important to find a regular way to synthesize, organize, and share what is happening in work groups and pilot projects across the network and to outside groups. Providing social opportunities to help participants feel aligned with each other, and for them to connect with both the broader system changes, will help sustain investment and ownership.

Piloting Strategies

Do you have to wait until the plan is developed or a study is completed to advance the ideas that your team has generated? When do you begin to integrate evaluation into the implementation process? Are there risks and benefits to this approach?

This section will discuss how collective impact efforts across the country are adopting an action-focused approach and testing strategies as they go. Whereas more traditional planning efforts proceed consecutively from study to action to evaluation, your work group may choose to adopt and pilot a strategy and use incoming data to make adjustments rather than waiting for the results of a formal evaluation.

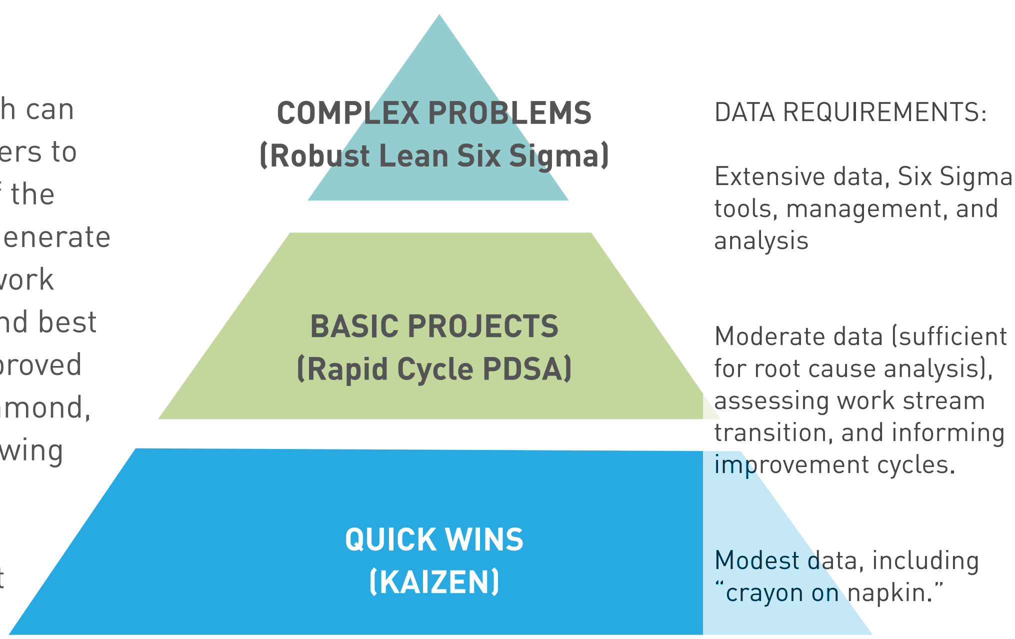
Facilitators can create opportunities within a network, coalition, or work group to test their hypotheses and strategies while they are implementing, discuss formal and informal results of the pilot, and make quick adjustments to their work plan. Testing a hypothesis early can empower work group members, accelerate the rate of change in the community, and increase the project's credibility. Further, the idea can be replicated or expanded once the initial model is complete.

6 Phase Six: Assessing and Improving Upon Results

In addition to the techniques described in this guide, there are several models to borrow from in considering how to integrate findings into a collective action process, to test and implement concepts along the way, and to accelerate rapid cycles of improvement. One of the best known is the "Six Sigma" approach, which originally came out of industry to improve complex manufacturing processes yet is well suited for collection action projects.[27] Another is the "Plan-Do-Study-Act" framework and the "Quick Win" approach.

Adopting a Six Sigma approach can encourage work group members to gain a broad understanding of the complexity of a problem and generate creative thinking. This helps work groups connect root causes and best practices that bring about improved results. Bridging RVA, in Richmond, Virginia, has adopted the following framework to help its work groups decide what type of assessment and improvement process is appropriate for their project.

Figure 1. Continuous Improvement Levels[28]



Several innovative collective action efforts are drawing upon a framework for research called Plan-Do-Study-Act, which was first introduced in 1996 to facilitate community improvement efforts.[29] As with traditional research, the intent is to help participants understand the problems they face. Yet, unlike long-term research, this approach encourages work group members to introduce changes that are informed by their knowledge and assumptions early in a planning process.

PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT CYCLE[30]

- ✔ Plan—Understand the presenting problem through a shared understanding and examination of plausible explanations from both the practitioners' and researchers' vantage point.
- ✔ Do—Launch "rapid trials" to test the hypothesis. "Try it quickly, learn from it cheaply, revise and retry."[31]
- ✔ Study—Set a baseline of outcomes for the hypothesis and measure performance in a practical and flexible study design.
- ✔ Act—Revise and refine based on results to inform and improve the system and approach.

Once launched, the emphasis is on assessing the results relatively quickly and refining and improving on the approach. This is a different approach than trying to implement a program or pilot with fidelity and waiting a year or two to evaluate whether it worked. This just-in-time planning and design approach is ideal for collective action and process improvement efforts as it can shorten the planning process. The method puts effective research to work right away while allowing members to make a difference even before they are absolutely certain of the approach. There are risks in both models, but the rapid cycle improvement process favors small early failures over the risk for larger failures at the end of a longer investment.

Research for Action and Practice reduces the time between publication and use of the study results and engages the strengths and knowledge of researchers and practitioners as partners in solving community problems.

Research for Understanding and Publication

- Reviewed comprehensively for all factors
- Conducted and published by scholars
- Waits for results to share with practitioners, time lag
- Results in lengthy well-documented reports
- Published to add new knowledge to the field

Research for Action and Practice[32]

- Selective factors analyzed that are within work group's scope and control
- Conducted jointly by work group members and researchers for immediate use
- Tests ideas and analyzes results in current time
- Produces short analytical briefs to answer questions and suggest next steps
- Data used to test hypotheses & improve practices

Implementing "quick wins" can also be an approach to adopt when there is low risk, outcomes are easily reversible, and work group members have a clear idea of a simple solution that will address the problem and help to build credibility and ownership. To generate ideas for a quick win, some groups use a "Kaizen." The Kaizen method entails holding a series of conversations in a short period time, usually a day or several days, that results in action commitments to address a root cause of the problem.[33]

In any type of community improvement research, the first rule of thumb is to do no harm. If there are no risks to individuals and communities in the proposal and the effort is not successful, then there has been relatively low research cost and time investment. Should the effort not have the intended results, then the resources can be redirected to a more promising or proven effort.

Whether the adopted process is complex or simple, the goal is to pilot, improve, and replicate promising practices that create the opportunity to fail small and make improvements quickly before going to scale. The facilitator can help the group frame losses as learning opportunities and generate and document the changes made as a result. The facilitator helps to reinforce a group norm of acknowledging failures and celebrating and rewarding the group for the improvements made.

After each cycle of testing and assessing hypotheses and adjusting practices, the facilitator has a role in helping the group update the charter and work plan with any key findings or agreed-upon adjustments. The facilitator may also have a role in communicating those changes or proposals back to external and internal stakeholders and participants.

Sustaining Momentum

Are there techniques or incentives that help keep a group of people engaged in collective action? What happens when new people enter the group? How do you maintain a sense of cohesion while keeping an ear to the ground in the community and adapting your approach as needed?

A facilitator's ongoing challenge is to keep work group members engaged, particularly as the tasks become less theoretical and participation in the process can demand more time and specific organizational commitments. Participants' fatigue can manifest in missing meetings, reverting to a more observatory role, or otherwise retreating from the high level of engagement that is evident in the early and exciting ideas-generation stages.

Oftentimes, the shift to operationalize the work of the group requires new voices at the table, including people who can influence and lead distinct parts of the strategy. These players can bring new energy or they can risk setting things back, depending on how a facilitator helps the group welcome them and includes them in owning the actions.

There are several facilitation techniques that help a group stay involved and invested in a process. The following are a few techniques to employ during and after the strategy development process.

Show Early Progress

The point here is not to wait until the work group has all the data in hand and the perfect recommendations to begin to bring about collective action. Are there changes that your work group can make by aligning efforts now? Are there legislative or operational changes or new resources that can be accomplished in the short term? These early wins—often referred to as "quick wins" or "low-hanging fruit"—not only build confidence in the initiative among residents, they also provide a venue to test and assess work group ideas and improve lives while doing so. Further, they build trust, ownership, and credibility among work group members themselves.[34]

Commit to Action between Meetings

An effective way to build ownership and keep to timetables is to delegate assignments and facilitation to members in between large group meetings. Call upon work group members to shape and lead sections of the larger meetings and to share information that will advance the group. If members have divided into subgroups, assign a subgroup to lead a discussion or ask an individual member to read an article, present the results to the group, and lead a discussion regarding how it might impact the work.

CHECKLIST TO KEEP ENERGY AND PRODUCTIVITY HIGH	
IF...	THEN...
Fewer people are attending meetings consistently	• Call people before meetings to remind them to come • Consider shorter meeting times • Conduct a confidential interim evaluation of the process to figure out what's working and what's not
Members are using electronic devices in meetings	• Give lots of breaks during a meeting • Let participants know in advance when they will have free time, and request that they put away devices in the interim
There is frustration with the pace of change	• Build in early wins • Organize the work so that the group can plan, test, refine, and implement some of its ideas midway through the process
Members are rehashing old ground	• Document decisions • Remind participants of decisions made • Address lingering conflicts or concerns that have not been resolved
There is less energy around the table	• Reconnect with the purpose • Bring participants directly to the communities they are working in • Engage more residents in the work • Select a compelling article for discussion, or ask individual participants to lead a session about a central concern

Orient New Members

Many work groups begin and end with the same membership, yet it is frequently the case that new participants are asked to join the process midway through. This is particularly common as the focus moves from planning to implementation and different people are needed to advise and manage new phases of the work. Managing the meeting process to make newcomers feel welcome and informed is essential. Equally important is communicating to new participants the importance of learning the group's history and norms and being respectful of decisions and progress made so that their participation doesn't inadvertently cause the group to backtrack.

Three Steps to Integrate New Participants into a Work Group

- **Adopt a membership list and policy.** As part of your charge, confirm the list of members and the specific term they will serve.
- **Orient all new participants.** Before a new participant attends a meeting, ask a current member to provide a one-on-one orientation on the work to date.
- **Debrief.** After his or her first meeting, respond to any questions or requests for additional information. Establish a "buddy" system for the first few months between the new member and one of the original participants.

Conclusion

Developing and managing a successful collective action effort is complex. The facilitator plays a central part in bringing together participants to create a new way of working together. While advancing collective change is an emerging field, there is a great deal of scholarship, professional knowledge, and guidance that has informed this guide and will continue to evolve. This guide's primary purpose is to provide common language and tools for facilitators to accelerate the work of networks and coalitions forming and operating different forms of results-oriented collective action.

There is a ripple effect that takes place through the work of an effective facilitator. A facilitator helps a core group of individuals nurture and refine the genesis of an idea. Over time, the facilitator creates a productive and exciting space, which draws more resources, people, and energy into the effort. He or she keeps the group focused on obtainable and precise results, creates an inclusive and interactive process, and sets the groundwork for transferring ownership and skills to a growing network where new leaders take on facilitation and convening roles.

A facilitator keeps a team focused but experimental, practical but visionary, committed and willing to share control. The net result, if facilitated well, is a sustainable network of people improving the community with greater efficiency and impact than any one organization would have on its own. The facilitator plays a central yet background role as a coach, synthesizer, convener, and support to a team. The facilitator's greatest reward is to empower others to achieve their envisioned results.

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(Endnotes)

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