Issue Brief

Kara Conroy, Mary Anne Anderson, Annalisa Mastri, Amanda Benton, and Gretchen Lehman

Facilitating local cross-sector collaboration: Strategies for intermediaries

Key Findings

- The federal government, foundations, and other intermediaries have a number of strategies available to them to help facilitate local cross-sector collaboration between different organizations. For example, they can provide training and technical assistance (TA), convene stakeholders, draw attention to local efforts, address bureaucratic and regulatory challenges, identify potential resources, and/or conduct research and evaluation.

- Drawing attention to local sites, and combining that attention with training and TA, resources, and/or evaluation activities, might attract new partners and resources that help to achieve cross-sector collaboration goals.

- Convening stakeholders early in an initiative, ensuring opportunities to meet face-to-face, and engaging both local and federal/national personnel can have payoffs in solidifying initiative design and in moving to implementation with greater ease.

- Assistance in identifying funding or non-financial resources can encourage cross-sector collaboration when used strategically. Staff support, even if only a small amount, can also encourage cross-sector collaboration. For example, foundations or federal agencies can provide staff who monitor and are responsible for progress toward the collaboration's objectives.

Typically, local cross-sector collaboration is a process whereby organizations in two or more sectors link or share information, resources, activities, and capabilities to achieve shared outcomes. This can help organizations coordinate and communicate better, making them more efficient at using limited resources, reducing the burden on program staff and clients, and ultimately improving client outcomes. Federal agencies, foundations, and other intermediaries (for example, training and technical assistance [TA] providers or association groups) have many strategies available to them to encourage, promote, or support local cross-sector collaboration (Exhibit 2).

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is partnering with Mathematica to explore strategies that enable federal agencies and foundations to better support cross-sector collaboration at the local level. This brief describes findings from interviews with designers, implementers, and participants of federal or philanthropic cross-sector collaboration initiatives.

Using examples from past and current federal and philanthropic efforts, this brief explores several ways that intermediaries (such as federal agencies or foundations) can facilitate cross-sector social service collaboration. Based on these examples, we discuss a menu of strategies available to those intermediaries. We illustrate how each strategy can be used, and discuss the challenges associated with using it and the conditions under which it might have the most impact. Finally, we highlight lessons learned and potential actions for future cross-sector collaboration initiatives. The brief is based only on the information collected for this project.

We collected information through a document review and discussions with 29 key informants (respondents) across six federal or philanthropic cross-sector collaboration initiatives (see Exhibit 1).[1] Respondents included:

- Federal or philanthropic designers: Developed and/or financed the initiatives

- Federal or nonprofit implementers: Executed the initiatives at the national level

- Local site personnel or participants: Participated in the initiatives at the local level

- Evaluators: Conducted evaluations of the initiatives

- TA providers: Offered training and TA to local sites as part of the initiatives (contracted by designers)

Exhibit 1. Initiatives included in the study

- Detroit Federal Working Group (2011–2016)
- EnVision Centers (2018–present)
- Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth [P3] (2014–present)
- Promise Zones (2014–present)
- Rural Integration Models for Parents and Children to Thrive [Rural IMPACT] (2015–2017)
- Work Support Strategies [WSS] (2011–2016)

The appendix contains additional information on the methods used in this study, the initiatives included, and the types of respondents interviewed for each initiative.

Menu of available strategies to facilitate local cross-sector collaboration

Exhibit 2 is a menu of the six available strategies that respondents said they used most often to facilitate local cross-sector collaboration: (1) provide training and TA; (2) convene stakeholders; (3) draw attention to an initiative and to designated sites, (4) address bureaucratic and regulatory barriers; (5) identify potential resources, including direct staff support; and (6) conduct research and evaluation. Each potential strategy is followed by examples taken from the initiatives included in this study. Note that strategies can overlap, and some activities can support more than one strategy.

Available strategies in detail: considerations for impact and potential challenges

Respondents shared their insights about how each potential strategy can impact local cross-sector collaboration. They also identified challenges they encountered with the strategies.

Provide training and technical assistance[2]

All the initiatives we reviewed used training and TA to try to improve the participating organizations' ability to work together toward shared goals. Local sites were typically expected to participate in the training and TA as part of their engagement with the initiative. Respondents said there were four things to consider in designing and delivering TA that can impact local cross-sector collaboration:

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[1] Initiatives and respondents were purposively selected, so the respondents' experiences may not be representative of local cross-sector collaboration initiatives in general. The range of experiences offered by respondents do illuminate a variety of experiences.

[2] For more information on how funders can leverage training and TA to meet the goals of their initiative, see the following resources from ASPE: Providing TA to Local Programs and Communities: Lessons From a Scan of Initiatives Offering TA to Human Services Programs; Measuring T/TA Effectiveness; and Improving Human Services Using Virtual Technical Assistance.

Exhibit 2. Menu of available strategies to facilitate local cross-sector collaboration and examples identified by respondents

Provide training and technical assistance (TA)

Help local sites assess their needs

Facilitate peer learning groups across sectors and communities

Provide sustained, ongoing support to individual sites or programs

Convene stakeholders

Convene groups across sectors in local sites

Convene federal staff across agencies while designing initiatives

Convene local site personnel, private sector partners, and federal staff throughout implementation

Draw attention to an initiative and to designated sites

Publicly designate a community as a leader, innovator, or pilot site

Spotlight an issue through messaging, public awareness campaigns, or media interviews/events

Involve senior leaders, such as the White House, federal Cabinet-level secretaries, governors, or mayors

Address bureaucratic and regulatory barriers

Issue waivers to facilitate coordination across sectors

Determine whether locally identified barriers are real or perceived, and what their source is (such as federal, state, or local laws or practice)

Have federal staff spend time in communities to observe the impact of regulations on cross-sector collaboration

Identify potential resources, including direct staff support

Include priority points or preference for cross-sector collaboration in grant competitions

Help local sites find and/or apply for federal, state, or philanthropic funding

Offer grants to support cross-sector collaboration

Encourage private-sector partners to provide resources

Provide on-the-ground personnel to supplement existing staff, such as federal staff on short-term assignments or AmeriCorps members

Conduct research and evaluation

Evaluate implementation and/or impact of an initiative at the national and/or local level

Provide resources for formative evaluations at the local level

Analyze state or local administrative data

Use performance measures to monitor progress

- **Starting intensive training and TA right away.** Local site personnel and training and TA providers all generally agreed that training and TA should begin as soon as possible after a local site starts participating in an initiative. To start up quickly at the beginning of an initiative, designers reported leveraging existing training and TA contracts or using federal staff, not new contractors, to provide training and TA. They noted that having a dedicated planning period of intensive TA early, before moving into implementation, can eliminate surprises, give enough time to solidify partnerships and agreements, and make implementation smoother. Respondents also said that regular (at least monthly) calls between TA providers and local site personnel can keep people engaged and enhance their sense of accountability.

"When we first got the grant, I thought, 'Oh gosh, I have to talk to this person every month and did I do my homework?' In hindsight, this was one of the most useful pieces. It really kept us accountable."

—Local site staff member reflecting on training and TA

- **Leveraging peer learning.** Respondents of all types emphasized that peer learning opportunities can help local sites navigate similar challenges and find possible solutions. Peer learning can take place in one large group or in smaller groups based on the number of sites involved, which region they come from, and their populations, program designs, or shared challenges.

- **Providing organizations with opportunities to meet in person.** Local site personnel generally extolled their experiences with in-person training and TA. They highlighted the opportunities to engage with training and TA providers, federal or nonprofit implementers, and their peers face-to-face during site visits and annual convenings. They agreed that these opportunities fostered deeper and more lasting relationships.

- **Setting a dedicated point of contact.** Although some initiatives provided training and TA from multiple providers, feedback from respondents revealed that training and TA might have the most impact when local personnel have a single, dedicated TA point of contact who can help them navigate the TA landscape by answering questions and elevating concerns to the appropriate TA providers or other parties.

Challenges. Because training and TA engagements can be time-consuming and take staff away from their usual responsibilities, local site personnel, federal implementers, and evaluators reported that training and TA might be more valuable when accompanied by financial support that offsets staff time. In addition, respondents said that local sites within a training and TA cohort often had different needs and were at different stages of meeting the initiative's objectives. As a result, personnel from high-performing sites were sometimes frustrated because they thought they were often called on to share their promising practices, but they received training and TA that addressed their own needs less often.

Convene stakeholders[3]

Respondents of all types generally agreed that convening stakeholders is one of the most effective strategies to support local cross-sector collaboration. Stakeholders could include federal staff who are designing, funding, or otherwise supporting an initiative; philanthropic partners; private-sector partners; nonprofit staff involved in implementation; representatives from states, local sites, and their communities; and training and TA providers. Respondents shared five considerations for convening stakeholders to potentially increase the impact of local cross-sector collaboration:

- **Convening local stakeholders while the initiative is still being designed.** Several respondents noted that local stakeholders, such as local site personnel and their partners, can play a valuable role in designing an initiative. They are often more familiar than federal staff are with the needs

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[3] For more information on strategic convenings for collaborations across departments and levels of government, see this resource from The Forum for Youth Investment.

of their own communities and communities like theirs. Including their perspective by inviting them to meet with other designers early on may lead to an initiative that is better targeted to community needs and goals.

- **Forming federal interagency working groups.** Federal stakeholders can form interagency working groups to achieve some degree of alignment at the federal level on the initiative's goals. Meeting regularly before launching cross-site collaboration initiatives at the state or local level can help ensure consistency in messaging.

- **Involving the White House.** High-profile leadership can help federal staff get a convening up and running faster because of the White House's influence and the connections and urgency it can bring to the table.

- **Engaging philanthropies.** Federal implementers can invite foundations to attend convenings already scheduled as part of the initiative or host separate convenings just for foundations. During the convenings, local site personnel can present an initiative, discuss how it may align with the foundations' investment priorities, and pursue partnership opportunities.

- **Fostering learning communities.** Respondents valued opportunities for federal and local stakeholders to come together in person at least annually. When paired with smaller, ongoing meetings that take place in person or virtually, intermediaries can foster a learning community for local sites to share challenges, strategies, and progress. These meetings might have more impact when attendees are assigned work to do ahead of them, and when local stakeholders have flexibility about how many and which staff members from their site attend.

Challenges. Respondents noted that convening stakeholders can require significant time and resources, depending on the size and location of the groups. They also noted it can be challenging for stakeholders from rural or remote sites to travel to and from in-person convenings.

Draw attention to an initiative and to designated sites

Respondents from all six initiatives noted that simply being designated as a participant or innovator by a federal or philanthropic initiative elevated the reputation of local sites and put a local spotlight on the initiative's goals and objectives. Some respondents also said the attention helped to bring more local partners on board and secure other investments. Respondents said there were five considerations for drawing the kind of attention to an initiative that can impact local cross-sector collaboration:

- **Making senior leaders part of the initiative.** Respondents said that when the White House, federal Cabinet secretaries, governors, or mayors are involved, simply having their participation can elevate and add urgency to an initiative, both within federal, state, and local agencies and among the media and broader public.

- **Shining a spotlight on rural communities.** Smaller, rural communities often face particularly difficult funding challenges and are not as visible to potential funding sources, such as philanthropies.[4] Respondents said it can be difficult for rural communities to compete for funding opportunities due to their small population sizes. According to respondents in rural areas, a public designation as part of a federal or philanthropic initiative helps them showcase their collaboration efforts to other potential partners.

- **Maintaining local control over messaging.** Initiatives that engage sites from all over the country can benefit from locally tailored messaging instead of a one-size-fits-all campaign. In some instances (for example, where national leaders do not have strong reputations in the local community, or where partisanship may be a challenge), it may be more effective to allow the local site to create and disseminate its own messaging about the initiative. That way, the site can tailor messaging to its unique local context and political environment while still achieving the initiative's overall goals.

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[4] There are likely specific challenges in urban and suburban areas as well, however, none of our study respondents addressed these. For the purposes of this project, we are reporting what was mentioned by respondents.

- **Drawing attention plus investing resources.** Respondents said that drawing attention to the initiative's work by being designated as a leader, innovator, or pilot site, along with receiving training and TA or grants through the initiative, can attract more resources from outside the initiative. Community partners, foundations, and other potential partners might view the designation and any accompanying resource investment as an indicator that a site has already been vetted, making them more likely to contribute resources themselves.

- **Drawing attention plus conducting research and evaluation.** Respondents said that local sites might have an interest in working across sectors but lack the time, bandwidth, or resources to prioritize this collaboration. Receiving a public designation as a pilot site or innovator through an initiative that also has an evaluation component might push local sites to prioritize cross-sector collaboration even when it is difficult to do. In particular, the notion that the site's efforts will be evaluated and the outcomes made public can encourage collaboration across sectors.

Challenges. Respondents said that drawing attention, unlike some of the other strategies, may not accomplish much if it is the only strategy that is used. They also noted that drawing attention might cause an initiative to be associated with a certain leader or group, which could threaten the initiative's sustainability.

Address bureaucratic and regulatory barriers

Collaboration at the local level can expose bureaucratic and regulatory barriers that stem from federal, state, and local laws. Federal agencies and other intermediaries can work to help localities identify and address these barriers throughout an initiative. Respondents from three initiatives noted that the first step in overcoming a barrier identified by local sites is to decide whether it is real or perceived. If a barrier is determined to be perceived (for example, if it is a consequence of a policy decision made at the state or local level, and not a federal requirement), respondents suggested working to correct misconceptions,

such as by sharing related guidance or regulations from relevant authorities to clarify the federal policies. Respondents noted three considerations for addressing bureaucratic and regulatory barriers that can impact local cross-sector collaboration:

- **Coordinating between federal agencies before working with local sites.** An initiative might seek to mitigate bureaucratic and regulatory barriers that stem from federal law and regulations by offering "barrier busting," meaning waivers or increased flexibility, to local sites. However, respondents said this tactic might be most effective when federal agencies make a shared commitment, perhaps through written agreements, on what supports or exemptions they can provide before promising flexibility to local sites. Otherwise, once the initiative is underway, the agencies could disagree about which supports or exemptions can or should be offered, or sites could be disappointed to learn that some barriers cannot be removed. Both might result in implementation delays and frustrations for local sites. A designated point person who oversees these commitments, and explorations from each involved federal agency, could make this process more efficient.

- **Spending time on-site.** Respondents reported that when federal staff spend time on-site, they might witness the impact of bureaucratic and regulatory challenges firsthand and be in a better position to determine how to navigate and address these challenges. When appropriate, they can help to identify and connect with the federal contacts who can help to reduce or eliminate a barrier. They can also help clarify federal requirements and determine whether or not barriers are real.

- **Building capacity in identifying the source of a barrier.** When states or local sites are trained on how to correctly identify the nature and source of the barriers they face, they can be better equipped to address those barriers through the appropriate channels on their own after an initiative ends.

Challenges. When initiatives promise some degree of "barrier busting" at the federal level, federal implementers may need to manage local sites'

expectations that federal staff can eliminate all the bureaucratic barriers that local sites face. Some barriers are difficult to remove even with federal agency support. For example, federal agencies may not have authority to waive requirements that are congressionally mandated. Other barriers can be at the state or local level. Respondents also said that it can be difficult to determine the extent of the bureaucratic and regulatory barriers until implementation of an initiative begins, and local sites run into challenges.

Identify potential resources, including direct staff support

Most of the initiatives we reviewed did not provide substantial direct funding to local sites. Respondents reported that local sites generally needed to secure additional funding to participate in initiatives. Initiative designers often tried to help sites identify sources for funding and for non-financial resources (for example, meeting space, communication channels or platforms, and TA opportunities). Conversations with respondents revealed four key considerations for identifying potential resources for local cross-sector collaboration:

- **Securing funding for cross-sector leaders.** Several respondents said it was important to have a manager whose sole responsibility is running initiative operations on the local level without other competing job responsibilities. They said having funding for dedicated, cross-sector leadership or management positions at the state or local level throughout planning and implementation can help local sites maintain a focus on meeting initiative goals. Respondents indicated that staff in these positions can focus on ways to leverage existing funding streams to make sustainable, cross-sector system changes and on training frontline staff and supervisors to work across sectors. When an initiative lacks the resources to support these positions in full, supporting part of a dedicated staff person's time can still be worthwhile, according to these respondents.

- **Providing priority points on federal grants.** When competitive federal grants provide priority points or preference to local sites participating in initiatives, respondents said that these sites were more competitive in securing federal grants to support collaboration.

- **Encouraging private investment.** Most federal designers and implementers whom we interviewed said it can be hard to overcome a lack of direct financial resources to offer local sites. In lieu of federal dollars, these respondents said they found it valuable to encourage private-sector partners (within appropriate parameters) to fund a portion of the work that local sites performed. Private-sector partners may also be able to provide non-financial resources, such as computer equipment or office space.

- **Using resources to attract more (and more diverse) local site applicants.** The potential to gain grants, staff, or other non-financial resources can motivate local sites to apply for an initiative, potentially generating a wide and diverse pool of local site applicants. This diversity can lead to a richer peer sharing community for the participating sites.

In addition, providing **staff support to local sites**, even if only a small amount, was helpful.[5] Respondents said that AmeriCorps members and/ or federal staff assigned to temporary posts can help sites identify and apply for additional funding and build local capacity in grant writing. They can also help sites with strategic planning and deliver training and TA to community partners. When local staff are stretched thin, these staff can also lead or contribute to project management.

Challenges. Most initiatives were not able to directly provide funding to sites, but instead focused on helping sites identify other financial resources and, in some cases, provided non-financial resources. Designers, implementers, and training and TA providers generally expressed frustration about

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[5] For more information on the role of federal staff in helping communities implement place-based initiatives, see this underline resource from The Forum for Youth Investment.

asking local sites to dedicate a large portion of their time to working on the initiative without also providing funding to support staff time and efforts. Initiatives that received staff support from AmeriCorps members found that they had to keep retraining and having orientations for new AmeriCorps members because of the annual turnover.

Respondents from the one initiative that did provide significant grant funding reported that sites without effective and strategic leaders struggled to spend those resources within the grant period despite the many needs in their areas.

Conduct research and evaluation

Respondents talked about how important research and evaluation can be in identifying what works and what doesn't in efforts that involve local cross-sector collaboration. Local site personnel from initiatives that included evaluations explained how instrumental the evaluations have been in showcasing their efforts to other potential partners. Conversely, local site personnel from initiatives without evaluations expressed frustration with their inability to present outcomes from their work to potential partners. Although not all initiatives include an evaluation, most have performance measures associated with them. These performance measures can be used to monitor a local site's activities and, to a limited degree, evaluate how well it is doing. Conversations with respondents revealed three considerations for developing performance measures and conducting research and evaluation that can impact local cross-sector collaboration:

- **Establishing clear performance measures before implementation.** Federal implementers often determine performance metrics to measure the success of the initiative. Respondents noted that when federal implementers create and communicate these metrics ahead of implementation, local sites can include them in their data systems and track them consistently over time.

- **Striking a balance between general and individualized performance measures.** Sites participating in cross-sector collaboration

initiatives often differ in their plans for local implementation. According to respondents, this can make it difficult to develop and capture standardized or common performance measures. At the same time, respondents said that when local sites have autonomy in developing their own goals and metrics to reflect their program design, comparing outcomes across sites can be challenging. Consequently, a hybrid approach can be useful — tracking some common performance measures across sites and having some site-specific metrics that measure progress toward an individual site's goals.

- **Streamlining the research team.** According to respondents, when an individual or organization already involved in the initiative conducts or coordinates research and evaluation activities, it can reduce the burden on local sites to respond to requests from multiple organizations and individuals.

Challenges. Depending on the study design, evaluations can be expensive, and data might be analyzed too late to help the implementation. Respondents noted that for local sites, participating in or conducting research and evaluation can sometimes feel more like a stressor than a benefit, even when the sites get evaluation TA. It can also be difficult to strike the right balance between general and individual performance measures without burdening local sites. Finally, respondents reported that including evaluation capacity as a site selection criterion could give sites an incentive to claim they are ready to conduct rigorous evaluations, such as randomized controlled trials, before they really are.

Lessons learned

The application process itself can foster cross-sector collaboration. When an initiative or grant application process requires it, local site personnel must think about how much cross-sector collaboration they currently engage in and how to foster more. Respondents said that getting the necessary stakeholders to strategize for the application can move the collaboration forward, even if the site does not ultimately earn the initiative designation or additional funding.

Exhibit 3. Spotlight on the Work Support Strategies two-phase approach

Work Support Strategies (WSS) was a philanthropically funded cross-sector collaboration initiative intended to help families with low incomes access work supports for which they are eligible. Respondents involved in WSS said the initiative's two-phase funding approach allowed funders to engage with states that demonstrated their ability to make progress and an enduring commitment to the goals and objectives of the initiative. The two phases were:

1. A nationwide application process followed by one year of planning with nine selected states. Selected states had one year of grant-funded planning with intensive TA before implementation. Selection criteria included a commitment to the goals of the initiative and diversity in size, geography, and starting points relative to WSS objectives. States without an outstanding service delivery track record were not excluded; instead, they had to demonstrate ambition in their application and identify which of their existing problems they wished to fix.

2. Implementation with six of the nine states: A subset of states received about three years of grant-funded implementation and support. Selection criteria included demonstrated progress based on their starting point and a commitment to carry out the plan developed in the planning year.

One respondent said that although it would have made the process more complex, even more stages or earlier progress checkpoints would have helped reveal which sites were truly on track and which appeared promising, but did not ultimately deliver.

> **"We looked for the greatest potential for change, not just those who had done the most to date."**
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> *– WSS designer discussing state selection criteria for the initiative*

Three preexisting factors might lead to quick improvements in local cross-sector collaboration. If designers want to select sites that can improve collaboration quickly, some respondents suggested that they look for a demonstrated ability to provide quality services, even within silos; existing or budding trusted partnerships; and leaders who prioritize the objectives of the initiative. This approach might only engage sites that have already established some collaboration and buy-in. The WSS two-phase approach is an alternative model for engaging sites that have more work to do before implementation (see Exhibit 3).

Involvement by senior leaders draws attention and adds urgency. Respondents from several initiatives noted that involvement by the White House, federal cabinet secretaries, governors, or mayors ensured that initiative objectives became and remained a priority. However, as we note below, this comes with a trade-off of potentially being associated with a particular leader or administration. According to respondents, federal staff site visits led to increased stakeholder attention and participation at multiple levels of state and local government, even when stakeholders had been reluctant to engage before because of political differences.

Creating a culture of collaboration and working with incoming administrations can help local sites sustain initiatives during leadership transitions. Transitions of elected leaders sometimes disrupt cross-sector collaboration initiatives, as incoming administrations at all levels might view a particular initiative as too closely tied to previous administrations and stop prioritizing it. Because collaboration requires constant effort to maintain, local sites can lose any improvements they made if stakeholders are no longer motivated to maintain the collaboration, or if other priorities overtake this work. Respondents from

one initiative said that two strategies helped them successfully navigate leadership transitions: (1) encouraging culture change within state and local agencies to promote collaboration, and (2) working closely with incoming local administrations to demonstrate the initiative's value.

Some sites may need more help with securing resources and funding travel while participating in cross-sector initiatives. Although respondents noted that participating in cross-sector collaboration initiatives helps rural and tribal sites draw new attention to their work and secure much-needed resources, these sites might need more support to participate.[6] For example, respondents reported that many local site personnel need to apply for outside grant funding (or leverage philanthropic contributions) to carry out the work of cross-sector collaboration. However, some respondents believe that in competitions for federal or philanthropic grants, rural and tribal areas might be less likely to secure funding because they serve smaller populations, know less about grant application processes, and have limited staff capacity to apply for grants. In addition, local site personnel said they had logistical challenges traveling to in-person meetings. Rural and tribal sites thus might benefit from building capacity to apply for grants and from additional travel-related resources and flexibility.

"[It's a] pretty special thing the federal government can do in [funding] small rural programs. We can't generate the revenue for programming like this in our own place. We need something to lift our activities up to a larger audience outside our county to find investment."

—*Local rural site staff member on federal designations as a spotlight*

Potential actions suggested by respondents for future initiatives

Respondents reflected on what they would do differently and gave advice to foundations, federal agencies, and other intermediaries looking to design, implement, and sustain new initiatives that support local cross-sector collaboration. To complement the other lessons in this brief, respondents offered the following potential actions for future initiatives:

Design

- **Start with the outcomes the initiative is trying to achieve.** Be clear about shared goals, and then work backward, using collaboration as a strategy to help reach the goals.

"When trying to get people to change and transform, you need to be able to see a shared vision. We could see it. If you can't, it just feels like additional work that makes life harder."

—*Designer reflecting on the importance of a shared vision among stakeholders*

- **Get input from local stakeholders early.** To help inform the design of the initiative, seek out local stakeholders who either collaborate well across sectors already or know the needs of target communities.

- **Start convening and training and TA early, but do not rush to start implementation.** Build in time for planning, getting partners on board, designing or solidifying any data-sharing agreements, determining and communicating performance and evaluation criteria, and ensuring readiness to collect data for evaluations before implementation begins.

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[6] See footnote 4. Some urban and suburban sites may also need additional help as well, though our respondents did not address this issue.

Implement

- **Model collaboration at the federal level.** While they are implementing an initiative, local sites are energized by positive examples of federal collaboration and discouraged by negative ones.

- **Include opportunities to meet face-to-face when possible.** Beginning to collaborate across sectors often requires building trust and relationships. In-person and organic interactions can facilitate and speed up that relationship building. Embedding federal staff on the ground in local agencies, having federal staff conduct site visits, and convening stakeholders can make these interactions possible. Local personnel also value opportunities to be in the same room with federal staff members who can answer their questions, and in-person convenings make this possible.

- **Make virtual meetings and training and TA interactive and user friendly.** Virtual meetings and training and TA can be used to enable cross-sector collaboration, but activities and meeting tools need to be carefully designed or selected to keep local sites engaged when communicating from afar.

- **Consider data system design and data-sharing needs early and often.** Local sites might need training and TA on selecting and/or tailoring data systems, collecting data, or setting up data-sharing agreements between partners. This can be time-consuming, so it should be started early.

Sustain

- **Foster peer-sharing networks that will persist after the initiative ends.** Respondents from multiple initiatives said they are still in touch with some of the stakeholders they met and learned from through peer sharing opportunities. Supporting these relationships through a formalized alumni network could make it easier for local sites to sustain cross-sector collaboration.

Appendix A: Study Methods

This appendix describes the methods we used to collect information for this brief.

Selecting initiatives and respondents

In fall 2019 and winter 2020, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and Mathematica selected six local cross-sector collaboration initiatives together (Appendix B). Respondents selected for interviews were all from those six initiatives, which were chosen from a list of 25 that have used or are using different strategies to facilitate local cross-sector collaboration. The selection process was designed to achieve a mix of the following:

- Federal agencies and partners or foundations involved with the initiative

- Rural sites in addition to non-rural

- Strategies used to facilitate local cross-sector collaboration and perceived intensity of cross-sector collaboration

- Initiative status and timeline: time period, and whether initiative was completed or ongoing

Using a list of the primary selection criteria for each initiative, ASPE initially selected seven initiatives to include in the study. Ultimately, one federally funded, health-oriented initiative was dropped from the study because of the need for potential respondents to focus on the COVID-19 public health emergency during the interview period.

For each initiative, ASPE and Mathematica identified several respondents for interviews by communicating with federal and nonfederal staff familiar with each initiative, targeting Internet searches, and getting recommendations from respondents who had already been interviewed (snowball searches). The types of respondents were federal or philanthropic designers, federal or nonprofit implementers, local site personnel, evaluators, and technical assistance (TA) providers.

The number and type of respondents interviewed from each initiative varied depending on the makeup of personnel involved in the initiative and their responsiveness to interview requests. For example, some initiatives did not have third-party evaluations or hadn't had them yet, and some did not have contracted TA providers. Also, local site respondents were selected to ensure geographic representation across the six initiatives. Mathematica interviewed respondents from seven states: California, Colorado, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Texas, and Washington. Table A.1 briefly describes each initiative and includes the number and type of respondents interviewed.

Because ASPE purposively selected the initiatives and respondents, respondents' experiences are not necessarily applicable to a broader set of local cross-sector collaboration initiatives. However, the respondents' range of experiences allows us to learn lessons and illustrates some practices for strategies that policymakers and practitioners can use to facilitate local cross-sector collaboration.

Table A.1. Number and type of respondents interviewed per initiative

Initiative	Number of designer respondents	Number of implementer respondents	Number of local site respondents	Number of evaluator respondents	Number of TA provider respondents
Detroit Federal Working Group	1	1	0	0	0
EnVision Centers	1	1	2[a]	0	0
Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3)	1	1	2	1	2[c]
Promise Zones	2	2[b]	2[b]	1	2[c]
Rural Integration Models for Parents and Children to Thrive [Rural IMPACT]	1	1	1	1	1
Work Support Strategies	1	1	1	1	1

[a] Both respondents were from the same local site.
[b] One federal respondent based at a local site gave the perspective of both an implementer and a local site.
[c] Both respondents were from the same TA provider organization. They discussed providing TA for both P3 and Promise Zones.

Data collection methods

ASPE and Mathematica developed two semi-structured protocols to guide respondent interviews. One was used with TA providers, and the second was used with all other types of respondents.

Mathematica staff conducted telephone interviews with respondents from February through May 2020. Interviews were about 60 minutes long and included one or two respondents at a time. In some cases, respondents shared related documents after the interviews, which we reviewed.

Data analysis methods

Mathematica staff cleaned interview notes and then used NVivo to code qualitative data on the themes of interest. The authors used these coded data to develop insights and reach conclusions that have the potential to be broadly applicable to local cross-sector collaboration.

Appendix B: Initiative Descriptions

Detroit Federal Working Group (2011–2016).[i] An iteration of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities model, this leveraged close working relationships between (1) federal resources and staff and (2) local leaders to address seven key areas involved in revitalizing Detroit: neighborhood stabilization, resources and sustainability, workforce development and training, transportation and mobility, economic development, international affairs, and policing and public safety.

EnVision Centers (2018–present).[ii] Led by the Department for Housing and Urban Development, EnVision Centers are centralized hubs that give people the resources and support they need to excel. They have four distinct focus areas: (1) economic empowerment, (2) educational advancement, (3) character and leadership, and (4) health and wellness. EnVision Centers are built on public-private partnerships formed between nonprofit organizations, government agencies, community development corporations, public housing authorities, housing finance agencies, and faith-based groups.

Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (2014–present).[iii] A collaboration between federal partners including the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services (HHS), along with others, this initiative allows for agreements with states, regions, localities, or tribal communities that give them more flexibility to use discretionary funds across multiple federal programs. In exchange, pilot sites commit to achieving significant improvements in educational, employment, and other key outcomes for the youth they serve: disconnected youth, defined as those ages 14 to 24 who have low incomes and are either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, unemployed, or not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of an educational institution.

Promise Zones (2014–present).[iv] Promise Zones are high poverty communities where the federal government partners with local leaders to increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, leverage private investment, reduce violent crime, enhance public health, and address other priorities identified by the community. Twenty-two urban, rural, and tribal Promise Zones were selected through three rounds of national competition, in which applicants demonstrated a consensus vision for their community and its residents, the capacity to carry it out, and a shared commitment to specific, measurable results. A 10-year Promise Zone designation enables a community to receive up to five AmeriCorps members; a federal liaison who helps designees navigate federal programs; preferences for certain competitive federal grant programs; and technical assistance (TA) from participating federal agencies.

Rural Integration Models for Parents and Children to Thrive [Rural IMPACT] (2015–2017).[v] Initiated by the White House and led by HHS, this cross-agency initiative helped 10 rural and tribal sites adopt or deepen a two-generation approach with the goal of increasing employment and education levels for parents and improving the health, development, and well-being of their children and families. Rural IMPACT included a six-month planning period with targeted TA to help communities link programs and services; at least six months of additional TA to begin the implementation period; a partnership to develop projects to place AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers, to help develop new or enhance existing antipoverty programming, map community assets, and help build local community capacity; participation in a peer learning network; and support from a federal interagency team to identify and address barriers to cross-programmatic work.

Work Support Strategies (2011–2016).[vi] A philanthropically funded, five-year, multistate initiative to help families with low incomes get and keep the work supports for which they are eligible. Through grants and expert TA, the initiative supported states as they worked to reform and align the systems delivering work support programs that increase families' well-being and stability. Participating states sought to streamline and integrate service delivery, use 21st-century technology, and apply innovative business processes to improve administrative efficiency and reduce burden on states and working families.

Appendix B Endnotes

[i] See https://www.eda.gov/archives/2016/news/blogs/2016/12/09/detroit.htm, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/12/02/crisis-opportunity-building-brighter-future-detroit-through-federal-local-teamwork, and https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/files/documents/DFWG_Report_Final_120216.pdf.

[ii] See https://www.hud.gov/envisioncenters

[iii] Adapted from https://youth.gov/youth-topics/reconnecting-youth/performance-partnership-pilots

[iv] See https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/promise-zones/promise-zones-overview/

[v] See https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2015/09/25/fact-sheet-10-communities-named-rural-impact-demonstration-sites

[vi] See https://www.urban.org/work-support-strategies