

# A Toolbox for **Library-Led Collective Impact** and **Neighborhood- Based Collaboration**

Written and compiled by **the Paschalville Partnership**,  
a collaboration led by the Free Library of Philadelphia



# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLBOX</b>	<b>1</b>
Why should libraries collaborate?	1
What is collective impact and why follow it?	3
How the toolbox is organized	4
<b>GETTING A COLLABORATION STARTED</b>	<b>5</b>
Step 1: Lay the foundation	5
Step 2: Go through a planning process	7
Step 3: Work toward a detailed plan	8
<b>BUILDING A COLLABORATION</b>	<b>10</b>
Step 4: Shore up your work	10
Step 5: Keep the momentum going	11
<b>SUSTAINING A COLLABORATION</b>	<b>13</b>
Step 6: Share lessons learned and celebrate successes	13
Step 7: Seek opportunities to leverage your collaboration	13
Step 8: Evaluate your work	14
Appendix A: Partner Interview Guide	16
Appendix B: Partner Profiles	17
Appendix C: Brainstorming Activity	18
Appendix D: Affirmation Ceremony Form	19
Appendix E: Paschalville Partnership Self-Evaluation	20

# INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLBOX

We are pleased to share this toolbox for libraries and library systems that seek to collaborate with organizational partners and engage with community members in an authentic way. The toolbox is based on our experience—the Free Library of Philadelphia—convening and leading the Paschalville Partnership, a collaboration of 11 organizations working to transform services for job seekers in the community served by Paschalville Library, which is located in Southwest Philadelphia.

Collaborations come in all shapes and sizes. Ours is neighborhood-based and follows the principles of collective impact, and this toolbox is very much a reflection of that. In our view, there is no one way to form or sustain a collaboration, but we share our experience in the hope that it gives our colleagues in the library and museum world “food for thought.” With this in mind, we have assembled this toolbox of practical steps, ideas, tips, and resources that we have developed or encountered along our own collaboration journey.

## The Paschalville Partnership: Partner Organizations

### Backbone Support:

Free Library of Philadelphia

### Community-Based Organizations:

Paschalville Library

Southwest CDC

CityLights Network

AFRICOM

Outley House

### City Agencies and Organizations:

Office of Adult Education

Philadelphia Works, Inc.

PACareerLink

Office of Community Empowerment  
and Opportunity

First Person Arts

## Why should libraries collaborate?

When organizations come together to collaborate, the expectation is that working together—combining resources, expertise, and networks—will result in a collective impact that is greater than the sum of what each organization would achieve individually. In this equation, we argue that libraries bring a unique “value add” to the table:

- Libraries have incredible **infrastructure** to draw upon. For the Paschalville Partnership, we rely on infrastructure in our neighborhood libraries—the facility, collection of physical and digital materials, computers with internet access and meeting space, as well as neighborhood library staff and their expertise. As a larger library system, we also benefit from central administration infrastructure—executive staff at the helm, grant writers and managers leading our fundraising efforts, and a communications team that helps us get the word out.
- Libraries, especially neighborhood libraries, are a **trusted community presence** with a keen understanding of residents who are coming in their doors everyday. Indeed, in a community like that served by Paschalville Library, a neighborhood library may be one of few remaining institutional anchors, perceived as a “safe haven” that residents turn to not just for educational or intellectual nourishment, but also in times of need.

- Libraries have **built-in data tracking**—the library card! Our collaboration has experimented with ways of using the library card to collect data on initiative outputs, and we see great potential in using library cards for tracking initiative outcomes as well. (Don't worry: We are not tracking user accounts, but rather how individuals might engage with library services and those of our partners.)
- Libraries bring a lot of **good will** to a collaboration. Libraries are among the most trusted and highly regarded public institutions in our country (see the Pew Research Center's *Libraries 2016* study,<sup>1</sup> among many others), and there is a "spillover effect" to a collaboration that includes or is led by them.

Of course, libraries stand to gain from collaborations, too.

- Collaborations also help libraries **extend their service offerings in order to respond to community needs**. Too often, libraries are confronted with challenges in communities, even though they are not traditional social-service organizations. By forging strong connections with community partners, libraries can refer community members for "deeper" services than librarians can (or should be expected to) provide.
- Collaborations also help libraries **build their brand**. Libraries of the 21st century are no longer just about books and space; they can be a vital part of community revitalization. As stated by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) itself: "Now more than ever, libraries and museums are building new partnerships with public and private organizations to strengthen connections to their communities. They are uniquely valued as trusted spaces that bring people and organizations together to tackle local challenges."<sup>2</sup> By being part of a collaboration, the library's role in the community goes from being transactional to potentially transformative.

Indeed, libraries and library systems are increasingly incorporating collaboration, partnerships, community engagement, and even collective impact into their strategic plans and operations. A key priority in the Free Library of Philadelphia's 2018–2020 Strategic Plan, for example, is to "nurture mission-driven partnerships and implement engagement strategies that advance the Library's ongoing response to community needs."<sup>3</sup> IMLS also includes a similar key priority in its 2018–2022 Strategic Plan: "Promote the ability of museums and libraries to serve as trusted spaces for community engagement and dialogue."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/americans-attitudes-toward-public-libraries/>

<sup>2</sup> Transforming Communities: 2018-2020 IMLS Strategic Plan: [imls.gov/about-us/strategic-plan](https://www.imls.gov/about-us/strategic-plan)

<sup>3</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia 2018-2020 Strategic Plan and an accompanying video can be found at [freelibrary.org/about](https://freelibrary.org/about)

<sup>4</sup> Transforming Communities: 2018-2020 IMLS Strategic Plan: [imls.gov/about-us/strategic-plan](https://www.imls.gov/about-us/strategic-plan)

## What is collective impact and why follow it?

Our partnership has chosen to follow the collaboration model known as “collective impact.” This model was first outlined in a 2011 article published by the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, which stated that: “Large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations.”<sup>5</sup> Collective impact calls for a systematic rather than piecemeal approach to social impact that focuses on the relationship between organizations and their progress toward shared objectives.

The authors identify five components that characterize successful collective impact initiatives:

- **Mutually reinforcing activities:** “Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring them to do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake their specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.”
- **Shared measurement systems:** “Collective impact includes collecting data and measuring results consistently for a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations, not only to ensure that all efforts remain aligned, but also to enable participants to hold each other accountable and to learn from each other’s successes and failures.”
- **Continuous communication:** “Continuous communication refers to consistent and open communication that is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation.”
- **Common agenda:** “Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.”
- **Backbone support organization:** “Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations have any to spare.”

In our view, the primary advantage of following the collective impact model is its structure, which has kept our discussions—and subsequently our work—focused and disciplined, starting at the beginning with our planning process. At the same time, the five components were broad enough to allow creativity and flexibility in shaping our partnership and crafting a collaborative initiative.

---

<sup>5</sup> “Collective Impact”, John Kania and Mark Kramer, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011.



## LINK

There is a growing and vibrant worldwide community of collective impact initiatives, and we can all learn from each other. We suggest starting with the Collective Impact Forum ([www.collectiveimpactforum.org](http://www.collectiveimpactforum.org)), a online community where you can learn about other collective impact initiatives in your area or your field of work; view resources and post questions; find information about meetings, events, and conferences; and share information about your collaboration.

### How the toolbox is organized

This toolbox is divided into three main phases: starting, building, and sustaining a collaboration. For each phase, we have provided:

- Multiple steps for working through the phase;
- Practical tips and tools that we have developed or come across;
- Examples from materials developed by our partnership;
- Sidebars highlighting related topics; and
- Links to some of the partnership's published reports and other work.

To keep up with the work of the Paschalville Partnership, visit us at the Free Library's website: [www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership](http://www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership).

# GETTING A COLLABORATION STARTED

## Step 1: Lay the foundation

**Choose an area of focus.** A collaboration is most effective when the group coming together focuses on a clear and well-defined issue, opportunity, or challenge. In deciding on an area of focus, think about the community in which you will be doing your work and how you are already serving them. What issues are customers presenting to library staff? What services or programs have library staff already taken the initiative on? What is the community asking for? Another way to find an area of focus is to ask the community you serve directly. A growing trend in the world of collective impact is the call for collaboration to be community-informed. (See sidebar on Asset-Based Community Development.)

### Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

The ABCD Institute at DePaul University describes ABCD as “a movement that considers local assets as the primary building blocks of sustainable community development. Building on the skills of local residents, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions, asset-based community development draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future.” There are three foundational truths to ABCD:

- Everyone has gifts.
- Everyone has something to contribute.
- Everyone cares about something and that passion is their motivation to act.

Under the ABCD approach, community members engage in asset mapping: local assets (in the form of people, associations, institutions, place, economy, and stories) are identified, connected to each other, and built upon for productive use in support of what the community cares about. The primary tool of the asset mapping is the “learning conversation,” a focused conversation with community members where they articulate what they care about, what they are willing to act on, and what assets they see in the community. For more information on and resources for ABCD, visit The ABCD Institute page on the DePaul University website: [www.depaul.edu](http://www.depaul.edu).

In the case of the Paschalville Partnership, we work in a community that is economically distressed. Our collaboration could have chosen to go in any number of directions when faced with such deeply entrenched and complex social ills. At the Free Library’s urging, our chosen focus was to tackle chronically high unemployment by transforming the services we collectively and collaboratively provide to job seekers in the community. This focus would build on the foundation laid by neighborhood library staff, who were already providing one-on-one assistance to job seekers at their Job Readiness Lab.

Beginning with a clear area of focus will help bring other organizations to the table and make clear which departments and staff should become

involved in the effort. In the case of a larger library system, it could also help narrow down efforts to a particular community or neighborhood library for which the area of focus makes the most sense.

**Designate an internal team.** The first step is to designate an internal team (or staff person) that will provide initial direction and take on the tasks of convening a group. As a start, this

internal team should put together a list of other organizations with a vested interest in the focus area to invite to the table. This list could include nonprofit organizations based in the community; city agencies or programs, especially those with a presence in the community where your work will take place; community leaders, associations, or “connectors” who are engaged at the local level; and key library staff at the neighborhood library or central administration level. To expand your search, consult with colleagues—within the library but also contacts outside the library—to learn what other organizations might be invited to join.

**Sketch out a planning process.** To bring organizations to the table, you have to communicate what you are hoping to accomplish and how you plan to get there. Just as important, you have to communicate what role potential partner organizations would be expected to play in the process and how they would benefit from being part of a process. Sketching out a planning process, even the broad outline of one, will make things clearer to everyone at the outset.

### The Paschalville Partnership: Planning Process

October – December 2013	Sent organizational invitations, conducted organizational interviews, and developed partner profiles
January – June 2014	Conducted brainstorming meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kick-Off Meeting: Vision and Mission Statements</li> <li>• Planning Meeting #1: Mutually Reinforcing Activities</li> <li>• Planning Meeting #2: Shared Measurement Systems</li> <li>• Planning Meeting #3: Continuous Communication</li> <li>• Final Retreat: Common Agenda and Partner Affirmation</li> </ul>
July – August 2014	Finalized Common Agenda
September 2014	Released Common Agenda

In our case, the goal was for our planning process to result in “common agenda” (according to the principles of collective impact) for working collaboratively with job seekers in the community served by Paschalville Library. To arrive at this common agenda, we sketched out a yearlong planning process. In the first few months, we would conduct interviews with the organizations in order to develop profiles of each of them, followed by six months of group brainstorming meetings, each focused on a particular aspect of the collective impact model. (See sidebar.) Our “ask,” in essence, was two-fold: participate in an interview and send at least one senior-level staff person to all five brainstorming meetings.

**Formally invite their participation.** To kick off the process, it helps to formally

invite the participation of each organization with a letter or email. This formal invitation should outline the goals of the process and clearly describe what you are asking of each organization. Also, make it clear in the letter that someone from your internal team will be following up with a phone call. In our case, a letter was drafted from and sent by the Associate Director of the Free Library. Library staff followed up the letter with personal phone calls, during which an hour-long interview was scheduled with each organization.

## Step 2: Go through a planning process

**Conduct organizational interviews.** To kick off our planning process, we conducted interviews with all the organizations and entities that responded positively to our invitation. In these interviews, we asked questions about the organization's mission, how the organization served our community of interest, what outcomes it sought to achieve, and what resources it could bring to a potential collaboration, among other questions. The interviews also gave us the opportunity to explain our project to the organization and gauge their interest in participating.



### TOOL

A **sample interview guide** based on the one we used is provided in **Appendix A**.

**Develop partner profiles.** We used the results of our interviews to develop individual partner profiles, and then shared all the profiles with the full group in advance of the first group brainstorming session. This step helped the organizations get to know each other ahead of time in an efficient manner. Each profile was limited to a half-page, with information reported for specific section headings.



### TOOL

Samples sections you can develop for **partner profiles** are provided in **Appendix B**.

**Conduct background research.** Another way to set the stage for a planning process is to conduct background research on the issue and/or the community on which you intend to focus. In our case, we developed a socioeconomic profile of our community using census data, and we did a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis drawing from our partner interviews and the data analysis. We presented this information at the very beginning of our first group session before jumping into the brainstorming. In subsequent meetings, we also presented background research on two of our target populations: new Americans, our term for immigrants and refugees, regardless of status; and the reentry population, a broad group comprised of individuals who are formerly incarcerated, out on bail, in a diversion program, or in a federal or state corrections facility.

**Engage outside help.** When moving to brainstorming meetings, we suggest bringing on board a neutral facilitator and/or note taker, if possible. In fact, hiring an outside consultant, if your budget allows, or even bringing in a colleague from outside the project to facilitate the process will allow you to focus on the substance of the meetings rather than getting caught up in the mechanics of meeting execution. For our process, we hired a consulting practice affiliated with a local university to develop the meeting content, facilitate our meetings, summarize the meetings, and draft our final common agenda.

**Have a clear agenda going into each meeting.** While we knew the general topic of each of our five brainstorming sessions ahead of time, we developed the agenda for each meeting along the way so that we could respond to what had happened in the previous meeting.

In developing the agenda, we always started with an overview of the meeting topic, which included providing basic definitions and examples. For example, for our first brainstorming session on mission and vision statements, we shared general thinking on what makes a mission and vision statement compelling as well as example statements.

**Build iteration into the agenda.** If you are having multiple meetings as part of your planning process, consider building “iteration” into the agenda, meaning revisit what was discussed in the last meeting to ensure the collective thinking is still valid and to make connections with discussion in the present meeting. For example, for our agenda on the session covering “continuous communication,” we first revisited our thinking on mutually reinforcing activities and shared measurement systems to make sure the group was still in agreement. We then discussed how continuous communication (both internally and externally) could support these other components.

**Make brainstorming a structured activity.** For our brainstorming, we always developed activities incorporating specific questions, rather than opening it up to general discussion. These activities generally started with each attendee writing down their answers to specific questions on a pre-designed worksheet. Next, attendees shared their individual thinking in a breakout group of four to five attendees, and the group noted areas of common thinking on a flip chart. Lastly, each breakout group shared the highlights of their discussion with the full group. This approach was successful in that each person had equal opportunity to provide input. (Open-ended discussions can often be dominated by a handful of people.) It also provided a written record of that input, along with some vetting of ideas by the breakout groups themselves.



## TOOL

An example of a **brainstorming activity** (used in our first brainstorming session on creating a vision statement) is provided in **Appendix C**.

**Get work done in between meetings.** Sometimes it is hard to cover everything on your agenda in a meeting, or perhaps the group discussion in a meeting sparks additional thinking after the meeting is over. A great way to capture additional thinking is to assign “homework” in between meetings. In our case, we periodically sent out short online surveys usually with open-ended questions to gather additional input. We also sometimes fielded a write-up of our thinking to make sure our summary of the group’s input was being characterized correctly.

### Step 3: Work toward a detailed plan

**Write it down.** Another advantage of laying out a planning process ahead of time is that it gives you an endpoint to work towards, rather than getting caught in a trap of endless discussion. Ideally, you want the group sessions to start building toward consensus as you get closer to the end point, and a great way to achieve consensus is to develop a written proposal of the group’s thinking on what a collaboration could do together and how it would work. A written proposal gives something for your potential partners to respond to, make changes to, and—ideally in the end—agree to.

In our case, we decided to create a common agenda, another component of collective impact. Since there was no blueprint for us to follow, the common agenda articulated our thinking on the three of the five main components of collective impact:

- The **mutually reinforcing activities** that partners would work on together, with specified roles and responsibilities for each partner at the table;
- A set of metrics we wanted to track, the **shared measurement systems** we would need to put in place in order to track them, and target goals for each metric that we wanted to hold ourselves accountable to; and
- **Continuous communication**, both internally within the partnership and externally to outside stakeholders.

We were able to arrive at a final version of the common agenda after only a few rounds of revision. These components were summarized in table form for easy reference, preceded by several pages of narrative describing our planning process.



You can view our **final common agenda** at this link: [www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership](http://www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership)

**Set a timeline.** Setting a timeline can get things underway and help move you to the next phase of building a collaboration. Our common agenda included a timeline for when we wanted to implement different aspects of our common agenda. Our general time frame consisted of an initial “bridge year,” during which we would start to work together on activities that could be undertaken right away while pursuing funding. Assuming funding could be secured, we would then move into a more intense “implementation phase,” which ideally was to be a multi-year period. This timeline gave partners a clear sense of where we wanted to go and how we could get there, step by step.

**Affirm partner commitment.** Once you have arrived at the end of your planning process and hopefully have a plan in place, it can be helpful to mark the achievement by seeking some form of affirmation from your partners. In our case, we held a signing ceremony, where each individual (even if from the same organization) was invited to sign their name to a document affirming their commitment to the common agenda and encouraged to say a few words about how their organization would benefit from and contribute to the collaboration. Of course, this affirmation document had no official or even legal meaning, but we did include it in funding proposals to demonstrate the commitment of partner organizations to our collaboration.



## TOOL

You can view the form we used for our **partner affirmation ceremony** in **Appendix D**.

## BUILDING A COLLABORATION

### Step 4: Shore up your work

**Put in place backbone support.** An important component of successful collective impact is to have strong backbone support, meaning a person or organization designated by the group with the main responsibility of nurturing the collaboration. Specific tasks that could fall to the backbone support include convening the group (or subgroups) as needed; coordinating mutually reinforcing activities; setting up shared measurement systems, tracking key metrics, and reporting back on these metrics to the collaboration; supporting joint fundraising activities and taking care of administrative tasks for jointly secured funding; and coordinating community outreach and publicity efforts.

Ideally, these tasks would be incorporated into the formal responsibilities of the person or organization taking on the role of backbone support, and they would be compensated for this work. Expecting the work to be done on a voluntary basis or adding the tasks to a person's existing workload is not likely to be a path for sustaining a collaboration. Indeed, finding a way to create a specific backbone position might be the surest way to keep your collaboration on track. In our case, we knew we wanted to pursue joint funding together, and we decided that our proposal would include hiring a project coordinator who would report to the Free Library, which would continue to be the convening organization of our collaboration.

**Pursue joint funding.** Once you have your plan in place, considering pursuing joint funding to implement your work. It is one thing to talk about doing things together, but securing funding together will bring your collaboration into a more productive phase. When talking to funders, highlight all the partners you have brought to the table and how you are looking to have social impact in a community on a scale much larger than what each organization could do on its own. Share your planning process and how you arrived at a common agenda or whatever your final plan turns out to be. Emphasize your commitment to each other.

In the case of the Paschalville Partnership, we initiated discussion about a joint funding proposal by asking each partner to identify funding they might need (if any) to implement their portion of the common agenda. We then gathered these "asks" and proceeded to negotiate between the partners until we came up with a reasonable and equitable joint budget. The Free Library, drawing upon its internal grant-writing capacity, developed the proposal from this budget and our common agenda, and a draft was circulated for final review and input. The final proposal was submitted by the Free Library to our funder on the partnership's behalf.

**Co-brand your efforts.** Now that you have a group of organizations working together, find opportunities to promote your joint efforts, especially when you can piggyback on each other's existing branding efforts. In our case, the partnership wanted to build off the Free Library's "brand," which is highly regarded and trusted throughout the city. We publicized ads in the local paper and created new marketing materials that identified services for job seekers at not just Paschalville Library but also some of our partner organizations. We used common language

in our community outreach efforts and were sure to highlight all our organization logos in our materials.

## Step 5: Keep the momentum going

**Meet regularly, but not too much.** Our original common agenda called for the collaboration to meet on a quarterly basis. However, over time we found that the full group only needed to meet two to three times each year and that we could keep the partnership up to date in between these meetings with emails sent out by the project coordinator every other month or so. We also started to have smaller meetings of the partner organizations that were more deeply involved in the day-to-day activities of the collaboration, focusing on implementation. We also changed the focus of our full partnership meetings to “best practices” on working with target populations within our community, namely immigrants, refugees, and the reentry population.

**Commit to shared metrics.** As noted in the previous section, an important component for success in collective impact is having shared measurement systems, but even before this you need to know what metrics the group as a whole is interested in tracking and even holding itself accountable to. Indeed, one of the advantages of working collaboratively is that a group can strive toward achieving broader social goals. For example, in our case, the Free Library could begin looking beyond traditional metrics, such as customer visitation and program

A great way to frame a program or initiative—whether it is at the organizational level or by a collaboration—is to develop a **logic model**. A logic model is a concise, graphical depiction of how a program or initiative works and how program inputs and outputs are linked to participant and community outcomes. Logic models also can articulate assumptions, values, and external factors undergirding the program or initiative’s “theory of change.” The internet provides many resources on developing and examples of logic models. We suggest starting with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation *Logic Model Development Guide*, downloadable at [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).

attendance, to broader goals such as helping job seekers find employment and even community-level goals such as increasing labor force participation and reducing unemployment.

To identify key metrics, be sure to think about both outputs and outcomes. Outputs refer to the direct products or results of program activities. Outcomes, on the other hand, refer to specific changes in behavior, knowledge, skills, status, or level of function for your target population that you hope come about as a result of your program activities. Once you identified relevant outputs and outcomes, think about different indicators you can collect data for that will help you track progress toward achieving them.



You can view the Paschalville Partnership’s **logic model** at this link: [www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership](http://www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership)

In the partnership's case, we committed to tracking several outputs at the job-seeker level, including visitation to our two Job Readiness Labs; attendance at our employment boot camps, resource fairs, and job fairs; and referrals between our partner organizations. In some cases, we needed to establish new tracking systems for collecting the data, such as installing bar code scanners at both Job Readiness Labs that fed into a shared sheet on Google Drive. In the case of outcomes, we attempted to contact job seekers and attendees to our programs via email after some period of time to see how their job searches were going. We also worked with several partner organizations to track outcomes of clients who were referred to them through our partnership to see if these client outcomes had been positively enhanced as a result of the referral.

Finally, be sure to report back on your shared metrics to the full group periodically. Reviewing shared metrics, especially the group's work toward moving them in a positive direction, can help keep the organizations at the table together and in sync on the common goals and vision. Our partnership committed to reviewing shared metrics roughly every six months. When this time frame coincided with a meeting of the full partnership, we dedicated a portion of the agenda to reviewing the latest figures and talking about what was working and what needed to be revisited.

**Build concentric circles of collaboration.** Partnership and collaborations are inherently fluid. As you implement more of your common agenda and word gets out about your collaboration, you are very likely to encounter or be approached by new organizations or even loosely affiliated associations of community members. Be open to these entities becoming part of your partnership by exploring how their involvement could be mutually beneficial. Invite them to meetings and consult with existing partner organizations to weigh the pros and cons. It might make sense to bring them on board as formal partners, or you might consider involving them at a less intense level, such as putting them on a list of organizations to be kept informed of your work. At the same time, existing partners might drift away or intentionally end their involvement, but with concentric circles of support you can often keep them involved but in a new and different way. For the Paschalville Partnership, we have built concentric circles of support—an inner circle of largely the original core partners, a broader circle of organizations that we involve on an as-needed basis, and an outer circle that wants to be kept informed of our work.

## SUSTAINING A COLLABORATION

### Step 6. Share lessons learned and celebrate successes

**Report to your stakeholders.** If your collaboration has identified metrics, collected data on them, and shared this information internally with partners, then you might consider releasing the information in a more public form to your external stakeholders, such as in a short report. By publicizing your work in a report, you get the word out on your collaboration, which in turn might bring more organizations and other entities into the fold. Also, issuing a report lends credibility to your work, as it demonstrates a significant level of commitment. A report also gives you the opportunity to reflect on your progress, convey any lessons learned, and outline any anticipated adjustments to your activities or strategy for the coming year.

For the past three years, our partnership has published a “state of the community” report. In this report, we provide details on what we have worked on in the past year, including statistics on visitation to our Job Readiness Labs, attendance at our events, and referrals we have made within our partnership. Our next report will feature analysis of our outcomes metrics, including survey responses from our community and client-level data tracked by our partners. This report has been a useful piece to share with our external stakeholders, such as community leaders, city and elected officials, and potential funders.



You can find all of the Paschalville Partnership's **State of the Community** reports at this link: [www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership](http://www.freelibrary.org/paschalville-partnership)

**Highlight community members.** Even more compelling than metrics are real-life stories that illustrate your work and goals. Be on the look out for members of your target population whose progress represents the goals you seek to achieve. Include their stories in your report as a case study, or highlight quotes and photos of them. For our work, we have highlighted job seekers who have participated in our programs and gone on to successfully secure employment. These individuals put a human face on the work we do and help communicate to the broader community that they can be part of our work, too.

### Step 7. Seek opportunities to leverage your collaboration

**Be the “guinea pig.”** When you are part of a collaboration, you may find that periodically opportunities arise for which you can put forth your group, and this can be a great way to explore new, productive directions for your collaboration. These opportunities might be in the form of new funding, pilot projects, or new partnerships, and your collaboration should be on the lookout for them.

Our partnership has been the beneficiary of several of these opportunities over the years. Early on, one of our partners, the city's workforce development arm, received funding from the state to fill a position at the community level. This city agency could have chosen any community in the city for this position, but because our partnership already had a foundation in place, they chose our community. Similarly, another partner received a grant to hire an arts organization to work with community members on gathering their stories. Because of the partnership, they decided to implement this project in our community as well, helping us gather community members' stories that we could use for our own reporting purposes. And finally, we approached an outside organization about developing a set of digital badges for the job seekers with whom we work. When this organization secured funding to conduct a pilot of digital badges as a demonstration project, they decided to use it for our work. Once out of the pilot phase, the next step is for this organization to roll out these badges for other communities of the city, which will serve to highlight our work even more.

**Tell your story.** Whenever possible, look for opportunities to share the story of your collaboration, such as at conferences, in newspaper articles, or in a publication (including online channels such as blogs). Our partnership has had the great fortune of presenting our story at national conferences such as the Annual Meetings of the American Library Association and the Public Library Association and the Annual Convening of the Collective Impact Forum, as well as at several local conferences. Our partnership has been featured in the local newspaper and on local news channels. And we have even been mentioned in a publication. We also have posted regularly to the Free Library's blog and been invited to write for the blog of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

## **Step 8. Evaluate your work**

**Honestly assess progress.** After working together for some period of time, perhaps a few years, it is good practice to ask how well you have reached your goals, particularly as they relate to the desired outcomes. If you have developed a logic model, go back to it and ask: Is your theory of change still valid? Are you implementing the activities with fidelity and seeing the results you had planned for? Gather data on your outputs and outcomes and tabulate them for your extended study period. Have these outputs led to positive changes for your target population that your logic model called for? This exercise might result in the group challenging the original theory of change underlying the logic model. If it does, consider changing your approach, starting with program activities.

**Conduct a self-evaluation.** Another "best practice" is to periodically survey the organizations in your collaboration, or what is known as a "self-evaluation." This survey is an opportunity to ask organizations what benefits (if any) they get out of being in a collaboration, what benefits they bring to it, and if they still value being part of it. After working together for a period of years, it is important for the group to remind itself of why it came together in the first place and if the original impetus to work together remains.



## TOOL

You can view the **self-evaluation** we have used for the Paschalville Partnership in **Appendix E**.

**Consider the outside world.** Even if you are able to implement your program activities with fidelity and achieve your desired outcomes, the world around you is changing. In conducting an evaluation, it is important to take a scan of the landscape and incorporate external factors into your analysis. Have new laws, policies, or regulations that touch your target population come into effect? Have major funders changed their priority areas such that they align—or no longer align—with your mission and goals? Is the political environment conducive to positive change in your area of focus? These are big-picture questions that the group needs to discuss together. If the external environment has changed significantly since you first came together, then it might necessitate a complete change in focus.

In the case of the Paschalville Partnership, our recent discussions have focused on the changing environment for two of our target populations: immigrants and refugees, whom we also refer to as new Americans, and the reentry population, a broad group comprised of individuals who are formerly incarcerated, out on bail, in a diversion program, or in a federal or state corrections facility. With regard to new Americans, we are examining changing federal policies, the effects of which might be having a dampening effect on participation in our program activities. For the reentry population, we are working hard to leverage “second chance” and “fair chance” regulations and laws at the local, state, and federal levels—some relatively new—that address barriers to employment and educate employers on workforce potential of this population.

**Go back into planning mode.** Sometimes an evaluation reveals that a collaboration’s original purpose for being is no longer valid or meaningful. Perhaps the group has achieved significant outcomes and is ready to move onto a new challenge. Or maybe the evaluation reveals that the original theory of change was not correct, or that the program activities designed to achieve the intended outcomes could not be implemented with fidelity. Or it could be that the external environment has changed such that a new game plan or even mission is warranted. In any of these cases, it is perfectly acceptable and probably advisable for the group to go back into planning mode.

Effective collaboration, like all good learning experiences, is an iterative process, but this time you will go back into planning mode armed with a history and track record that you can draw upon in your brainstorming. The Paschalville Partnership itself has gone back into planning mode, and this time we are looking for our common agenda to be not only community informed but also community led. Following the ABCD approach (presently on page 5), we have formed a resident consultant team to guide our overall research process and hired a band of neighborhood ambassadors to canvass the community in an effort to inventory assets and document what the community cares about. Our overall goal is to create an action plan that prioritizes needs identified by the community, builds on community assets, and articulates a catalyzing role for the partnership. This plan will be issued in fall 2020—stay tuned!

## Appendix A: Partner Interview Guide

### INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Name:

Title:

Organization:

Date of interview:

Start time:

End time:

Conducted by:

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERVIEWER

- Thank interviewee for time.
- Assure interviewee that quotes, stories, or specific views from interview will not be attributed to them, but will be aggregated with those of others when reported to group.
- If appropriate, ask if possible to record interview. Again, reassure re: discretion.

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please describe your organization's mission and primary activities are. (Request any available materials, e.g., strategic plan, program/service descriptions, org chart, marketing materials.)
2. Please tell me about your role with the organization.
3. What is your service area?
4. What (social) outcomes are important to your organization? Are you tracking them? If so, how?
5. How do you communicate with constituents and stakeholders of your organization?
6. What resources or organizational strengths can your agency lend to supporting job seekers in the community?
7. When considering the needs of job seekers in the community, where do you feel there are service gaps that prevent folks from finding gainful employment? (Where is there organizational overlap?)
8. Which people or institutions do you consider to be leaders in promoting (your area of focus)? Why do you say that and what are they doing that makes them leaders? (Obtain references or actual reports if possible.)
9. What would you consider to be the one single initiative/improvement/change that would have to occur in (your community of focus) to ensure (your area of focus) for its residents in 10 years?
10. What, if anything, is going to ensure that that happens?
11. What, if anything, is preventing that/standing in the way of that happening?
12. Is there anything I didn't ask you about, but that you'd like to tell us?
13. What is your availability for a retreat of (your group's name)? (List specific dates or time frames.)

## Appendix B: Partner Profiles

**MISSION:** short description (one to two sentences) of organization's mission

**SECTIONS:** Drawing from the interviews, one to two paragraphs can be developed for each of the following:

- Geographic area served
- Target demographic
- Services offered at large
- Services offered to targeted population of interest
- Organizational resources that can be drawn upon for collaboration

## Appendix C: Brainstorming Activity

**INTRODUCTION** – What are the components of a compelling vision statement? Share examples.

**Core Values** Individual values held by group members and imputed to the organization. They are personal in nature, not organizational.

**Core Purpose** The group's reasons for existing.

**A Huge Goal** A clear and compelling goal that will take a long time to accomplish (10 to 30 years). It should be extremely challenging, energizing, and a catalyst to unity. Readers of the goal (especially group members) should be able to "get it" right away.

**A Vivid Description** What it will be like to achieve the goal.

Provide an exercise sheet of these questions with room for written answers. Have individuals write down the answers to these questions on their own. Then put them in small groups to discuss their answers and look for areas of commonality. Finally, have each small group report back to the full group on one to three takeaways from their discussion. Collect the written answers for future reference.

### QUESTION 1. Values

- What personal values led you to do the work you do?
- What values led you to serve on this Advisory Council?
- What are the values and beliefs that should inform our collective action?

### QUESTION 2. Purpose

- Twenty years from now, how have we changed the community?
- What do different stakeholders say about the Advisory Council and the library?
- What are key accomplishments of this group?

### QUESTION 3. Goal

- What is the future we would wish for our community?
- What lasting legacy would we desire for our community?

### QUESTION 4. Vivid Description

It's five years from now and our initiative has been written up by a major publication...

- What would the headline be saying about our initiative?
- What would be a featured quote about the initiative and who would be saying it?

## Appendix D: Affirmation Ceremony Form

**VISION STATEMENT:** Southwest Philadelphia: an engaged, employed, and prosperous community

**MISSION STATEMENT:** To leverage Paschalville Library as a hub for job seekers by bringing together a broad array of community partners in support of Southwest Philadelphia residents

**CORE BELIEFS:** Following the model of collective impact, we the members of the Paschalville Partnership, affirm our commitment to a common agenda in the following ways:

- To engage in **mutually reinforcing activities**, we seek to bundle our services and infuse them with best practices.
- To have a common understanding of our progress and to learn from each others, we will implement and utilize **shared measurement systems** of our own activities and of the outputs and outcomes of job seekers.
- To ensure efficient and timely flow of information among our partners and to tell our story, we will establish channels of **continuous communication**, both internally among partners and externally to other stakeholders and audiences.

### PARTNERSHIP MEMBER

### ORGANIZATION

PARTNERSHIP MEMBER	ORGANIZATION

## Appendix E: Paschalville Partnership Self-Evaluation

1. How familiar would you say you are with the Paschalville Partnership's mission, vision, and common agenda? Circle one answer:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all familiar				Very familiar

2. How clear is it to you what your organization's role/responsibility is within the partnership? Circle one answer:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all clear				Very clear

3. How effective has the Free Library been in leading the Paschalville Partnership and, under our IMLS grant, implementing our common agenda? Circle one answer:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all effective				Very effective

4. How familiar would you say you have become with the principles of collective impact? Circle one answer:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all familiar				Very familiar

5. As a model of collaboration, how effective has collective impact been for the Paschalville Partnership? Circle one answer:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all effective				Very effective

6. Are you part of other collaborations in the community or city? If so, describe.

7. How does the model of collective impact compare to other types of partnerships or collaborations in terms of offering greater opportunities/results? Choose one:

- Better opportunities/results
- Similar opportunities/results
- Worse opportunities/results
- Not sure

8. Has your organization benefited from being part of the Paschalville Partnership? What benefits has your organization brought to the partnership? Explain.

9. Has the community served by Paschalville Library benefited from the partnership's work? Explain.

10. To what extent do you believe the Paschalville Partnership's model of collaboration can be feasibly implemented.... (circle one answer per row)

	Not at all feasible	Somewhat feasible	Very feasible	Not sure
In other neighborhoods of the city	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Citywide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nationally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. What other feedback would you like to share with us?