

Cross-sector Innovation Initiative Learnings

Learnings from a Framework to Support Sustainable Collaboration



Overview

Collectively, the work of the Cross-sector Innovation Initiative (CSII) grantees affirmed the importance and validity of the [Framework for Aligning Sectors](#). Below, specific aspects of the framework and how to leverage them for maximum impact in ways that are not necessarily apparent when reading descriptions of the pillars of alignment and adaptive factors are captured. In addition, a few examples are provided to further illustrate the value of applying the framework elements to efforts aimed at improving population health status and advancing health equity.



Pillars of Alignment

Discovering the Value of Shared Understanding and Efforts

The Framework for Aligning Sectors "emphasizes coordination that extends beyond working together on a single project. Aligned systems require that sectors think and work together in fundamentally new ways to improve the health and well-being of the people and communities they serve in ways that are built to last¹."

CSII grantees' experience with the pillars of shared purposes, shared data and measurement, and shared governance provides some insights to, and strategies for, maximizing the impact of collaboratives' work and sustainability.

For CSII grantees, framing the core components/pillars of alignment pushed collaborations to ask tough questions and seek deeper understanding of each other's work and role in their shared project.

Shared Vision
A shared vision goes beyond generating agreement on project goals and objectives that are presented to the community. Rather, it is intended to embody the principle of "nothing about us without us" and therefore is created by everyone "at the table." It may not be an identical reflection of an agency's agenda, and therefore taking the time, and being willing, to understand the issues of greatest importance to the community is critical to the process of establishing a shared vision. A shared vision is meaningful and worthwhile to all agencies and the community and it helps drive the sustainability of collaborative efforts. Developing a shared vision was applicable to several CSII grantees.

Shared Data
While shared data often refers to sharing program data, there are other types of data that can be shared as a means of strengthening collaborations and collaborative efforts. The Substance Use Network Project (Cabarrus County, NC) provides holistic support to pregnant women with substance use disorder, and their clients' data are shared during patient care conferences with non-traditional partners including healthcare providers, social workers, probation officers, mental health providers, and others working together towards the goal of clients delivering full-term babies.

Shared Governance
The process of sharing governance is more important than the structure. Community members can be at the governance "table" but may not be active contributors in the absence of deliberate efforts to share and shift power and create structures and processes that bolster their ability to participate in a meaningful way. An example of this is EMBRACe (Chatham County, NC); they hosted a series of story circles to help prepare women with lived experience to use their stories to speak up during birth and beyond. The Highrise Health Alliance (Minneapolis, MN) is both avoiding the use of acronyms to the extent possible and educating everyone in the room about acronyms if they are used, in order to make discussions more accessible to all participants. The Health Improvement Collaborative of Southeastern Connecticut steered away from creating a 'bylaws' document, to avoid bureaucratic procedures and policies, and instead collaboratively created a 'purposes and procedures' document to drive their governance structure and practices.

All CSII grantees worked on the fourth pillar, shared financing, and acknowledge the importance of collective efforts to build sustainable methods with appropriate incentives and shared accountability.

¹ *Aligning Systems for Health*. (2021). *Framework for aligning sectors with glossary*. Georgia Health Policy Center. <https://ghpc.gsu.edu/download/aligning-systems-for-health-a-framework-for-aligning-sectors/>

Cross-sector Innovation Initiative Learnings

Learnings from a Framework to Support Sustainable Collaboration


Adaptive Factors

Integrated and Dynamic Nature of the Adaptive Factors

The interplay of adaptive factors is perhaps best expressed by a grantee who said, “We are leading with equity, which cannot be achieved without shifting power dynamics, which cannot happen without centering community voice, which we cannot hear without building trust.”

The adaptive factors not only facilitated progress toward alignment but were also important goals in and of themselves – to the extent that grantees often described achievements related to the adaptive factors as among the most important outcomes of their cross-sector alignment efforts.

Key

 Grantees reported that the fourth factor, **community voice**, must be centered throughout all the factors to ensure their maximum impact.

Power

Addressing power imbalances in communities historically affected by racism requires that people in power dedicate time and effort to surface implicit bias and learn how to identify both implicit and explicit racist practices. This requires that collaboration leaders commit to engaging in ongoing efforts, being receptive to potentially difficult truths about how their traditional approaches and practices perpetuate power imbalances, and co-creating new structures and processes with the community. The Live Healthy Napa County successfully used human-centered design principles as one strategy to shift power to the community, and Mothering Asheville transitioned its backbone organization from the Mountain Area Health Education Center to a new non-profit, SistasCaring4Sistas: Black Doulas for Social Justice.

Health Equity

Advancing health equity necessitates a commitment to dismantling racist and other inequitable structures. Simultaneously conducting organizational assessments can be particularly valuable for all members of a collaboration to develop a shared vocabulary and understanding with respect to racism and its effects on health. Both the EMBRACe Coalition and the Health Improvement Consortium of Southeast Connecticut experienced how a common understanding of racial inequities laid a strong foundation for their efforts to simultaneously advance health equity and racial equity.

Trust

Trust is at the heart of successfully leveraging all of the adaptive factors, and it has been said that work happens at the speed of trust. However, project timelines typically do not account for the time and effort needed to develop authentic relationships and build trust. Dedicating staff time at the front end to attend both formal and informal community gatherings, actively listen to community concerns, and otherwise get to know people with lived experience has proven to generate a high level of trust and result in meaningful community engagement and commitment to the work at hand. And because trust is hard-won and easily lost, it is imperative to dedicate ongoing staff time to relationship-building throughout the duration of a community-focused initiative.

