

Collective Impact in Workforce Development: A Working Paper

Perspectives From the Field

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Overview

Nearly every region of the United States has a successful job-training program that helps residents train for and access employment or move into better jobs and careers. These programs often target people most in need of opportunity, including veterans, the disabled, single parents, out-of-school youth, individuals with criminal records, people of color and the long-term unemployed. And increasingly, these programs collaborate with one or more educational institutions, businesses, labor unions and public agencies to serve their clients better.

Yet despite these good programs and collaborative efforts, there has been little progress toward achieving workforce development's ambitions of helping to address persistent inequities in unemployment, wages or economic mobility for people of color and others with limited access to opportunity.¹

Over the last decade, civic and social policy leaders have explored "collective impact" as a framework for multisector, collaborative efforts that produce better results and solve specific social problems by aligning agendas, efforts and measures of success.

While multisector collaboration is certainly not new to the field of workforce development,² which has committed to working across sectors for many years now, thoughtful application of a collective impact framework can help employment-and-training practitioners improve alignment among programs and services, successfully connect more individuals with employment and help address inequity in employment, occupational segregation and opportunities for economic mobility. Collective impact approaches also have the potential to align public and private funders and investors, and, in doing so, address funding and measurement challenges and build evidence for effective strategies.

Drawing from an exploration of current practice and input gathered from interviews with more than 20 practitioners and workforce development experts, this paper provides insights from collective impact strategies in workforce development and offers examples of how they can have a positive impact in the field. It also makes recommendations for funders and practitioners involved in multisector collaborative efforts in workforce development to set goals and targets that capture the difference their work makes; organize employer demand to inform and drive efforts to increase the number of individuals with in-demand skills; and develop and advocate for greater use of shared measures of success across funding sources, sectors and programs. This paper also offers thoughts about where collective impact can go next in workforce development. In addition, relevant observations from interviews provide texture to the discussion.

Context and Definition

Effective workforce development is a pressing national need. Many Americans lack the skills or access to jobs that pay a decent wage, offer the opportunity of a career and provide key benefits. Although unemployment is down across the nation, many people have been left behind in the recovery. As of October 2015, the unemployment rate among African Americans was still twice that of their white counterparts, and the Latino unemployment rate was more than 30 percent higher. The young adult unemployment rate was three times greater than for the general population.³

Workforce development operates within a challenging context that can make progress slow, especially on a broad scale. This context includes the growing number of low-income, low-skilled adults who face especially steep obstacles to workplace success; increasing inequality in income, assets and other areas; institutional racism and sexism that stifle opportunities for many; and a long-term trend of insufficient and declining resources for workforce development that undermines staff capacity and leadership development.

Directly or indirectly, these factors have also generated growing interest in collective impact strategies among stakeholders throughout the workforce field.

In considering the role of collective impact strategies in this arena, the first challenge is the lack of a shared definition for the “workforce system.” In fact, the definition might well depend on orientation (e.g., business vs. community) and on specific goals (e.g., developing a talent pipeline vs. creating economic opportunity for low-income adults).

Broadly speaking, workforce development aims to address the need for employment and advancement in the labor market through services, programs, systems and networks that provide people with education, skill development and access to jobs. It also seeks to address the quantity, quality and location of these jobs and to meet employer needs for a skilled workforce.

It’s not uncommon for people to equate workforce development with the public workforce system, even though the latter is also hard to characterize, with its multiple funding streams and programs. A broader definition would also include business investments in human resources; the work of economic development agencies and investors in creating employment opportunities; and, increasingly, the work of community organizers and labor unions in advocating for improving job quality and advancement opportunities. All play a role in creating job opportunities or filling labor-market needs.

At the outset, this paper begins with the broadest possible definition of a workforce system that includes many public, private and nonprofit actors. This system also would include workforce boards, career centers, community colleges, community-based organizations, philanthropy,

businesses, labor, labor-management partnerships (consisting of representatives from unions and businesses) and workers themselves.

This broad definition of workforce development, however, can obscure the disconnect that can exist between demand and supply. What businesses are looking for and how they acquire talent often diverges from the primary concerns of the organizations preparing people with limited income or access to opportunity for work. This disconnect in the workforce field is a challenge that collective impact strategies may be able to address.

Defining Features and Framework

The basic idea of collective impact seems straightforward. High-level stakeholders in communities agree to pursue specific results among a targeted group of people by coordinating investments, analysis, learning and advocacy. Perhaps the best-known example of a collective impact project is the cradle-to-career effort StriveTogether, now in various stages of development across the country, which aims to improve student achievement.⁴ Collective impact campaigns also exist to address issues related to youth who are neither in school nor working, homelessness and reducing poverty.

A literature on the theory and practice of collective action has emerged over the past few years and is being enriched by on-the-ground experience. Researchers and practitioners have identified five elements central to the collective impact framework:

- a common agenda or rallying point focused on outcomes, not activities;
- shared measurement and data-driven decision making;
- mutually reinforcing activities and governance structure;
- continuous communication; and
- backbone organizations or partnerships that can provide the central staffing, data analytics and convening functions that collective impact requires.⁵

Not all of these elements will be present or highly developed at the outset in most communities; they will require deep and long-term investment if the promise of collective impact is to be achieved.

Most collective impact campaigns are distinguished by the civic rallying and focusing effect of a guiding north star, generally a population-level goal, such as doubling the number of a region's college graduates or reducing poverty by half, rather than a measure of programmatic outputs, such as the number of participants in a specific program that attain employment. These ambitious goals are meant to motivate and drive attention, commitment and funding.⁶

More recently, collective impact efforts have begun to recognize the need to address disparities in employment and opportunity among different racial and ethnic groups and by gender, and to explicitly promote equity (and to bake this concept into the ethos and activities of backbone organizations or partners⁷). They also have started using disaggregated data when considering progress to better track results with subgroups; analyze root causes of disparities; and engage the community or those affected in setting goals and implementation.

However, many people have unrealistic expectations of collective impact strategies, which are by no means a panacea or silver bullet. In fact, some interviewees rejected the suggestion that collective impact strategies are meant to fix workforce development, pushing back against the implication that workforce development is broken as well as the notion that collective impact is a solution, rather than an approach. More than one interviewee felt that collective impact seemed to be a new name for what workforce development practitioners have already been doing, emphasizing that the field engaged in multisector collaboration long before the term was in vogue.

Despite this frustration, almost all interviewees said the collective impact framework adds value to workforce efforts and may help the field to achieve better results not just through collaboration but also through alignment.

What Collective Impact Offers Workforce Development

Collective impact strategies offer opportunities to help rethink the workforce development system.

IMPROVING THE TARGETING OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND SYSTEMS

A key feature of collective impact is its emphasis on collaboratively setting and striving to reach population-level change.

People face different barriers to succeeding in the labor market that in turn require different programs or strategies to help overcome those barriers. This makes it difficult for workforce development efforts to focus on or measure population-level impact, especially if one is looking for attribution or causality. Having a range of strategies impedes the use of a common language for describing the challenges and proposed solutions; in this diverse field, there is no overarching mandate to resolve differences in problem statements, solutions and metrics.

The workforce development field already tends to gravitate toward efforts focused on subgroups in the community. As one interviewee put it, “Workforce development is so amorphous and unbounded that **choosing a subpopulation** allows you to draw clearer boundaries and define

what's in and what's out.”⁸ Another noted that “when you make it smaller, you make it more measurable, and you can begin to see a difference faster.”⁹

Nearly all interviewees agreed that the workforce development field struggles with system-wide goals: the system does not have broad agreement on what to measure at the population level. While it may be easy to set a goal such as achieving a certain regional unemployment rate or reducing the percentage of residents in poverty, it is unclear how directly workforce interventions can be tied to these goals.

Nonetheless, interviewees agreed that setting better targets could help improve workforce outcomes and generally embraced one of three approaches to this task, by focusing on a particular subpopulation; on a defined geographical region; or on achieving industry-specific (also known as demand-side) goals, especially in hiring.

All three goals fit with the approach of disaggregating data to better understand the nature of the problem and potential solutions.

Examples of subpopulation goals include:

- Reducing the number of young adults out of school and work in New York City by 5 percent by 2017.
- Reducing disparities in job access, wages and job quality among different groups — e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, veteran status or disability. This could include diversity targets set by employers.

Examples of regional or geographic goals include:

- Getting 2.5 percent of the low-income population in Central Texas (from serving 600 to 5,000 people per year) into a family-supporting job.
- Adding 60,000 new college degrees and certificates to Central New Mexico by 2020.
- Placing 5,000 residents in Austin, a West Side Chicago neighborhood, in family-supporting jobs by 2025.
- Lowering unemployment and reducing poverty in a specific low-income or high-unemployment neighborhood or community.
- Increasing the number of Greater Philadelphia workers who earn family-supporting wages.

“I think there's value in looking at how a collective-impact-type framework encourages funders and providers to look at nontraditional service delivery and funding models. More informal governance structures that allow for resource development are valuable. Organizations stepping outside of what would be their mission central to become more mission-aligned is of great value.”

— *Martin Zanghi, director of youth and community engagement, University of Southern Maine Muskie School of Public Service*

In 2012, New York City was home to 172,500 young adults (ages 18–24) neither working nor in school. That same year, JobsFirstNYC — a nonprofit that aims to help bring together community, corporate, human, organization, private and public resources to connect young adults out of school and work with the city's economic life — set a goal to reduce that number by 5 percent, or about 9,000 young people, by 2017.

While that goal came out of a strategic planning process, Executive Director Lou Miceli recognized that the number itself was somewhat arbitrary. It was bold and audacious, yet not so big as to be overwhelming. “The problem is complex, and we don’t control, and cannot account for, all of the factors in achieving the goal,” Miceli said. But he also believed that his organization’s goal “galvanizes and inspires” and helps JobsFirstNYC work in a focused way to strengthen the system and move it in the right direction. This has been especially true in recruiting employers to support the effort.

Importantly, the goal has affected how the organization shapes and aligns its work and the work of others in the community. JobsFirstNYC has taken the first step of completing a baseline survey and committed to going back to measure the impact of its efforts in 2017. It has also articulated four strategy areas that align with its goal: (1) employer engagement to make business a key partner in connecting youth with the labor market; (2) raising consciousness about the out-of-school and out-of-work young adult crisis; (3) advancing the practice of organizations and individuals focused on the needs of young adults; and (4) building capacity to become the premier workforce intermediary for young adults in New York City and beyond. (The organization tracks its progress toward the latter goal by uniformly assessing accomplishments across multiple programs.)

JobsFirstNYC has found its goal broad enough to inspire and require collective action yet targeted enough to allow for measuring specific interventions and approaches. This is a good example of the potential of the collective impact practice of targeting a specific subpopulation.

Examples of demand-side goals include:

- A certain percentage of employees hired by any employer that does more than \$50,000 worth of business with the federal government must have a disability.¹⁰
- Thirty percent of employees on a project must come from a targeted geographic area or from low-income populations.

- Fifteen percent of the labor hours on every construction project in Rhode Island must be completed by apprentices.
- Increasing hiring rates for women by 30 percent and for underrepresented people of color by 8 percent for engineering roles at Pinterest, and committing to interview at least one person from an underrepresented background and one female candidate for every open leadership position.¹¹

The challenge in targeting by subpopulation is creating a definition broad enough to meet employers' needs. As one interviewee put it, "If the goal is to get people to work, then we cannot focus on deficits or subpopulations, as employers simply want the most qualified employee for their job opening. We need to maintain a focus in workforce development on employer needs and let that dictate the intervention and the focus of the collective impact work."¹²

New rules for Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act that took effect in March 2014 strengthen the enforcement of the Americans With Disabilities Act and put new employer requirements in place around recruiting, hiring and accommodating individuals with disabilities. The rules require federal contractors and subcontractors doing projects of \$10,000 or more to aspire to, and track progress toward, employing individuals with disabilities.

Covered employers must have, or show progress toward attaining, a workforce in which at least 7 percent of employees have disabilities. Those with at least 50 employees and a federal contract or subcontract of \$50,000 or more must have a program for hiring individuals with disabilities.

When the federal government made the rule change, advocates for people with disabilities realized the potential for helping companies realize these goals while providing individuals with job opportunities.

Carol Glazer, president of the National Organization on Disability, shared this story in an interview:

Our first customer was Lowe's Home Improvement. I spoke with the head of distribution, and we picked three out of their 14 distribution centers to start. They set a hiring goal of 10 percent at each center. We assessed their policies, job descriptions and accommodation and treatment of employees with disabilities.

We recommended each distribution center director broker relationships with a couple of community-based organizations to help identify, recruit and train people with disabilities. Within 18 months, with our help, Lowe's filled 150 jobs with people with disabilities. We helped Lowe's bring this function in-house. In the next 18 months, up to 400 people were hired.

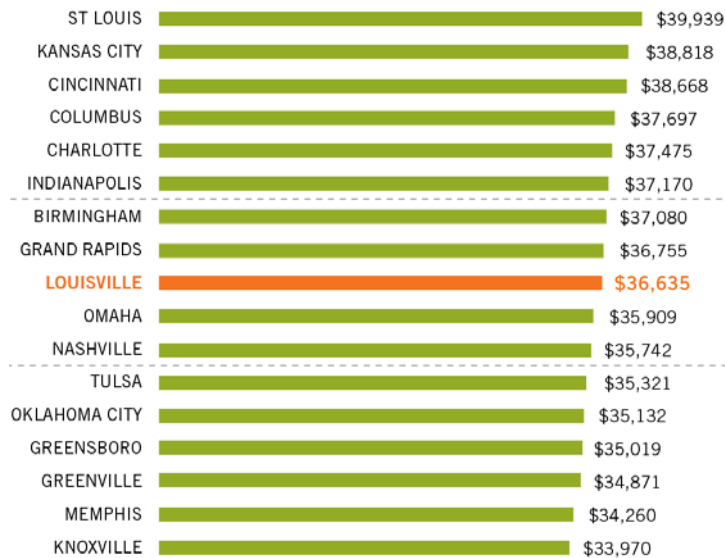
Targeting employers can galvanize public and private partners to reach a concrete, measurable goal.

One way to get at the challenge of setting population-level targets within workforce development is to look at a set of regional benchmarks. The Greater Louisville Project (GLP) is an independent, nonpartisan civic initiative supported by a consortium of foundations. Launched in 2003, this collective impact effort has honed in on three “deep drivers” of change: education, jobs and quality of place. These deep drivers of change are a few big, but attainable, goals that can inform Louisville’s civic agenda by highlighting the possibilities and challenges facing the metro area.

To measure progress, GLP tracks a set of economic characteristics for Louisville and compares them against 14 peer cities, identified by using demographic, economic and other variables.

The graphic below shows how Louisville ranks on median wage compared to its peer cities. An example of workforce-related goals and benchmarks include moving Louisville into the top 50 percent of peer cities on median wage adjusted for cost of living; the percentage of workers employed in technical and professional jobs; jobs that pay family-supporting wages; and unemployment rate.

Louisville Ranks Ninth out of 17 Peer Cities on Median Wage, Adjusted for Cost of Living



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics, May 2013.

ALIGNING INVESTORS AND SYSTEMS

Aligning public, private and philanthropic investors in support of promising strategies is an important dimension of collective impact that is built in part on sharing and aligning measures and data. This is especially relevant for the workforce field, which has limited funding, no agreed-upon pipeline to jobs, a focus on serving multiple populations and a continuing effort to build evidence for effective strategies. Despite those realities, one can measure whether investors are supporting the most effective strategies and whether those strategies are expanding their impact. These efforts require meaningful measures of impact, programmatic fidelity, co-investment, system change and expansion on a broad scale.

Consider the success of sector-based workforce strategies, supported with collaborative funding, that target specific industries and more job-ready individuals. One such example is the [National Fund for Workforce Solutions](#), which involves 200 funders in 33 communities.¹³ Since 2007, the work of the National Fund has grown to serve more than 55,000 individuals and 4,700 employers. The National Fund has also generated significant improvements in business practices and public policy. National Fund initiatives such as [CareerSTAT](#), an employer-led national collaboration of health care leaders who promote employer investment in the skill and career development of frontline health care workers, have celebrated employer investment in and helped expand career pathway opportunities for frontline health care workers. And National Fund collaboratives are starting to lead conversations with local stakeholders on increasing the skill levels of an entire community through policy and system change efforts, improving job quality and building regional prosperity.

“We are limited in terms of resources of time and money. Lots of collective impact initiatives have shared root causes. We need to better coordinate our strategies so that we complement each other’s work instead of competing.”

— *Shiloh Turner, vice president for community investment for the Greater Cincinnati Foundation*

Examples of investment alignment can also be found in various models of integrated economic and workforce services, such as the [Centers for Working Families](#), [Financial Opportunity Centers](#) and [SparkPoint Centers](#). Multiple funders support these and other integrated models because of promising evidence that they produce better results. Funders also collaborate to support national and local replication and evaluation of bridge models. The most well-known example is Washington’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training, which accelerates adult basic education so people can move through school and into family-supporting jobs more quickly.

CHANGING POLICY AND SYSTEMS

Public policies play a critical role in allocating resources and benefits and allowing targeted workforce development efforts to achieve results on a wider scale. Consider how paid sick and family leave or increased child care resources improve financial stability and increase job retention, opportunities for advancement and educational completion.

In recent years, more business, political and community leaders, including those who are connected to the workforce development system, have started to pay attention to wage and income inequality. While workforce development has traditionally addressed inequality through an approach focused on individual training and advancement, collective impact may present an opportunity to connect these individual efforts to inform a broader policy discussion or campaign.

Multisector Collaboration in Changing State Workforce Policy

The Skills2Compete state campaigns, supported by the National Skills Coalition and implemented by local funding partners and stakeholders, are a good example of multisector collaboration in effecting public policy.

While each campaign had different goals depending on state context, all engaged funders, policymakers, community-based organizations and other stakeholders. The campaigns sought to address funding and alignment needs in the workforce system to create better pathways to middle-skill credentials and jobs (e.g., medical laboratory technicians, system administrators or early childhood educators).

Policy work requires the creation of coalitions of investors, stakeholders and consumers to advocate for specific legislative or administrative change. Collective advocacy educates stakeholders by using data and modeling to document likely benefits of specific reforms. Funders also have united to support efforts to combine systems — including workforce development, welfare, community colleges and public benefits.

Given the complexity of the issues workforce development seeks to solve, as well as the challenges within the workforce development field itself, policy changes seem to be a promising avenue for collective impact efforts.

Policy changes can also address some of the current challenges to implementing collective impact efforts in workforce development, such as:

- Providing funding, incentives or policies that encourage organizations to work together. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) offers one example of this: The legislation prioritizes sector partnerships, [career pathways](#), cross-program data and measurement and investments driven by employer demand — and encourages states to develop plans combining all their major strategies for preparing a skilled workforce, not just those under WIOA.
- Addressing the fact that resources for workforce are often insufficient for the scale of the problem.
- Removing constraints on public and private resources that prevent collaboration and collective impact work. Although there is support for one-off funding to implement specific projects,

support for building the system or even sustaining and expanding successful approaches is not as easy to find.

DEVELOPING CONSENSUS ON SHARED MEASURES AND TOOLS FOR SHARING DATA

Stakeholder interviews underscored the tremendous opportunity and value of increased sharing and use of data. In fact, many felt the focus on shared measurement, system changes and alignment generated by data-driven decision making are the most significant contribution of the collective impact framework to workforce development.

The workforce development field nearly universally agrees on the importance of a few key metrics, such as measuring job placement, job retention and wage gains. However, these metrics do not quite translate to population-level outcomes. Greater consensus on indicators and appropriate proxies for long-term, population-level outcomes, as well as better tools for sharing data across programs and systems, could help move the field forward.

Indicators such as regional employment or unemployment rates seem relevant to workforce development, but using them to measure an initiative's impact can be misleading because of how they are defined. In addition, these rates are affected by factors and economic forces beyond the reach of workforce development interventions and cannot be tied directly to any one strategy.

Other economic indicators — i.e., job or industry growth rates; job vacancy, income and wage rates; or unemployment insurance claims — may draw on real-time and traditional labor market information, but they often mask community- or industry-specific trends that may be more relevant in a given region. In addition, they are often disconnected from systems that measure a specific subpopulation's skills, education and work readiness.

Within the workforce system, data, metrics and benchmarks differ by funding source and target population and frequently are not aligned. This may make it difficult to use that information as a guide for reaching a larger scale — or to assess the relative effectiveness of different efforts and a region's overall progress in building a skilled workforce. The workforce development field also lacks a way to easily store information to promote shared data and measurement, a key tenet of collective impact efforts.

Despite these challenges, the workforce development field is moving to increase the transparency and availability of data. National efforts include the Workforce Data Quality Campaign, Workforce Benchmarking Project and the State Workforce and Education Alignment Project. Maryland's Skills2Compete, which tracks the attainment of middle-skill credentials, is an example at the state level. These efforts show the promise of moving from simply gathering and compiling data to agreeing on common measures and sharing them across systems.

One question for the workforce field is whether it can leverage a big-data approach to combine administrative data with unemployment insurance and wage record information to inform frontline staff decisions and services, as well as policy decisions on areas requiring more investment or resources. Career Connect (see box on next page) highlights the potential value of the increased sharing and use of data.

Career Connect

**Integrating Data Systems to Better Serve
Job Seekers and Employers**

Among the efforts to improve data collection and analysis, a key component necessary to support collective impact is Career Connect, an integrated workforce information system for the Chicago area. Made possible through a five-year, \$3 million Workforce Innovation Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance, the system emerged from a multisector collaboration between funders and public and privately supported workforce development organizations. Career Connect will improve service to job seekers, employers and public and private workforce funders by:

- creating efficient tools for employment and training programs to assist their clients;
- capturing information on a range of clients and services throughout the workforce system; and
- enabling service providers and public and private funders to make informed decisions about how to best invest in programs and strategies.

In June 2015, the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership launched the Business Services phase of Career Connect, which gives service providers a system to manage employer contacts, post and share job orders across agencies and track employer services.

The next phase, scheduled to launch by June 2016, will add comprehensive case management tools and a job-seeker portal. Career Connect will serve as the front-end data system for workforce development organizations in the Chicago and Cook County to track job-seeking clients across programs. Additionally, Career Connect will link with existing state systems to reduce duplicative data entry required for reporting performance metrics. Service providers and funders will be able to pull real-time reports across sources of funding.

Career Connect will benefit job seekers and employers, enabling more effective use of public and private resources. Additionally, prospective workers will have an integrated system for exploring career options, developing their resumes and searching for jobs.

Limits of Collective Impact in Workforce Development

Despite their promise, collective impact strategies and the assumptions that undergird them do not always align well with conditions in the workforce development arena. This section discusses some of the limitations.

Workforce development operates in a complex landscape. Collective impact efforts are generally based on linear, single-indicator assumptions involving a well-defined service system, such as K-12 education, that lends itself to clear goals and a road map to reach them. The “aim, ready, fire” mentality of collective impact does not work as well with emergent, complex and highly interdependent social and economic processes that exist across multiple systems, such as workforce development.

In fields where collective impact has thrived, such as education and health, there is a well-funded research base to inform collective impact practitioners and collaboratives. For example, strong research documents the benefit of a high school diploma, enabling collective impact efforts to use high school completion as a proxy for larger societal goals such as earning income. Similarly, research documents the benefit of addressing childhood obesity, smoking, diabetes and asthma in improving broader health outcomes.

By contrast, there are few agreed-upon, well-proven or documented interim outcomes or proxies in the workforce development field that can reliably be associated with large-scale workforce improvements. Such measures might include English language proficiency or postsecondary credential attainment, both of which have been associated with higher wages and rates of employment. Another might be the attainment of a career-readiness credential, if one can prove that employers value and use it in significant enough numbers.

In addition, outside factors in the local or regional economy can dramatically affect workforce development efforts and outcomes, even if collaboratives are successful in convening players across multiple systems. And available jobs and skills required may vary widely from region to region, adding to the complexity of agreeing on appropriate outcomes.

The success of workforce development initiatives is fundamentally tied to the quantity, quality and location of jobs, the bulk of which are produced by the private sector and over which the workforce development system usually has little influence. To reach the broader population, collective impact strategies related to skills training and employment need to widen their focus. Some workforce development initiatives are thus starting to focus attention on creating jobs as well as

“Collective impact has the mindset that what we need to make change is to get everyone at the table to agree on what change is needed and then to work toward that change. But how big does the table have to be in workforce development to make sure that we get there? How do we account for externalities like the market crashing or a major employer leaving or other big factors?”

— *Rebecca Kusner, director of strategic planning and policy, New Growth Group*

improving job quality and access, as well as community benefits that can be negotiated through economic development projects.

Workforce development and businesses operate on different time horizons. The workforce system by nature makes investments and achieves results over the medium to long term. By contrast, business tends to focus on immediate needs. They share an interest in finding the right person for the job (and job for the person). However, business wants to find and hire that person now, not in six months, and workforce systems are built and funded in a way that can make them inflexible and difficult to change course. Helping an individual attain a credential or build a skill set is usually a long-term proposition.

Resources for workforce development are fragmented, inadequate and often deployed ineffectively. Even though combined public and private workforce resources are considerable, public workforce funding has been on a downward slide over the last decade, with a tilt toward competitive grants over legislation that allocates funding based on priority and region (such as WIOA).¹⁴ As a result, funding fluctuates significantly from year to year. Together, public and private resources only reach an estimated 5 to 7 percent of those who need them.

While many collective impact efforts address resource fragmentation or coordination, some stakeholders caution that this may not be enough in workforce development, where a major problem is the lack of sufficient resources.

The way in which available resources are used is also an issue. Public and private resources tend to prioritize direct services to and outcomes for job seekers. This is not necessarily a negative, as funders and policymakers shift toward more rigorous, performance-based funding mechanisms. However, the focus on individual and program outcomes does not lend itself to building systems or supporting the backbone functions integral to collective impact. Lack of agreement and research on appropriate metrics at the population level means the field needs help in translating individual and program effectiveness into progress toward outcomes on a larger scale.

Workforce development often lacks organizational capacity and resources. Collective impact initiatives assume certain levels of staff capacity are in place for effective implementation, as well as a system to invest in and support staff development. Many under-resourced workforce development organizations simply do not have this capacity. The field also lacks the resources to support intermediary or backbone activities, or efforts to build more cohesive systems.

In addition, one of the hallmarks of collective impact is that all parties who come to the table are committed not only to changing the system but also to aligning their organizations toward the

“The skills required to lead collaboration are different from the skills required to manage operations. Both are valuable, but they are different. It’s work that is not concrete, hard to measure, stressful and exhausting. We must value both, and there are not enough people out there.”

— *Sallie Glickman, Principal, SJM Consulting*

shared outcome. However, because of federal legislation and state-level decisions, local public workforce systems often have limited latitude to change levels and types of spending, services and focus.

Prepare Learning Circle

Working to Define Employment Outcomes in Collective Impact Initiatives

Despite the challenges, or perhaps because of them, efforts are underway to refine collective impact and multisector collaborations in workforce development, starting with better definitions of employment outcomes and indicators.

In late 2014, the StriveTogether Network partnered with Living Cities to form the Prepare Learning Circle, a group of five StriveTogether communities focused on defining the career end of the cradle-to-career spectrum: Thrive Chicago in Illinois; All Hands Raised in Portland, Oregon; Mission: Graduate in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Big Goal Collaborative in northeast Indiana; and StrivePartnership, along with Partners for a Competitive Workforce, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and northern Kentucky. Representatives from three of these communities were interviewed for this paper.

In November 2015, the Prepare Learning Circle recommended an employment outcome for the StriveTogether Network: “a postsecondary graduate will be employed on a path to self-sufficiency,” with self-sufficiency defined as an individual’s ability to meet his or her basic needs. The recommended core indicator, which helps collective impact partnerships track their progress toward this longer-term outcome, is: “percentage of postsecondary graduates employed one year after graduation.” The Prepare Learning Circle and a subset of members of the StriveTogether Network will pilot tracking this outcome in 2016 to identify and find solutions for challenges.

In developing this outcome recommendation, Living Cities and the StriveTogether Network reflected on the challenges of defining and tracking employment in collective impact:

- There is little agreement about what it means to support individuals in obtaining a family-supporting career. A student can take many paths to get to a career — a GED, four-year college, associate degree, industry credential or some combination of all of those. The complicated nature of these pathways makes it difficult to define one and to track student progress.
- Initiatives struggle to link their on-the-ground work to overall changes at the population level. This is generally true for the collective impact framework, but more work needs to be done for employment outcomes, especially to define the common indicators connected to moving population-level changes.

- Multiple stakeholders — including business leaders, policymakers, parents, young people and even workers themselves — need to change their mindsets to increase employment in high-quality jobs. We need to invest in all levels of workers, think beyond the four-year degree and explore alternative career pathways to get people on a path to self-sufficiency.
- We need to tackle adaptive as well as technical challenges in creating change in workforce systems. Two kinds of challenges are inherent in creating change: (1) technical challenges that have a clear definition and solution and (2) adaptive challenges that do not. While some of the work to create change in workforce development may seem to be more of a technical challenge — such as finding and using data from statewide longitudinal P20/Workforce data systems — the challenges are actually often adaptive, such as how to engage state entities to obtain access to the data. Identifying the adaptive aspects of problems can help organizations make sure they engage the right stakeholders to truly address and solve the problem.

Adapted with permission from “How to Get All Students on a Path to Self-Sufficiency” by Jeff Radarstrong and Kaci Roach.

This is a real challenge that collective impact initiatives in workforce development must acknowledge and work to address to realize the collaborative’s desired improvements or system changes. Collaborators should begin by working to understand the limitations their public-sector partners face and then identify potential ways to improve or remove these barriers. Depending on the situation, approaches might include pursuing waivers, administrative changes or even legislative changes.

Final Thoughts and Implications

Stakeholders interviewed for this paper generally agreed that the collective impact framework and associated strategies to increase multisector collaboration hold promise for the workforce development system.

Specifically, they pointed to shared measurement as a core principle that can provide a supportive foundation for such collaborative efforts. While interviewees agreed that identifying the right data to measure success and gaining access to that data could be challenging in workforce development, they nonetheless agreed on the need for a common knowledge base. They saw an opportunity, through adoption of the collective impact framework, to galvanize the workforce development field, including funders and policymakers to invest in building and better aligning and sharing metrics and systems. They also identified an opportunity to make better use of information that is readily available to improve programs and coordinate resources.

Shared measurement facilitates and supports the collective impact strategy of establishing population-level goals. Interviewees specifically zeroed in on setting workforce development goals for discrete groups as a promising practice. In some ways, collective impact in workforce development is similar to cradle-to-career efforts that also organize around and target outcomes for specific groups of young people (e.g., improving third-grade reading scores and closing disparities between racial or ethnic groups). Identifying a specific target population facilitates setting goals that make more sense and can be more directly linked to the collective impact strategies and interventions.

Collaborations can set particular targets on the supply side as well as the demand side. On the supply side, practitioners can focus on increasing employment rates for young adults; increasing the credential or degree attainment rate of a particular community; or increasing the percentage of adults with disabilities with the skills required to be employed with a company or in a sector. Alternatively, the field might partner with policymakers or the business community to establish voluntary, market-driven targets (such as those adopted by Pinterest) or mandatory, policy-driven demand-side targets (such as those negotiated through community-benefits agreements or through the Americans With Disabilities Act) that create more equitable access to good jobs and wages. Such efforts may also lend a greater focus to the often-fragmented workforce development community.

Finally, research and feedback from stakeholders lead to the following thoughts with regard to implementing collective impact strategies in the workforce development field.

For Practitioners

- **Don't rush into collective impact.** Many organizations have moved toward a collective impact strategy because national foundations are supportive, but collective impact is typically a multiyear effort involving many partners and stakeholders and a willingness to realign resources and programs if necessary. Does the organization have the partners, the staffing and the support needed to sustain these efforts? Is the leadership willing to examine and change tactics or programs that are not leading to the stated goals and outcomes? Are the right people and organizations at the table?
- **Set discrete, measurable goals and targets — and track progress toward them.** Setting overly ambitious goals can create as many problems as not setting goals at all. Choose goals that are inspiring but also definable and measurable, and ensure data sources required to measure progress are in place or accessible. Stakeholders including staff, board members, supporters and partners need to understand the relationship between the organization's efforts and progress toward the targeted outcomes. Just as importantly, practitioners need to measure and report progress and be willing to investigate unexpected outcomes.

For Funders

- **Invest for the long term.** Philanthropic and public funders have a tendency to focus on short-term funding and results that can be attained by the end of a grant cycle, shifting their investments from priority to priority or population to population. A collective impact strategy aimed at changing a complex set of systems, networks, programs and services like workforce development requires a shift to longer-term thinking — and investing. As one interviewee put it, the work of the intermediary or backbone needs to be supported for the duration, including the typically unfunded but necessary work of convening, building networks and communication.
- **Invest in staff capacity.** Staff capacity is assumed but often missing. The capacity to lead collective impact is different from the capacity to run programs or manage operations. Community-based organizations and even large public organizations generally lack resources and human-resource systems to invest in the professional capacity of workforce development staff. Funders can explicitly support staff development as well as appropriate levels of compensation by prioritizing these areas in funding proposals. They also can invest in leadership development by facilitating peer exchanges and strengthening grantee networks.
- **Invest in work to change systems and policies.** System and policy changes are necessary in many cases to drive greater impact and scale in workforce development. While some funders have supported advocacy, public education and system change, more partners are needed. The returns on investment can be dramatic over time, resulting in new state funding for demand-driven training and greater coordination of programs, as state advocacy efforts in Alabama, Colorado, Indiana, Connecticut, Iowa and Massachusetts, among others, have shown.¹⁵

For Policymakers

- **Facilitate the sharing and alignment of information and systems.** Many hurdles prevent organizations providing workforce development services from sharing data with one another, even if they are willing or mandated to do so. For example, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires core programs to use quarterly wage record data for reporting, but many states do not have the necessary interagency data-sharing agreements or data system requirements that would allow for this type of reporting.¹⁶ Policymakers should provide guidance and resources to create and put in place appropriate data-sharing agreements, policies and processes.
- **Support longitudinal data collection and research — and use the evidence in program design.** Policymakers can invest in building and sharing an evidence base — especially in terms of measuring long-term impact — that supports workforce development interventions, much as there is for education or health care, for example. Given short funding cycles, as well as the difficulties and expense of tracking people over time, workforce programs tend to focus only on short-term outcomes. As one interviewee put it, “We have measured the first three years over and over again; we need more data and research about longer-term impacts.”¹⁷ Policymakers can also make better use

of the data that is available. We know, for example, that the intensity of workforce and adult basic education programs matters in terms of student success in earning credentials and finding jobs with a family-supporting income. Yet many funders and policymakers still lean toward supporting shorter-term and less intensive training, perhaps to serve more individuals.¹⁸

Multisector collaboration is likely to become more common, especially if the trend of declining public resources to support workforce development continues. In addition, collective approaches that creatively bring business, labor, philanthropy, education and the public sector together seem increasingly needed to address the persistent disparities in opportunity, employment and income among communities.

To make progress toward the ultimate end of workforce development — creating access to better employment opportunities, income and economic mobility for people of color and others facing significant obstacles to achieving that end — we need to understand and better define our goals. To measure that progress, we need better benchmarks as well as an understanding of how our efforts are moving those indicators.

And along the way, we need to deepen our engagement with the business community in setting targets to employ underrepresented individuals and in working on pathways to train and place them. Finally, we will need the long-term buy-in of funders and policymakers to not only support workforce training and other direct services to benefit workers but also to support the data alignment, staff capacity and network building required to move this complex system toward greater impact.

Methodology

This paper was developed through a review of the literature on multisector collaborations and collective impact efforts, with a particular focus on cradle-to-career initiatives and workforce development. The author conducted interviews with more than 20 practitioners, collaborative leaders, funders and researchers with expertise in these areas. Bob Giloth, Allison Gerber and Amina Omar of the Annie E. Casey Foundation contributed to a background research and context that also informed this paper.

INTERVIEWEES

Andrew Cortes	<i>Building Futures</i>
Dena al-Khatib	<i>Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership</i>
Tynesia Boyea-Robinson	<i>Living Cities</i>
Robin Brule	<i>Living Cities Integration Initiative</i>
Randall Eberts	<i>W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research</i>
Carol Glazer	<i>National Organization on Disability</i>
Sallie Glickman	<i>SJM Consulting</i>
Angelo Gonzales	<i>Mission: Graduate</i>
Michael Gritton	<i>KentuckianaWorks</i>
Steve Jackobs	<i>Capital IDEA</i>
Jennifer Keeling	<i>THRIVE Chicago</i>
Rebecca Kusner	<i>Towards Employment</i>
Ross Meyer	<i>United Way of Greater Cincinnati</i>
Lou Miceli	<i>JobsFirstNYC</i>
Jason Perkins-Cohen	<i>City of Baltimore</i>
Jeff Radarstrong	<i>Living Cities</i>
Ben Reno-Weber	<i>Greater Louisville Project</i>
Greg Schrock	<i>Portland State University</i>
Willa Seldon	<i>The Bridgespan Group</i>
Marlene Seltzer	<i>Nonprofit Management Consultant and former CEO of Jobs for the Future</i>
Beth Siegel	<i>Mt. Auburn Associates</i>
Kelsie Smithson	<i>Greater Louisville Project</i>
Jennie Sparandara	<i>JOIN</i>
Dan Swinney	<i>Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council</i>
Tse Ming Tam	<i>United Way of the Bay Area</i>
Shiloh Turner	<i>Cincinnati Community Foundation</i>
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Endnotes

¹ Without a doubt, many factors beyond the realm of workforce development contribute to reducing inequity, such as job creation and quality, as well as educational quality.

² For this paper, we have adapted the definition of workforce development articulated by the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank: Workforce development aims to address the need for improved access to employment and advancement in the labor market through services, programs, systems, and networks that provide people with education, skill development, and access to jobs (see www.stlouisfed.org/publications/bridges/spring-2010/what-is-workforce-development).

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics. Table A-2. Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age; Table A-3. Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age. October 2015. Retrieved November 2015 from www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm.

⁴ For more on StriveTogether, see www.strivetgether.org.

⁵ Many now believe that the search for one backbone organization is unwise. Most communities need a partnership of backbone functions.

⁶ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Laying the groundwork for collective impact: a working paper*. Author: Baltimore, MD. Retrieved from www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-LayingtheGroundworkforCollectiveImpact-2014.pdf

⁷ Arias, J.S., & Brady, S. "3 Steps for Advancing Equity through Collective Impact." Retrieved November 2015 from <http://collectiveimpactforum.org/blogs/11421/3-steps-advancing-equity-through-collective-impact>

⁸ Beth Siegel, president, Mt. Auburn Associates. Aug. 17, 2015.

⁹ Devon Winey, principal, Mt. Auburn Associates. Aug. 17, 2015.

¹⁰ For more on this, see the amendment to Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act: <https://adata.org/factsheet/section-503> or http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/section503/503_rule_qa_508c.pdf (p. 55, utilization goals).

¹¹ Sharp, Evan. "Our Plan for a more diverse Pinterest," July 30, 2015. Retrieved November 2015 from <https://blog.pinterest.com/en/our-plan-more-diverse-pinterest>

¹² Ross Meyer, vice president of community impact for United Way of Greater Cincinnati, April 30, 2015.

¹³ Conway, M., & Giloth, R. (Eds.) (2014). *Connecting people to work: Workforce intermediaries and sector strategies*. Washington DC: The Aspen Institute. 87-112; 131-160.

¹⁴ National Skills Coalition, Federal Funding Tool, Retrieved July 2015 from www.nationalskillscoalition.org/federal-policy/federal-funding-tool.

¹⁵ For more on these efforts, see the National Skills Coalition's 2014 and 2015 state legislative round-ups: www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/2014-06_State-Legislative-Round-Up_FINAL.pdf and www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/2015-07-State-Legislative-Round-Up.pdf.

¹⁶ Pena, Christina. "GAO Warns of WIOA Performance Reporting Challenges," Retrieved October 2015 from www.workforcedqc.org/news/blog/gao-warns-wioa-performance-reporting-challenges

¹⁷ Beth Siegel, Aug. 17, 2015.

¹⁸ Zafft, C.; Kallenbach, S.; & Spohn, J. "Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models," National College Transition Network, December 2006, Retrieved November 2015 from www.collegetransition.org/docs/nctntransitionpaper.pdf