

BUILDING & RE-IMAGINING ESTABLISHED PARTNERSHIPS

Re-imagining

What Partnerships Can Be

Partnerships can extend far beyond the familiar when we broaden the circle of who we consider as potential partners and reframe partnerships as relationships that contribute to building a connected community of support. This network can be fostered with diverse partnerships such as community colleges, hospitals, public health departments, small and large businesses, trade unions, cultural organizations, and alumni associations to actively support and amplify each other's shared community goals. These partnerships can bring valuable resources like funding, support, job training opportunities, and spark program innovation. Re-imagining your existing and future partnerships encourages both partners to think beyond their own scope and work towards change that will benefit the entire community.

Building on Established Partnerships

Don't start from scratch! Your Community Action Agency (CAA) likely has a network of existing partnerships. The key is to strategically expand and deepen these connections to pursue innovative economic mobility initiatives.



Best Practices for Building on Established Partnerships

- **Audit Existing Relationships:** Conduct a thorough review of all current partnerships. Understand their goals, what they offer, and where there might be opportunities for deeper collaboration or new initiatives.
- **Identify Shared Values and Goals:** Even if a partnership is informal, look for alignment in mission, values, and desired outcomes. This forms the basis for innovation.
- **Re-engage and Re-imagine:** Proactively reach out to established partners. Instead of just maintaining the status quo, brainstorm together how to innovate and tackle new challenges.
- **Demonstrate Value:** Show your partners the tangible benefits of working with your CAA. Highlight success stories and data that illustrate the impact of your existing collaborations.



Best Practice Focus: Community College Partnerships

Community Colleges are powerful allies in economic mobility, serving as a hub for workforce development, adult/ young adult education, and community engagement.

- **Mutual Reinforcement:** Frame the partnership as a synergistic relationship where both institutions strengthen each other's missions.
 - *For CAAs:* Access to training programs, certifications, career services, academic pathways, potential shared facilities, and access to the post-secondary educational network.
 - *For Community Colleges:* Access to a pipeline of motivated students, higher retention rates, opportunities for applied learning, community engagement, and data on local workforce and community needs.
- **Share Goals and Outcomes:** Work collaboratively to define clear, measurable goals that align with both institutions' objectives (e.g., increased job placement rates, higher wages, and greater completion rates).
- **Align Programs and Services:** Identify areas where your services complement theirs. Can you provide supportive services (transportation, childcare, financial literacy) that help their students succeed? Can their programs address skills gaps identified by your clients?
- **Formalize Agreements:** While relationships are key, formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or partnership agreements can clarify roles, responsibilities, and resource sharing. Having this structure help ensure that the partnership remains sustainable for both institutions.

Best Practices for Leveraging Private/Public Funding

Strategic partnerships can unlock diverse funding streams that might be inaccessible to individual agencies. By working together and combining each partner's unique strengths, these collaborations create more sustainable and effective programs.

- **Identify Shared Funding Opportunities:** Look for grants or funding solicitations that require or favor collaborative applications.
- **Complementary Strengths:** Highlight how each partner's unique strengths contribute to the overall impact, making your joint proposal more competitive.
- **Private Sector Engagement:** Approach local businesses and corporations. They often have corporate social responsibility initiatives that align with economic mobility goals.
 - *Tip:* Tailor your pitch to their business interests (e.g., workforce development partnerships with a local leading industry employer).
- **Government Grants:** Research federal, state, and local government grants that support collaborative initiatives in economic development, workforce training, or poverty reduction.
- **Leverage Funding Sources:** A mix of private, public, and foundational support creates greater sustainability.
- **Clear Financial Agreements:** Establish clear agreements on how funds will be managed, distributed, and accounted for within the partnership.



Best Practice Focus: Co-Location of Services

Bringing services under one roof can dramatically improve access and efficiency for clients and introduce them to supportive services they may not have realized were available to them.

- **Customer-Focused Design:** Prioritize the needs of your shared clients. How can co-location make it easier for them to access multiple services?
- **Streamlined Referral Pathways:** Develop clear and efficient referral systems between co-located partners.
- **Pilot Programs:** Start with a smaller co-location initiative to test the waters and learn what works best before scaling up.

Cross-Cutting / Supportive Services

Economic mobility is rarely achieved through a single intervention. Strategic partnerships enable the provision of comprehensive, community-designed support while removing barriers that limit access to opportunity and long-term stability.

- **Community Design:** Recognize that barriers to economic mobility are interconnected (e.g., transportation, childcare, health). Partnerships allow you to address these "cross-cutting" issues.
- **Integrated Service Delivery:** Work with partners to create seamless transitions and referrals between services. Examples:
 - *Coaches on Campus:*
(tinyurl.com/CoachesOnCampus) Partner with healthcare providers, mental health services, and early childhood education programs to support the well-being of the entire family, which directly impacts a parent's ability to work or pursue education.
 - *Wheelz 2 Work:*
(tinyurl.com/Wheelz2Wrk) Collaborate with car donation programs, local mechanics, public transportation authorities, and financial institutions to remove transportation barriers to employment and education.
- **Shared Measurement:**
(tinyurl.com/CollectiveImpactData) Agree on common metrics and data points to track the collective impact of these supportive (services on client outcomes).

- **Client Navigator/Advocate:** Consider a role within the partnership dedicated to helping clients navigate the various services and access the support they need.



Reflection & Discussion Questions

- What existing partnerships in your CAA could be deepened or re-imagined for an innovative economic mobility initiative?
- Identify one potential opportunity to partner with your local Community College in a new or different way. What are the areas where your goals and outcomes align?
- Are there opportunities for co-locating services with a current or future partner in your community? What would be the biggest challenge?
- How can your CAA better leverage both private and public funding through strategic partnerships?
- Which "cross-cutting" supportive service (e.g., transportation, childcare, financial literacy) is most critical for your clients' economic mobility, and what new partnerships could help address it?

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