

# Partnering for Greater Impact

Complex problems such as homelessness are not often solved or addressed by a single entity. Local governments should consider a number of key partners when addressing homelessness, such as the business community, nonprofits, the faith-based community and philanthropic organizations. In many cases, these entities are already addressing homelessness — establishing partnerships with them will allow your city or county to amplify existing efforts and enhance other organizations' efforts. This section offers tips to consider when forming partnerships and examples of successful partnerships.

Local governments are attuned to opportunities for pooling resources and working together to meet the needs of their collective citizens. The benefits of collaboration are vast, but can be summarized by two key points:

## 1. More efficient use of resources

Put simply, you can do more with less. By pooling financial and human resources, time, data and capital, the savings realized can be used for other priorities. The cost of operations and services decreases while the quantity and quality of services increases. Collaboration reduces duplication and provides opportunities to enhance and expand programming.

## 2. Increased effectiveness in the community

The whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts. By working together across jurisdictions, local government agencies increase their reach, power and positive impact in the communities they serve. Collaboration allows agencies to increase their impact.

When local government is more efficient and effective, it builds greater trust and support from community members. Working together creates a united community image, shares both the challenges and the rewards, and enhances the positive attitude residents have toward local elected officials and their community.



However, real collaboration takes significant time and is exceedingly hard work if done right and investments in relationships and a culture of collaboration are successfully established. Complex community problems are not created overnight. Similarly, successful solutions to vexing community challenges take time to develop and must include a comprehensive and layered approach and engagement of multiple stakeholders. Although the evolution of successful collaboration is fluid and dynamic, initiating and developing collaborative efforts require a strategic, organized and intentional approach. Every path to collaboration is unique to the people involved and the specific community's assets and resources. However, an understanding of the general stages in the overall process and the steps that can be taken will help drive collaborative efforts forward.

The pyramid of collaboration, identified by Sidney L. Gardner, president of Children and Family Futures, outlines four broad stages that are particularly relevant to local government collaboration.<sup>22</sup> These stages reflect the importance of starting the collaborative process strategically and allowing for a more fluid process as the collaboration evolves. The pyramid's four stages of collaboration are:

- Information exchange/relationship building;
- Joint projects;
- Changing rules; and
- Systems change.

## Information Exchange/Relationship Building

Collaboration is built on strong relationships. Therefore, the most critical stage for working together successfully is getting to know each other – both the individual people and the agencies they represent. During this stage, local government agencies and their partners exchange information about their missions, goals, mandates, programs and priorities. They discuss overlapping concerns about their shared constituencies and explore the local conditions and environments that impact each agency. Key considerations for this stage include:

- Taking time to build genuine relationships — focus on getting to know each other, not on what you need from each other;
- Understanding the current environment for each potential partner;
- Assessing and engaging the community — determine assets, needs, concerns and priorities from the community; and
- Exploring possible collaborative solutions — brainstorm ideas inside and outside the box.

## Joint Projects

Finding and addressing the “low-hanging fruit” is a common successful strategy for building partnerships that lead to collaboration. It creates an early win and initiates a shared sense of accomplishment. This often occurs through joint projects when two or more local government agencies dedicate resources for a shared purpose. Joint projects are often stimulated by a funding opportunity requiring collaboration, an opportunity to combine and leverage existing resources across agencies or a recognition that the project will be done more effectively and/or reach more people as a joint effort.<sup>23</sup> At this stage, local agencies continue to operate as they did before, but they may undertake one or more joint projects over time to address an identified need. Key considerations for this stage are:

- Identifying resources and staff that each agency will contribute;
- Developing planning documents and/or timelines, such as a joint use agreement, work plan or memorandum of understanding; and
- Focusing on what you agree on and setting aside other issues. Be willing to compromise when necessary.

## Changing the Rules

Successful collaboration requires a culture of “we” rather than “me.” This stage is marked by the development of a collective voice of collaboration, rather than special interests. Local government agencies that move beyond joint projects think in a collaborative way from the beginning about the challenges facing their community — their first response to a new challenge or opportunity is to call their partners.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, changing the rules means seeking broader policy change among partner agencies and realigning funding streams to support collaboration. This stage is also marked by a focus on evaluating the process of collaboration and not just on the joint project itself. Key considerations for this stage include:

- Being cognizant of constituents’ comfort levels – don’t try to do everything at once. Allow people to grow into changes and new policies;

22 The CCS Partnership, in collaboration with the California School Boards Association, developed the resource *Building Healthy Communities: A School Leader’s Guide to Collaboration and Community Engagement*. A fuller description of Sidney Gardner’s pyramid of collaboration can be found in Chapter 3 of this resource. The guide can be found at [www.ca-ilg.org/stretchingcommunitydollars](http://www.ca-ilg.org/stretchingcommunitydollars).

23, 24 CSBA, CCS Partnership, *Building Healthy Communities: A School Leaders Guide to Collaboration and Community Engagement*, 2009.

- Fostering open, transparent and consistent communication between partners and the community; and
- Recognizing organizational limitations — be up-front with potential legal, cultural or capacity limitations.

## Systems Change

When a cultural shift occurs that results in local government agencies changing the way they do business, they have entered the systems change stage of collaboration. This happens over time and through sustained leadership that has skillfully balanced patience with intentional action and a relentless focus on the big picture. Systems change requires local government agencies to rethink and redirect existing resources — including new allocation of funding, staff, methods of accountability and a new collective focus on goals and outcomes. Key considerations for this stage are:

- Recognizing that leadership matters — in both quality and consistency;
- Continuously renew commitments and sharing the vision;
- Continuously learning from what others are doing; and
- Turning barriers into opportunities.

The Institute for Local Government, a League and CSAC affiliate, offers a number of resources to help local governments begin and expand partnerships. Visit [www.ca-ilg.org](http://www.ca-ilg.org) for more information.

### *LA Home for Good*

In 2010, in response to the growing issue of homelessness in Los Angeles, United Way worked with the LA Area Chamber of Commerce to launch Home For Good. The partnership has brought together various stakeholders from both public and private sectors to coordinate ways to address homelessness through permanent housing systems and solutions.

Home For Good works with over 300 cross-sector partners to create systems of change to end homelessness in LA County, starting with chronically homeless individuals and veterans. Home For Good focuses on:

- Creating a “no-wrong door” system that more effectively matches client needs with available housing resources;

- Strategically investing in solutions through a Funders Collaborative that convenes philanthropy and public funders;
- Engaging all Angelenos to be part of the solution through community-wide education and advocacy campaigns; and
- Tracking community progress toward a set of shared goals and metrics to ensure accountability and advancement.

The Funders Collaborative is unique in convening different sources of funding, including the city and county, public and private sectors and nonprofits, to ensure that resources are distributed effectively.

Since its launch, the initiative has built systems and changed policies to prioritize those most in need. This has ensured that over 40,000 of LA’s most vulnerable homeless neighbors have found their way home for good.

The effort is funded by a combination of private donations and foundation support.

### *Sacramento Steps Forward*

Originally created in 2009, Sacramento Steps Forward (SSF) is a nonprofit organization working to end homelessness in the Sacramento region. SSF has taken a collaborative approach to addressing homelessness by developing a regional effort with multiple stakeholders and partners working collectively on managing resources and services. In addition, SSF has employed a data-driven and outcomes-based approach to ensure that it is implementing effective strategies and practices.

SSF is in a unique position to lead this regional effort as a nonprofit responsible for managing Housing and Urban Development funds for homelessness. The organization uses a Housing First approach to reduce reliance on temporary shelters and increase transition into permanent housing.

SSF is funded by public and private partners through performance-based grants, charitable grants and contracted services.

### ***San Leandro Homeless Compact***

In March 2016, the City of San Leandro (Human Services and Police departments) partnered with Building Futures with Women & Children (BFWC, a local nonprofit service provider) and the Rental Housing Association of Southern Alameda County (a landlords' association) to form the San Leandro Homeless Compact, a collaborative dedicated to providing long-term housing and services to chronically homeless individuals in San Leandro. The compact is the first of its kind in Northern California, and uses a Housing First approach, due to a tight housing and rental market. However, the compact's key component is the collaboration between the local government, BFWC and landlords to secure housing in tandem with vital services. The compact provides 25 housing units for chronically homeless individuals in San Leandro. The Rental Housing Association, along with the compact, helps coordinate landlords to provide the housing and BFWC provides a variety of supportive services for individuals staying in the units. Participants are assigned case managers to help coordinate health services and prepare them for success and independence.

The compact is funded by the city and county and HUD vouchers.

### ***Interfaith Summit on Homelessness***

In June 2017, the Los Angeles County's Homeless Initiative and LA Voice, a local multi-ethnic interfaith organization of 60 congregations throughout LA County, hosted the county's first Interfaith Summit on Homelessness, with support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The summit, titled "Pursuing the Promise Together," focused on combatting homelessness by building collaboration and a common vision between faith-based organizations and the county. It also highlighted homeless initiative strategies in which the county and faith organizations can partner and created avenues for faith-based organizations to connect to the Coordinated Entry System.

To support the faith-based organizations' discernment process, the county developed a Discernment Guide to help them prepare for collaboration. Through this process, 31 faith-based organizations expressed interest in exploring partnerships with the county in support of one or more specific homeless initiative strategies and are currently collaborating with county departments and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority to discern how each faith organization can support the countywide homeless system. The Homeless Initiative and LA Voice are committed to continued engagement with faith-based organizations to build capacity and partner in a meaningful way to combat homelessness.

Other than the support received from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation via a grant to LA Voice, the county incurred no cost to pursue this collaboration with the faith-based community.

The Discernment Guide can be accessed at:

<http://homeless.lacounty.gov/the-action-plan>.