



HEALTHCARE
ANCHOR NETWORK

Executive Summary

Activating place-based partnerships for
equitable economic development: a playbook
for anchor collaboratives

Healthcare Anchor Network, May 2024

For the full report, visit anchorcollaboratives.healthcareanchor.org



Foreword

By Jason Purnell, Jason Q. Purnell, PhD, MPH, President, James S. McDonnell Foundation

I have spent most of my career in large anchor institutions, and much of my work has been focused on addressing long-standing disparities in health and other life outcomes that disproportionately impact low-to-moderate income communities of color. What began as a collaborative, community-engaged, academic attempt to describe how the social determinants of health influence life expectancy, chronic disease, mental health, and other outcomes, while I was a faculty member at Washington University in St. Louis, led to my leading the community health improvement strategy as a vice president for one of the nation's largest nonprofit health systems, BJC HealthCare.



I have reported on the data and delved deeply with community partners into a wide range of solutions, some with lasting impact. It has become increasingly clear

to me at every turn that the most promising way to achieve equitable outcomes is by major institutions making significant investments in changing the economic conditions on the ground in communities that have been excluded and neglected. Among the work that I am most proud of during my time at BJC was the commitment to an anchor strategy made by visionary leadership and a supportive board. We were first movers among larger anchor institutions in the impact investment space, inspiring others to put millions of dollars to work expanding access to small business, home mortgage, and other lending in areas of the St. Louis region that have faced decades of disinvestment.

Part of our community health improvement strategy also included working with critical system supply chain partners on supplier diversity goals and infrastructure, and engaging with colleagues in human resources to advance local hiring efforts. While I knew the core mission and business of BJC was the delivery of excellent healthcare, I also believed that we could be of tangible and significant benefit to the community and its health in the course of doing business. I was incredibly gratified to be joined in that belief by leaders and fellow team members throughout the system. But we always recognized that we could not do this work alone.

When BJC had the opportunity to more fully commit to an emerging effort that initially involved one of our hospitals in an area of high need, the response from leadership was enthusiastic. Indeed, BJC CEO, Rich Liekweg, played an active role in recruiting other regional health systems and additional anchor institutions to the St. Louis Anchor Action Network (STLAAN). Where other anchor initiatives might have focused

on the immediate environs of a single hospital within a particular neighborhood, STLAAN encompassed a 22-zip code footprint characterized by poverty rates of at least 20 percent and majority-Black populations. It became a way of organizing and coordinating the activities of not only major health systems, but also universities, corporations, and civic institutions. The work of STLAAN is just beginning, but we believe so much in its potential to have considerable economic impact for individuals and communities that the James S. McDonnell Foundation, which I now lead as president, made a multi-year commitment to building its capacity.

My belief in collaborative efforts like STLAAN—and the others from around the country that are described in this playbook—is informed by over a decade of study and hands-on work that has spanned three industries. The elegance of the anchor mission approach has to do with the mutually reinforcing interests it has the potential to combine. Anchor institutions have a vested interest in the communities they call home. The strength of those communities allows them to attract and retain talent, consumers, donors, and investors. Unhealthy and inequitable communities do not grow at the same rate or experience the same levels of economic mobility as those that have more evenly and fairly distributed access to opportunity and resources. And they do not support optimal quality of life for any of their residents. Due to decades of intentional disinvestment and exclusion, facilitated by both the public and private sectors, Black communities and other communities of color have faced barriers to full economic participation that reliably and repeatedly co-occur with poorer health and shorter lives.

It is in the interest of those communities and others where low-to-moderate income households are concentrated, including in rural areas, to enjoy the benefits of economic integration that anchor institutions can provide. These communities need durable pathways to thriving-wage jobs, equitable access to the capital and contracts that grow diverse small and midsize businesses, and financial ecosystems that can be viably supported by impact investment. This is the very definition of economic justice, but it is also good business and good for communities.

When anchor institutions collaborate, they amplify the good that they can do in the course of doing business. And when those institutions represent healthcare, they are part of the 17.3 percent, or \$4.5 trillion, of GDP that is tied to health spending, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.¹ That is a tremendous amount of economic activity, which can be leveraged to meaningfully address systemic barriers to access that have prevailed in this country for too long. Working alongside anchor institutions in other sectors to address key social and structural determinants of health, healthcare organizations also have the potential to influence health disparities that are reflected in their exam rooms, emergency departments, and patient floors every day. In the politically polarized and deeply divisive moment in which we find ourselves, this common sense collaboration among institutions tied to their communities can serve as an example of what can be done to meaningfully change the material conditions of families across the country.

Preface

by David Zuckerman, President and Founder of the Healthcare Anchor Network

For more than a decade, I have been researching and advocating for the most promising practices for how health systems and other anchor institutions could maximize their local impact as the incredible community assets they are. When I started in this work, the phrase anchor collaborative did not exist. Granted, there were some early attempts at the concept from Hartford to Cleveland, but the idea that individual anchor institutions should intentionally leverage all of their assets—including their hiring, purchasing, investing, real estate, and voice—in concerted partnership with their peers and the community to address economic and racial inequities, and to create more inclusive, local economies, was not part of the conversation.



Fast forward to today, and this idea has taken root in cities across the country. Still, the field is nascent, understudied, and under-resourced.

At the Healthcare Anchor Network

(HAN), we believe there is incredible power in this collective strategy, and through this playbook we attempt to capture and organize what we believe is the most comprehensive set of learnings to date from this growing body of work.

Core to seeing this strategy succeed is that each one of us continues to champion the significant mindset shift required to see the anchor mission not only fully realized within institutions, but scaled through multiple institutions working together in place.

I have seen the impact that one anchor institution alone can have by thinking

differently about its assets and collaborating internally to leverage those resources more intentionally. And anchor institutions alone cannot address local economic and racial inequities; they will need to partner with community-based organizations, leverage intermediaries, and encourage for-profits to join the fray. But there is unique potential in the largest local institutions—those that are most rooted in a place and most civically oriented—coming together in long-term partnership to create a vibrant local economy that will also ensure their long-term organizational success.

We are now only beginning to see the possibilities of what can happen when multiple institutions begin to work together to address systemic inequities over the long term. I can only imagine the impact that would be created if we could sustain these complex, place-based collaborations for the years and decades required to reverse a legacy of disinvestment and discrimination that impacts so many communities across this country.

There exist incredible obstacles for working in this manner; it is counter to how institutional cultures have evolved to focus on competition and standardization, and they have only become more siloed and inert to change as they have become larger and more bureaucratic.

In this playbook, we provide a framework for partnership and action that offers the seeds for another way—a culture of collaboration and local investment based on the success factors we have observed in the existing anchor collaboratives across the country.

For HAN, it is important that these anchor collaboratives are leveraged in service of advancing economic opportunity, equitable economic development, and building community wealth. While the playbook does not dive into the details of individual institutional strategies for impact workforce, purchasing, and investment strategies; we provide the reader links to the many existing toolkits and resources in those areas wherever possible to help institutions and collaboratives on their anchor mission journeys.

Instead, we focus on uplifting the stories and progress from those anchor collaboratives across the country, even if their efforts to scale and align individual strategies are still in the very early stages. It is important that we shine a light on these many examples, which have often evolved independently from each other, and begin to forge a field of practice around structuring and resourcing these powerful partnerships for success over the long-term.



INTRODUCTION AND GETTING STARTED

Anchor institutions are non-profit or public institutions geographically tied to their community through their social or public-facing mission, invested capital, or clientele. Anchor institutions wield significant economic power through their hiring, purchasing, investing, and other institutional activities and assets. The Federal Reserve’s Anchor Economy Dashboard quantifies the economic impact in the US of two main types of anchor institutions: universities and hospitals. In 2022, these entities (sometimes referred to as “eds and meds”) accounted for 9 percent of total US employment, 6.3 percent of total US income, and 8.1 percent gross value added that year. This translates to 18 million jobs, \$1.1 trillion in income, and \$1.7 trillion in goods and services added to the economy. ²

Over the past 20 years, anchor institutions have increasingly explored how to leverage their economic assets to benefit the health and well-being of their communities. More recently, institutions have recognized that a deeper commitment to collaboration is required to move the needle on racial and economic inequities, advance equitable economic development, and support wealth building within the low-income and communities of color they serve.

Anchor collaboratives catalyze a new standard for how large institutions operate in partnership with communities. These collaboratives are place-based networks of anchor institutions that commit to intentionally apply their economic power in partnership with the community to benefit the long-term well-being of both. By creating a community of learning and accountability, the anchor collaborative mobilizes anchor institutions around a shared imperative while building the capacity of anchor institutions to collectively deliver on commitments to their

communities. While no two collaboratives will look the same, anchor institutions in every community can work in partnership—with the support of a backbone or trusted convener—to combine their significant resources in ways that foster a thriving, local workforce, support dollars circulating in the local economy, and increase the flow of affordable and flexible capital needed for strong, healthy communities.

The Healthcare Anchor Network (HAN)’s intent in publishing a playbook for anchor collaboratives is to share what we believe is the most comprehensive set of learnings from this growing body of work and showcase the power and opportunity behind this collective strategy. The playbook introduces core anchor strategies and defines key success factors that need to be present for an anchor collaborative to get started, build momentum, and be sustainable.

Getting started

Behind every successful collaborative there is an initial driving force. Whether the anchor collaborative forms organically over time or intentionally from the start, a respected civic leader from an anchor institution, public sector, or trusted convener will almost always play an outsized role in initiating and coordinating the collaboration between anchor institutions. As practitioners begin to form the collaborative and consider which organizations are right for the partnership, they are encouraged to identify institutions with demonstrated commitments to racial and economic equity, the courage to challenge the status quo, an ability to think long-term, a propensity for collaboration, and a willingness to learn, adapt, and create lasting impact alongside community partners.

Every anchor collaborative needs a backbone. The backbone for the collaborative provides the necessary coordination, facilitation, project management, communications, planning, and other key structural functions for the anchor collaborative. The backbone should be viewed by the anchor institutions and community partners as trusted and capable of motivating and engaging anchor institutions. Collaboratives are most commonly a program or initiative nested within a “host” organization that provides some or all of the backbone functions, such as an anchor institution or trusted civic leader, or a standalone 501(c)(3) non-profit with its own board of directors. Regardless of the structural model, the backbone plays a critical role in building an effective and impactful partnership between anchor institutions and the community.

Anchor Strategies Overview

HAN defines three core strategies for anchor institutions and collaboratives to maximize their impact in the community: Impact Workforce, Impact Purchasing, and Place-based Investing. Taken together, these strategies form the core of the anchor mission framework. This framework activates what we believe are anchor institutions’ most powerful assets for equitable economic development: their workforce, supply chain, and investment portfolio. As anchor institutions intentionally shift to more equitable and local hiring, purchasing, and place-based investment strategies, they can generate positive social impact in the form of increased economic opportunity and capital flowing into their communities.

2.1 Impact Workforce

The Impact Workforce strategy involves anchor institutions committing to local and inclusive hiring and workforce development that connects individuals from nearby economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to quality jobs and career pathways. Anchor institutions commonly adopt a targeted recruitment strategy, focusing on zip codes where communities are experiencing the greatest health and wealth disparities, or populations within those communities that face barriers to employment—for example, justice-involved individuals or immigrants. Strong relationships between anchor institutions, community-based organizations, and workforce intermediaries can help to build a sustainable community infrastructure for workforce development, and catalyze local job creation and career development.

When done well, Impact Workforce strategies should help accomplish broader workforce objectives to address worker shortages, reduce turnover and recruitment times, and create a better prepared staff that is reflective of their community.

Impact Workforce strategies are defined by three core approaches: outside-in, inside-up, and institutional commitments. Outside-in strategies prepare residents experiencing barriers to employment for jobs at anchor institutions by offering training and skill development, and providing specific entry points for these candidates. Inside-up strategies help entry-level and other incumbent employees reach their full potential through accessible learning opportunities, job coaching, wraparound support, and clear pathways for career advancement within the institutions. Embedding institutional commitments involves advancing systemic change in hiring and workforce systems to eliminate bias in hiring and advancement and build an organizational culture of belonging.

Examples of anchor collaboratives implementing Impact Workforce strategies include creating shared resources and information clearinghouses to make it easier for local residents to find job openings at participating anchor institutions, partnering with workforce intermediaries on training programs that prepare residents for high-quality jobs at anchor institutions, and working with training providers and education institutions to subsidize the costs of education, training, and credentialing for specific roles.

2.2 Impact Purchasing

The Impact Purchasing strategy aims to leverage the purchasing power of anchor institutions to help strengthen local economies and address the racial wealth gap. This strategy calls for anchor institutions to prioritize spending with local, diverse, and high-impact (e.g., employee-owned) businesses that better reflect the socio-demographic diversity of their communities. Impact Purchasing strategies have a place-based multiplier effect that can increase local economic activity beyond a single purchase, thus enabling wealth accumulation in communities. When done at scale through an anchor collaborative, Impact Purchasing allows for supply chain strategies that drive inclusive economic growth that would not be possible with any one institution alone.

Impact Purchasing strategies manifest in three core areas: creating connections, building capacity, and embedding institutional commitments. Creating connections involves connecting existing local, diverse, and high-impact vendors to contracting opportunities with anchor institutions by removing institutional barriers and adjusting internal practices to shift procurement dollars in ways that foster local job growth. Building capacity means increasing the ability of local, diverse, and

other high-impact businesses to meet anchor institution supply chain needs to help address gaps, meet specific product needs, and improve the efficiency and resiliency of the supply chain. Embedding institutional commitment involves implementing the internal policies, processes, and organizational culture necessary to sustain Impact Purchasing strategies within anchor institutions.

Examples of anchor collaboratives implementing Impact Purchasing strategies include leveraging technology integration solutions to create connections between local businesses and anchor institutions, providing technical assistance to support businesses to work

Impact Purchasing strategies can complement anchor institutions' business objectives by identifying and addressing pain points or vulnerabilities in the supply chain, while uncovering and building the capacity of local, diverse, and high-impact businesses to provide better quality products and services, therefore creating a more responsive and resilient vendor base.

across different institutions' supply chain requirements, and tracking and monitoring anchor institutions' individual and collective spending with local vendors.



2.3 Place-based Investing

Place-based Investing is an impact investment approach that increases the flow of affordable, flexible capital in historically disinvested communities and geographies, while achieving a modest financial return, or at least preserving the principal of the investment. A place-based investing strategy in partnership with community can begin to address racial and economic inequities around affordable housing, job opportunities, economic mobility, and opportunities for wealth building.

Place-based Investing strategies are made possible by educating and engaging leadership, building a pipeline of investable projects, and embedding institutional commitments. Educating and engaging leadership is a critical first step to socializing place-based investing concepts and building an understanding of the local investment ecosystem and the benefits that can accrue by bringing affordable and flexible capital to meet community needs. Building a pipeline of investment opportunities includes working in partnership with community partners, city officials, local housing agencies, local banks, and community development finance experts to surface and source projects in alignment with community priorities. Embedding institutional commitments involves anchor collaboratives and their member institutions setting aside a portion of their investment portfolios for place-based investments, defining objectives, and establishing the governance, and dedicated staff necessary to sustain the place-based investment strategy.

Examples of anchor collaboratives implementing Place-based Investing strategies include pooling resources to provide low-interest loans for affordable housing or growth of minority-owned or other high impact businesses, and establishing the mechanisms that allow those funds to be recycled back into the community as loans are repaid.

Shifting a sliver of an anchor institution's total investment portfolio to place-based investments will not have a material impact on the organization's bottom line, and such investments allow anchor institutions and collaboratives to create positive social and economic impacts in their communities while still producing a positive financial return.



ANCHOR COLLABORATIVE SUCCESS FACTORS

The success factors presented in the anchor collaborative playbook were informed by the experiences of more than eighteen existing anchor collaboratives, the expertise of key informants and thought leaders, and the efforts of the Healthcare Anchor Network and The Democracy Collaborative over the last decade to define the role of anchor institutions in building equitable local economies and community wealth. Success factors reflect the importance of organizing and motivating anchor institutions and community partners, clearly defining goals and tracking progress, securing the resources necessary for the collaborative to function, and telling the story.



3.1 A Shared Imperative

The anchor mission framework represents a significant shift in how anchor institutions have traditionally engaged with their communities. Effectively engaging members of the anchor collaborative and positioning institutions for collective action requires a shared imperative: a recognition and acceptance by all members that adopting the anchor mission framework is necessary and critical for the betterment of their communities.

Members of the collaborative must recognize that how they hire, purchase, invest, and deploy their other institutional assets is an essential component of creating thriving communities and equitable local economies. With the anchor mission as their framework for action, members of the collaborative move from a shared imperative for systemic change to concrete goals for realizing it as they explore, build, and implement measurable anchor strategies to generate positive social impact individually and collectively.

To successfully develop a shared imperative:

1. **Build consensus among anchor institution leaders** that how their respective organizations hire, buy, invest, and activate other key assets is an essential part of addressing racial and economic inequities in their communities.
2. **Identify a trusted, capable convener** who can help organize institutions and community partners around a shared imperative, strategy, and implementation plan.

3. **Create opportunities for members** of the collaborative to build collective understanding of economic and racial inequities in their communities, and of the link to core organizational priorities, such as community health and well-being.
4. **Prepare to adapt, and embrace nuances** and differences in priorities that arise when crafting and implementing anchor strategies across different anchor institution sectors and political contexts.
5. **Engage in a thoughtful and strategic process** to establish institution-level and collaborative-level goals that are specific enough to be meaningful and adaptable to anchor institutions across sectors.



3.2 Activated Champions

Champions are individuals who play an outsized role in advancing the mission, goals, and values of the anchor collaborative. As dedicated individuals who are either employed by anchor institutions or positioned at key partner organizations, champions are committed organizers inside and outside of their organizations. They serve as catalysts for change who can mobilize additional champions, mentor their peers, drive adoption of collaborative strategies within their own organization, and maintain momentum within the collaborative through their leadership.

Champions are essential for building partnerships, community support, and advocating for continued resources for successful anchor strategy implementation. Activating these individuals means engaging and empowering them in ways that harness their expertise and motivate them to take action. When backbone organizations engage, organize, and activate new and existing champions across each member of the anchor collaborative and key partner organizations, they create a powerful network of advocates who are invested in the success of the collaboration and the well-being of the communities it serves.

To successfully activate champions:

1. **Identify anchor institutions** in the community and begin to build a deeper understanding of each organization's social mission, priorities, public commitments to racial equity, and any existing anchor mission strategies.
2. **Map community leaders** within and outside of anchor institutions who are necessary to deepen institutional commitments to anchor strategies and sustain momentum over the long term. Lean on early champions (e.g., those who initiated the collaborative) to reach leaders at anchor institutions.
3. **Cultivate relationships with executive-** and department-level champions across institutions in order to socialize anchor mission principles, deepen existing commitments to racial and economic equity, and draw connections between their participation in the collaborative and their organizational objectives.

4. **Provide opportunities** for both existing and emerging champions to activate their skills, networks, or expertise to advance the goals of the collaborative.
5. **Regularly communicate and celebrate successes** to maintain engagement of champions and attract additional support, funding, and resources—and ask them to do so as well with key influencers.
6. **Work with champions to intentionally embed anchor mission** commitments into their organization’s strategic plan, governance, and culture, supporting long-term viability and sustainability of the anchor collaborative.



3.3 Effective Governance

Effective governance involves the policies, processes, and systems that the anchor collaborative uses to facilitate productive and informed

decision-making. Effective governance structures help guide the collaborative’s direction, operationalize the vision, and ensure oversight and accountability. A well-functioning governance system captures and aligns the diverse interests and efforts of anchor collaborative members and the community, while providing opportunities for connection, trust-building, and accountability, as well as ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Implementing anchor strategies in collaboration requires partners to work together in new ways. Taking the time to create a thoughtful governance structure that is tailored to the collaborative’s culture and norms allows anchor collaboratives to respond to changing circumstances and emerging challenges. By establishing structures and processes that endure beyond individual projects or initiatives, governance ensures that collaboratives can continue to thrive and evolve over time, leaving a lasting impact in the community.

The backbone and/or convener, in consultation with members of the collaborative, will need to find a balance between too much and not enough structure. Members of the collaborative and the backbone should feel empowered, motivated, and prepared to make decisions—and not bogged down by unnecessary processes or procedures that create rigidity, fatigue, and inhibit progress. Governing bodies should be action-oriented and designed to promote bi-directional exchanges of information and ideas, in order to avoid passive engagement by members. Further, the level of authority granted to each governing body and the backbone should be clearly outlined.

To successfully establish an effective governance structure:

1. **Review example structures to identify appropriate decision-making bodies,** committees, or advisory boards that may serve the collaborative well—recognizing that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

2. **Create just enough structure to make progress**, and not so much that it slows the work down. Too much structure may impact the responsiveness of the collaborative and create fatigue, while not enough structure may lead to passive engagement by members and limit meaningful impact.
3. **Document roles for each decision-making body** and its members, and create ongoing or time-bound working groups with the expertise required to advance specific programs or priorities of the collaborative.
4. **Establish a community advisory group** that can provide critical expertise regarding community history, current conditions, assets, and resident experiences.
5. **Work together to develop a collaborative charter** that outlines core components such as the mission and vision, guiding principles, criteria for participation, geography served, member expectations, and processes for decision-making.
6. **Revisit the governance structure** every 2-3 years to ensure that it is responsive to current community priorities and circumstances, and any new opportunities.



3.4 Collaboration with Community

Collaboration with community occurs when a diverse array of community stakeholders who stand to be impacted by the collaborative's efforts have the power to influence the direction, approach, and outcomes of the anchor collaborative. Authentic collaboration means residents and community organizations are valued as fellow experts and decision-makers, and relationships are grounded in mutual benefit, trust, and respect.

Building community wealth is a long-term project that requires meaningful and sustained collaboration between anchor institutions and community partners. Collaboration with community is especially important when anchor collaboratives seek to address health, social, and economic inequities within communities that have experienced histories of segregation, oppression, and disinvestment. To understand how the collaborative's collective assets can be most effectively activated to improve community conditions, it is necessary to build trusting relationships with a wide range of community stakeholders—particularly those from lower-income and disinvested communities and communities of color—and develop a deep, shared understanding of community history, context, and resources.

To build and strengthen partnerships between anchor institutions and community stakeholders:

1. **Get specific about who, where, what groups**, and why the collaborative intends to engage in the many circles that comprise its community.
2. **Engage with existing community groups** and coalitions to draw connections between community priorities and the assets and resources that anchor institutions can bring.

3. **Prioritize mutual trust, respect, and reciprocity** when building relationships with community organizations, leaders, and other circles with whom the collaborative would like to partner.
4. **Ensure processes reflect commitments** to racial and economic equity by critically examining systems for decision making, community engagement, and delivery of programs and services.
5. **Work collaboratively with community groups** to develop and implement anchor mission strategies that are responsive to community-identified priorities.
6. **Provide consistent opportunities for community groups** to be a part of the planning and implementation of anchor strategies.



3.5 Sustainable Resourcing

Sustainable resourcing includes consistent and reliable staff and funding that is necessary for long-term planning, stability, and continuity of

the anchor collaborative's efforts. Sustainable resourcing allows collaboratives to invest in capacity-building activities and pursue multi-year initiatives that are core to the anchor mission, which require long-term commitments and engagement by anchor institutions and the backbone.

By securing and effectively managing resources, the collaborative can create a stable foundation for its work and build its capacity. A well-resourced, well-managed collaborative can build trust and credibility among stakeholders, innovate, adapt to changing community needs, and measure its impact, while also leveraging outside resources and partnerships to advance its mission. Without reliable and ongoing resources, the collaborative may struggle to achieve its goals, engage stakeholders, and sustain its efforts.

To successfully resource the collaborative:

1. **Examine common funding sources** for anchor collaboratives and identify the sector (anchor institutions, public entities, or philanthropy) that can best provide initial resourcing.
2. **Leverage initial resources to demonstrate proof of concept** while laying the foundation for conversations about longer-term funding models (e.g., recurring membership dues, public support, and/or multi-year philanthropic commitments).
3. **Document financial needs for operational support**, projects and programs, and in-kind contributions or sponsorships.
4. **Leverage the networks** and relationships of your champions and the development teams within anchor institutions to expand fundraising capacity.



5. **Develop a fundraising plan** that outlines goals for diverse funding streams across local and national philanthropy, public sector, and anchor contributions, including the business and mission imperatives for why funders should support the anchor collaborative.



3.6 Quality Data and Impact Measurement

Quality data and impact measurement allows the collaborative to monitor progress towards its goals and the collective impact of its members when they work together to activate their hiring, purchasing, investing, and other institutional assets. Data reporting bolsters the anchor collaborative’s story both internally—as members seek to improve their anchor strategies—and externally—as government stakeholders, business leaders, and community partners hold the collaborative and its members to account for progress and social impact in communities. These efforts build a culture of learning, leadership, adaptability, and transparency among members of the anchor collaborative, increasing their accountability and commitment to the anchor mission.

To successfully implement a data collection program and impact measurement strategy:

1. **Allocate sufficient time for anchor collaborative members** to understand the value of reporting data and how it is necessary to inform goals and collective strategies.
2. **Leverage existing resources**, such as the [HAN Data Companion](#), to decide together which metrics will be tracked, and secure buy-in from all anchor institutions to collect the data at least annually.
3. **Establish best practices that promote the collection of high-quality data** across institutions, including setting baseline metrics and tracking progress toward anchor mission goals while pushing for year-over-year improvement.
4. **Be patient**—high quality data collection aligned across anchor institutions can take years of consistent effort and engagement, and could require resources that a new anchor collaborative may not initially have.
5. **Be realistic about what is possible** in the early stages (e.g., direct comparisons across institutions may not be achieved right away) and prepare for obstacles such as changes in membership, technological and budget constraints, and slow adoption of new systems.



3.7 Strategic Communications

Strategic communications help increase understanding of—and support for—the anchor mission, organizational commitments, and goals of

the anchor collaborative. Anchor collaboratives have organized around a shared goal of addressing racial and economic inequities through equitable economic development and community wealth building. As with any organization or business, educating stakeholders on why (the problem you are trying to address) and how (your goals and strategies) is key to getting their informed support in the short and long term.

An internal communication strategy helps keep collaborative members informed, motivated, and organized. In turn, each member can more effectively communicate the goals and progress of the anchor collaborative with their internal staff, key leaders, and executive champions. An external communications strategy prepares the anchor collaborative for effective messaging and engagement with the general public, and with key stakeholders such as elected officials or community members and leaders.

Strategic communications focus on the rationale, goals, and strategies behind the anchor collaborative's work, providing timely updates that are salient to its key audiences while elevating specific initiatives that have been successful. Furthermore, achieving community buy-in and accountability requires transparency in communication about these areas and the decision-making processes. The hope is that as members of the anchor collaborative and other key audiences learn about the “why” and “how” of the work and become involved, they will internalize these ideas and become more active champions and more effective and reliable community partners.

To develop and effectively implement a communications strategy that advances the anchor collaborative's goals:

1. **Identify your target audiences**, use storytelling, and focus on explaining the “why” and the “how” behind the collaborative's work. This will help build awareness, establish a consistent voice, and expand engagement among members of the collaborative and in the community.
2. **Use internal communications** to affirm and reaffirm the anchor collaborative's value by drawing connections between members' engagement in the collaborative and the progress they are making. Celebrate wins, no matter how small.
3. **Use external communications** to reach the collaborative's many audiences through different types of content and channels, including social media, newsletters, events, a website, reports, or graphics. Focus on high-impact channels and forums.

4. **Expand the influence of anchor institutions** and inspire others to join or support the effort by positioning anchor institutions and the collaborative as strong, informed advocates for local policies, investments, and partnerships that improve communities.
5. **Leverage the communications, marketing, and media teams** of the anchor institutions in the collaborative. Educate them on the goals and strategies of the collaborative, and make it easy for them to include updates in their institutions' internal and external communications plans (e.g., provide draft language for posts, graphics, photos).

Conclusion

In presenting the Anchor Collaborative Playbook, our hope is to elevate this powerful opportunity to activate the resources and assets of anchor institutions in service of more equitable, thriving local economies. The challenges before us are systemic in nature and moving systems require courage to challenge the status quo and shift mindsets, implement bold and intentional solutions collaboratively, and make long-term, institutional commitments that center racial and economic equity. Such commitments by anchor institutions are necessary to realize the shared vision of a just and fair economy in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. By offering anchor mission strategies as a framework for action, and by outlining success factors for anchor collaboratives, we have provided here what we believe is a practical, values-aligned playbook for equitable economic development that can be applied and adapted to fit the unique needs and circumstances of communities across the country. We also know that anchor collaboratives are an under-resourced, and understudied approach to equitable economic development, and we are now only beginning to see the possibilities of what can happen when multiple institutions begin to work together in partnership with their communities. Only by championing and sustaining these complex, place-based efforts over the long term can we fully realize the impact of such partnerships and practices in reversing the legacy of disinvestment and discrimination that impacts so many communities across this country.



Key Terms

Anchor institutions: Nonprofit or public institutions including hospitals, universities, local governments, utilities, large cultural organizations, and place-based foundations. Anchor institutions are geographically tied to their community through their social or public-facing mission, invested capital, or clientele. Due to the scale of their operations, anchor institutions produce a significant economic impact in their surrounding community, and given their social mission and place-based focus, have a vested interest in the long-term health and well-being of their surrounding community.

Anchor mission: A commitment to intentionally apply an anchor institution's long-term, place-based economic power in partnership with the community to mutually benefit the long-term well-being of both.

By adopting the anchor mission, anchor institutions recognize that their hiring, purchasing, investing, and other institutional assets are an important part of creating thriving communities and equitable local economies.

Anchor collaborative: A place-based network of anchor institutions that utilize an anchor mission framework in partnership with the community in order to advance economic and racial equity through increased economic opportunity, equitable economic development, and community wealth building.

Equitable economic development: Economic development promotes economic well-being and improves the quality of life in communities by creating and retaining jobs, enhancing wealth, and providing a stable tax base. Equitable economic development is achieved when every member of a community is able to share in and benefit from economic growth (Rockefeller Foundation).³

Community wealth building: A system-changing approach to community economic development that works to produce broadly shared economic prosperity, racial equity, and ecological sustainability through the reconfiguration of institutions and local economies on the basis of greater democratic ownership, participation, and control (The Democracy Collaborative).⁴

Racial equity: A process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color (Race Forward).⁵ Specific to equitable economic development, racial equity means just and fair inclusion in an economy in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. We achieve racial equity when race no longer predicts life outcomes (Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco).⁶

Endnotes

¹ “National Health Expenditure Fact Sheet,” Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, last modified December 13, 2023, <https://www.cms.gov/data-research/statistics-trends-and-reports/national-health-expenditure-data/nhe-fact-sheet>.

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