Leading and Sustaining Place-Based Healthier Communities Efforts:

Assessment and Reflection Tool

Facilitator's Version

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Introduction

Throughout the United States, a growing community-centered movement is creating lasting change to support healthy places leading to healthy choices and outcomes. This *place-based* movement is made up of many local and regional collaborative efforts, all focused on the three main risk factors for obesity and chronic disease: physical inactivity, unhealthful eating, and tobacco use and exposure. The movement is attempting to get individuals and groups working together to

- apply proven policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) strategies that make healthful eating and active and tobacco-free living easier (the norm);
- make sure that those community members who have the greatest burden of health disparities (in places where healthful choices are most challenging) benefit from these strategies.

Under most circumstances, accomplishing fundamental and systemic change in community conditions will take longer than a typical funding cycle. For this and other reasons, it is important to figure out the right formula for sustaining the work.

One of the first steps is to recognize that sustainability may mean different things to different people. Sustainability can be viewed from multiple angles, each suggesting a different primary question that people and groups are trying to address:

- How do we maintain and/or grow resources?
- How do we organize and develop lasting structures or partnerships that continually can adapt and deliver change?
- How do we change our community culture—our default way of thinking, prioritizing, and behaving—to support better health for everyone in our community?
- How do we perform this work in a way that identifies and reaches members of our community who shoulder the greatest health equity burden?

Regardless of viewpoint, those who are engaged in creating change quickly realize that sustainability can be much more complicated than simply identifying sources of funding.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) *Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities* defines sustainability as "a community's ongoing capacity and resolve to work together to establish, advance, and maintain effective strategies that continuously improve health and quality of life for all" (CDC, 2012). Creating and sustaining a healthier community is not a short-term endeavor; it is an ongoing and intentional process.

The issue of sustainability is (or should be) embedded in all aspects of how a community approaches long-term, desired results. This tool, which is divided into four fields, is based on observations by and interviews with local coalition leaders and a review of literature. The tool is designed to assist communities as they reflect upon and assess the key dimensions of effective, sustainable place-based coalitions and partnerships.

The following are the four fields:

- Field 1: How We Establish a Shared Vision
- Field 2: How We Lead and Organize
- Field 3: How We Plan, Act, and Adapt
- Field 4: How We Resource and Spread Impact

Using the Tool

This self-assessment tool contains the primary elements needed to effectively advance place-based solutions using proven policy and environmental strategies to create healthier settings where people live, work, pray, and play. Taking a place-based approach requires new ways of thinking and operating—and new ways of assessing effectiveness. The intent of this tool is to provide individuals and partners of a local healthier community coalition an opportunity to (1) understand the coalition's current capacity and effectiveness and (2) identify some key ways to improve the coalition's long-term effectiveness and sustainability. (Please note that the term coalition is used broadly and can serve as a proxy for other terms, such as partnership or collaborative.) To get the most out of this tool, it will be helpful to

- make sure that the timing is right for coalition members to reflect on current performance and potential enhancements (perhaps at a key transition period);
- use a facilitator and/or facilitated process to create a safe and constructive dialogue (see Facilitation Refresher in Attachment 1);
- recognize that the tool is a catalyst to action-oriented solutions—designed for coalitions, not for external evaluation (do not get too caught up in the numerical scores);
- revisit this tool at appropriate intervals (determined by the coalition and specific contextual factors) during the coalition's development and growth.

Field 1: How We Establish a Shared Vision

A vision that is based upon shared values draws people together and propels them forward. A compelling end goal that is bigger than individual achievements opens the door to new and often unexpected opportunities to learn and collaborate. Producing substantial change requires that a critical mass of community members and partners have a shared vision, a common understanding of the relevant problems, and an agreed-upon approach to improvement strategies.

Photo courtesy of Stacy Wegley

Communities typically have numerous groups or individuals focused on obesity and related chronic health conditions who may believe they have succeeded in diagnosing the problem. They may have strong opinions on preferred solutions. However, concentrating instead upon desired outcomes—such as an environment that supports walking, bicycling, and access to healthful foods—offers more opportunities for collaboration. As people think more about possibilities than problems, they are stimulated to action and are more likely to follow through on actions (Fritz, 1996). This framework enables broad constituencies to be built that gain the attention of stakeholders and decision makers. The following are some practices to consider.

Ground the Vision in Evidence-Based Strategies

Provide a productive context for exploring and reinforcing the importance of using PSE strategies to achieve and sustain bold improvements. **This could include creating a vision built on existing evidence-based strategies.** Linking the vision and longer-term outcomes to understandable and measurable strategies makes them more tangible and achievable.

Highlight Multiple Benefits

Help individuals and organizations to see how their fundamental interests would be met. A good example is the trailhead gathering spot and trail network spearheaded by LiveWell Greenville in South Carolina. This city's chamber of commerce uses this trail network to emphasize how quality of life is essential to sound economic development. The city's schools emphasized trails and other improvements to the built and natural environments as a safe and healthful way for children to get to school and be more prepared to learn. Greenville's hospital officials emphasized trails and other health assets outside their walls as crucial to chronic disease prevention and management. As Eleanor Dunlap, the LiveWell Greenville coordinator said, "They may use slightly different words, but we all know they are describing the same future." LiveWell Greenville included advancing health equity as an essential component of its future vision. An assessment of strategies was included to make sure that benefits will accrue to all community members.

Spread the Vision to the Broader Community

Employ descriptive branding and a coordinated media strategy to help communicate the vision. A coalition in Omaha, Nebraska, used a media campaign to notify community organizations and members of its movement, which was branded LiveWell. Citizens in Nashville, Tennessee, took a similar approach with Nashvitality. According to David Campbell, Nashvitality coordinator, “Nashvitality is now a brand that means something to the residents of Nashville; it means we are striving toward a healthy and green city together. We make sure to connect the many tangible and smaller projects—such as our bike share program or workplace wellness initiatives—to a brand that represents a larger effort.”

Revisit and Refine the Vision

Development of a shared vision may take several iterations before it becomes clear and compelling enough to engage and inspire a wide variety of stakeholders. Some coalitions refer to their vision as a touchstone to which they can return time after time and use as a basis for prioritizing opportunities and assuring that coalition members and the broader community hold onto a shared meaning and commitment to the vision.

Field 2: How We Lead and Organize

Leading a place-based healthier community effort requires strong collaborative skills and effective structures and processes. Most healthier community initiatives have ambitious aims, limited staffing, and strong reliance on volunteers. Healthier community initiatives are often complex, involving many organizations and partners, and cannot rely on hierarchy that enables individual organizations to mandate performance.

Photo courtesy of Mark Bryon

Successful place-based change efforts generally have a cross-sector "leadership team" of formal and informal community leaders that helps to shepherd the larger coalition. (These smaller "leadership teams" may go by different names.) Effective implementation and corresponding results generally rest with work action teams (workgroups) and/or are achieved through partnerships. However, no single model exists for leading and organizing a place-based collaborative. Some communities house them in existing organizations (e.g., health department or a YMCA); some incorporate them as separate nonprofit organizations; and others rely on various partners to fulfill core leadership and support functions. Whatever model is used, the following practices are worth considering.

Engage the Right Mix of Individuals

Strong "leadership teams," for example, are a mix of individuals who represent different sectors and perspectives—and who are willing to contribute their knowledge, skills, and/or networks. Action teams (or workgroups) need to include the right mix of partners, content experts, and stakeholders who can effectively apply targeted strategies. Individuals who represent community groups that experience the most health disparities are essential to this mix.

Build Strong Teams

The right mix is not enough if the group is unable to function as a team. Team members need to have a clear sense of the team's role and responsibilities and the specific and unique expectations of individual members (e.g., how they can best contribute their knowledge and influence). Implementation of policy and environmental strategies is new territory for many team members; educating them about existing PSE work and team capacity building will allow them to contribute fully. Engagement and attendance at meetings will drop quickly if the meetings are not well facilitated or simply become staff report-outs without offering any meaningful role for direction. Annmarie Medina of Activate Tucson said, "Making time for our respective team's relationships outside of a traditional meeting format such as doing sites visits, watching movies, and eating together, as well as attending relevant learning events, has helped us build trust and stick together when things get tough."

Provide Collaborative Infrastructure

Coalition leadership requires a commitment to collaboration, people, and organizations from multiple sectors working together in common purpose (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Also required are the confidence and trust to patiently support the process of community engagement and shared decision making. Collaboration also requires substantial support, including facilitation; communication (e.g., meetings, notes, notices, and updated action plans); research (i.e., determining evidence-based strategies); and evaluation (i.e., establishing the baseline and gaps). The Health Action Partnership (HAP) of Jefferson County, Alabama, leans on its United Way partner to help cultivate action team facilitators and support communication between meetings and with other action teams. This support has helped HAP to successfully implement place-based solutions.

Field 3: How We Plan, Act, and Adapt

Planning for and taking action on PSE strategies requires thoughtful and creative ways to build public understanding. A leader with the WeTHRIVE! coalition of Hamilton County, Ohio, said, “I have learned how much time it takes—and how important it is to take time—to educate partners and community members about new approaches to health improvement. Our job is to help build a constituency and appetite for these new approaches.”

More traditional elements of project or program planning and implementation also exist. An individual or group needs to apply strategies, for example, when selecting vending options or installing signs, bicycle racks, and other environmental prompts. A key is to balance time spent assessing, planning, acting, and adapting.

Effectiveness in planning and action will always hinge on

- good assessment of current gaps and opportunities;
- clear understanding of desired outcomes;
- clear understanding of successful strategies and practices.

Understanding the community’s priorities is also important to picking a productive course of action. Creating place-based changes requires both an artistic side that discovers creative ways to accomplish goals and a scientific side that profits from the growing evidence base of what works. Following are some practices worth considering.

Blend PSE With Programs and Promotions

Policy, system, and environmental strategies are the beginning of long-term change, and programs need to work in concert with those PSE strategies. For example, combining school policies; environmental improvements (e.g., street improvements involving sidewalks, crosswalks, crossing guards); and programs (e.g., as walking, school bus, and bicycle safety classes) can enable children and families to ride bicycles or walk to school safely. In addition, educating children and parents about healthful food by engaging them in cooking classes or posting clever and motivating posters may help to cement the importance of food to health. Visible programs in conjunction with policy-level strategies serve various functions. They enable people to take advantage of PSE improvements once they are in place, and they illustrate the results more clearly by identifying and measuring progress toward outcomes. This contributes to garnering more widespread support. For example, when community stakeholders see that a trail is being used, they will be more likely to support an expanded trail system.

Assess and Build on Assets

Photo courtesy of Stacy Wegley

Building on existing assets is a great way to generate momentum. Assets may include willing volunteers, other initiatives with commons goals, or school leaders who are hungry for new solutions. A partially constructed greenway or transportation system, as was the case in the Nashville metropolitan area, may serve as an asset to catalyze action. Effective coalitions and teams are scanning constantly for assets and opportunities. Such opportunities often arise without warning; a city announces a new paving project, or a media outlet offers an opportunity to help shape the public view. Suzette Harris of HAP in Jefferson County, Alabama, shared, "Assets started to emerge as we developed our tobacco-free strategies. We got a poll indicating stronger than anticipated community support for tobacco-free environments and we were able to help two powerful bar owners pilot smoke-free nights. This all contributed to our success in advancing smoke-free strategies." Of course, existing programs (e.g., a partner's bicycle safety or bicycle recycling program) can be wonderful assets for introducing or using new PSE improvements. Organizations such as HAP often use multiple funding sources; HAP has been careful to make sure to honor the unique and appropriate limitations on funds from Federal, foundation, and local sources.

Use Success Stories and Proven Strategies

The growing place-based movement is generating powerful stories and a more robust evidence base of PSE strategies. Success stories are a crucial part of any change process. When community leaders learn from their peers about what is working elsewhere, their thinking expands regarding what is possible for their own communities. Many successful actions have been inspired by hearing a story or seeing an example of PSE improvement in another community. Ensuring that coalition teams have regular access to outside research and peer communities—an eye on what is working outside their own communities—is important to effective planning and implementation. Success stories also can help to persuade key stakeholders that participating in the coalition effort is well worth their time and energy.

Be Experimental and Adaptable

No cookbook exists for executing place-based strategies; rather, effective place-based coalition members increasingly think and behave like social entrepreneurs, testing small changes and scaling those that work. A network of youth-serving organizations banded together in Nashville to test organizational policies and practices that lead to healthful eating and more active environments for youth. They plan to take what they learn—about what does and does not work—and share it with other youth-serving organizations in the region. This will involve adapting a spirit of inquiry and curiosity, as well as moving forward without having all the answers. Coalitions that embrace the attitude that failures are to be expected and provide good opportunities for learning and adapting are having success.

Invariably, all place-based coalitions will face ongoing changes and challenges. Grant programs will come and go, some new organizations will come on board, other organizations will depart, leaders and staff will leave their posts, and new issues and opportunities will arise. Adaptability will remain a key. By maintaining a focus on the vision and desired results while staying abreast of changing conditions, effective coalition leaders will be prepared to alter structures, incorporate new ideas and participants, and devise new means for achieving their desired ends.

Field 4: How We Resource and Spread Impact

Effective coalition leaders find ways to identify and recruit institutions and welcome them as a part of the coalition. These leaders demonstrate the ability to cultivate and renew relationships. In addition, they clarify the resources required to achieve priority goals and outcomes and guide efforts to find new resources or additional ways to use existing resources. Perhaps most importantly, they recognize that it is important to sustain the movement toward the healthy community and healthy lifestyles they seek, not the coalition itself. By paying attention to this outcome, these leaders are better able to plan and act to achieve sustainability. Practices to consider include the following.

Adapt a Movement Mindset

Leading a place-based change effort is really about growing and sustaining a movement with many centers of gravity—not one centralized body driving action. This means that leaders need to plan for and encourage distributed leadership across a wide range of actors. Patty Boyd from Tri-County Health Department in Colorado said, “We are a large regional community that can’t afford to have a single coalition or ‘leadership team’ making decisions for nearly 30 distinct communities and three different counties; we are better off helping communities, schools, and local governments to learn from and replicate each other’s successes.” Groups such as Tri-County work to create conditions and capacity that help the movement flourish.


Photo courtesy of Mark Byron

Help Local Organizations Adopt Their Own

Because so many of the PSE improvements are also specific to settings, local organizations and members within the organizations have numerous opportunities to adopt and implement their own PSE improvements. Local nonprofit organizations, workplaces, and places of worship can carry out their own healthy-eating, active-living policies and practices—a powerful and easy way to reach a broad number of community members and make a tangible connection to the movement. Youth-serving organizations in Nashville, including the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, and United Way, used a 5-month learning collaborative to share lessons and best practices for implementing organizational PSE improvements. This effort alone reached thousands of children, families, and staff members.

Diversify Funding Sources

Counting on a single source of funding, particularly grant funding, is unwise. Developing a more balanced financial support portfolio will help place-based efforts to mature. The HAP in

Jefferson County, Alabama, is developing a long-term strategy to spread responsibility for financing the core functions (collaborative infrastructure) among the United Way, the local health foundation, the health department, and the local university. Tapping into hospital community benefit dollars will present a major opportunity in the near future—especially given new reporting requirements for community benefit. For more information on this new requirement, visit the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Web site (http://www.rwjf.org/en/blogs/new-public-health/2012/10/new_hospital_communi.html).

Guiding Questions

Field 1: How We Establish a Shared Vision

A. How well is our coalition creating a mindset that this work requires concerted, persistent effort among many different people and partners over an extended time (i.e., "We all need to be in this for the long run—this is not a project with a designated end date")?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

B. How well is our coalition establishing a meaningful vision that is shared by a wide range of community members, diverse organizational and sector leaders, and organizations experiencing health-related disparities?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

C. How well is our coalition providing opportunities to revisit, refine, and align the vision with personal, community, and organizational goals?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

D. How well is our coalition linking the broader vision to "upstream" solutions (e.g., policies and environmental strategies that support healthful choices and behaviors in settings where people spend most of their time)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

E. How well is our coalition creating the sense that the vision is tangible and achievable?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

F. How well is our coalition communicating the ways in which organizations and individuals will see that their fundamental interests are addressed within the vision?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

G. How well is our coalition assuring that the vision and priority actions include an intentional focus on helping community members who experience the greatest health disparities (e.g., making health equity a priority)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

H. How well is our coalition linking the vision for health outcomes with other community goals (e.g., education, economic development, poverty reduction)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

I. Considering all of the dimensions of this field for ***how we establish a shared vision***, please provide the following information:

I1. One to two areas where we are doing especially well (definite strengths).

I2. One to two areas where we are most challenged (opportunities for improvement).

Field 2: How We Lead and Organize

A. How well is our coalition engaging in a purposeful identification, development, and ongoing assessment of its coalition or "leadership team" to assure the following?

A1. The diversity of membership reflects our community.

1 Poorly	2	3 OK	4	5 Very Well

Comments:

A2. We have key leaders across different sectors who possess the formal and informal clout to make PSE improvements (regardless of official title) and who are effective at making the case for change to other leaders within their networks.

1 Poorly	2	3 OK	4	5 Very Well

Comments:

A3. We are creating opportunities for meaningful contributions by all members—effectively using and aligning their passions, knowledge, and talents—and they are clear about their own and others' roles.

1 Poorly	2	3 OK	4	5 Very Well

Comments:

B. How well is our coalition taking the required time to build relationships and shared commitment and foster a culture of trust among the various members?

1 Poorly	2	3 OK	4	5 Very Well

Comments:

C. How well is our coalition establishing and supporting effective workgroups or action teams that help to get results in priority goal areas?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

D. How well is our coalition making decisions and prioritizing strategies based on appropriate levels of input from affected stakeholders, as well as the larger coalition?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

E. How well is our coalition developing both an ethic and practice of distributing leadership responsibilities and sharing credit across partners and participants for the work and resulting accomplishments?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

F. How well is our coalition developing and maintaining effective internal communication between various partners and across different streams of activities?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

G. How well is our coalition providing needed infrastructure support for effective collaboration within and across coalition teams (i.e., facilitation, communication, research, and evaluation)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

H. Considering all of the dimensions of this field for ***how we lead***, please provide the following information:

H1. One to two areas where we are doing especially well (definite strengths).

H2. One to two areas where we are most challenged (opportunities for improvement).

Field 3: How We Plan, Act, and Adapt

A. How well is our coalition developing a stronger and ongoing shared understanding of the following?

A1. Existing efforts, assets, gaps, and opportunities within the community.

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

A2. Proven and promising strategies, practices, and lessons learned from other communities doing similar work.

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

B. How well is our coalition capitalizing on emerging opportunities for immediate action (i.e., has adopted an “opportunistic mindset”—being flexible enough to act on unplanned opportunities without compromising long-term focus and outcomes)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

C. How well is our coalition keeping its vision, activities, accomplishments, and opportunities for involvement visible through systematic communication with key stakeholders and the broader community?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

D. How well is our coalition using community assessment processes and different types of data and information—including the wisdom of the community—to better understand community realities and frame priorities?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

E. How well is our coalition maintaining a "spirit of inquiry" (e.g., scanning for emerging opportunities for action, seeking to better understand what roles the team or coalition most needs to move effectively toward healthier community goals, reflecting on what is working well and what is not)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

F. How well is our coalition leveraging efforts through blending PSE strategies with related programs to work in concert and enhance the overall outcomes?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

G. Considering all of the dimensions of this set of practices for ***how we plan, act, and adapt***, please provide the following information:

G1. One to two areas where we are doing especially well (definite strengths).

G2. One to two areas where we are most challenged (opportunities for improvement).

Field 4: How We Resource and Spread Impact

A. How well is our coalition making sure that organizational members signal their commitment to the larger, healthier community vision by doing the following?

A1. Dedicating staff time for the support and coordination of coalition activities.

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

A2. Integrating the coalition's goals and objectives into the organizations' strategic plans and annual budgets.

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

A3. Modeling desired changes by adopting PSE improvements within our own organizational walls (e.g., procurement policies for healthful meals, physical environments that encourage physical activity).

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

B. How well is our coalition executing an effective communication plan aimed at documenting and effectively communicating results to funders and the larger community—via stories, media, Web sites, and social media—in ways that both inform and inspire engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

C. How well is our coalition developing a diverse funding plan for sustaining efforts, including a long-term funding strategy that includes local fundraising, grants, impact investing,[1] and inclusion in organizational budgets?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

D. How well is our coalition distributing new resources as they become available in ways that reinforce positive relationships and distribution of ownership or leadership among community partners?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

E. How well is our coalition demonstrating a movement-focused mindset by encouraging distributed leadership that involves teams across the movement?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

F. How well is our coalition establishing a systematic way to support changes in leadership—either changes in level of commitment or actual turnover—on the "leadership team" (e.g., transition strategy and rules)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		OK		Very Well

Comments:

[1] Impact investments are made with the intention of generating positive, measurable social and environmental impacts beyond financial return.

G. Considering all of the dimensions of this set of practices for ***how we resource our actions and spread our impact***, please provide the following information:

G1. One to two areas where we are doing especially well (definite strengths).

G2. One to two areas where we are most challenged (opportunities for improvement).

Suggestions for the Facilitator/Convener

There is no single or right way to use this tool. However, given its intent and design principles, the following is offered as a suggested, step-by-step process.

Step 1: Orientation

A team or coalition that agrees to use this tool will find it helpful to take some time *together* to review the tool, the questions, and the assumptions or design principles and agree upon the process and timeline for using it. Ideally, this initial review and orientation can take place in person as part of a scheduled meeting (e.g., as an agenda item). If this is not possible, however, orientation also could be done by sending this document to all of the participating individuals and then holding the orientation discussion via conference call.

Hint: As part of the orientation process, it may be valuable to collectively “walk through” and review the questions for clarification; however, be careful to avoid having individuals offer responses (e.g., “Well, I think we have done really well on that one!”). *The tool and process will be most valuable if initial responses are developed individually.*

Hint: One question that may emerge during this initial orientation is, “To what group or scale are we applying this? Is it our “leadership team”, some other group, or the whole coalition?” *All participants should have a shared understanding of the focus and scope of the assessment*.

Step 2: Individual Assessments

After the orientation to the tool, ask participating members to respond individually to all of the questions by circling the number on the scale that corresponds to their fullest understanding and perception of how the team or coalition is doing. If there is a question or two for which they have no knowledge, they can be left blank; however, they should be encouraged to try to respond to all of the questions. When participants have completed their individual assessments, they will send their responses to the coach, team leader, or some other designated person, who will then compile the results.

The following are a few tips:

- It will take about 20 minutes to complete the individual assessments. Encourage participants to do this at a time and place where there are few distractions and they can focus comfortably on the questions and reflect on their experiences.
- As a group, agree on whether individuals’ responses will be kept anonymous. If yes, then participants should keep copies of their responses so that they can refer back to them for the group dialogue that will take place later.
- Set a deadline and remind individuals when they need to complete and submit their assessments.

- Remind individuals that their honest assessment is not only welcome, but needed. The intent is not to make the team or coalition look good, but to collectively figure out where and how to improve the prospects for sustainability.

Step 3: Group Dialogue and Learning

After all of the individual responses have been completed and submitted, it will be necessary to compile the results. The individual assessments will become the raw data that will then be fed back to the group for discussion.

Hint: There is a natural inclination at this step to quickly generate and focus on the average of the combined results (e.g., “We scored a 3.5 on this practice”). While the average may be helpful for the group to consider, the results for each question should be reported back in a way that shows the diversity or “spread” of responses (e.g., “Four people chose two, one person chose three, three people chose four, and one person chose five”). *It is often helpful to explore those areas where there is a wide range of individual responses for any given practice or field of practices—“Why are we seeing or experiencing this differently?”* Seeking to understand different perspectives and experiences may point to more opportunities to learn and improve.

If possible, this group dialogue can be scheduled as part of a regularly planned meeting of the team or coalition. However, the dialogue may take at least 60–90 minutes; whether it happens at a regularly scheduled meeting or the group decides to set aside a separate gathering just for this dialogue, allow time for the discussion. It may be necessary, and more practical, to organize the conversation into two parts over two separate meetings (e.g., cover the first two fields of practices at the first meeting and the second two fields at another meeting).

Some judgments will need to be made regarding how best to proceed as a group with reviewing and discussing the combined individual results: review and discuss each individual practice as a group, discuss the scores given to a complete set of practices under one field (e.g., Organizing for Collaborative Action), or pick out only those practices or areas with diverse responses from many participants (suggesting that there have been different experiences regarding the team’s capacity and performance in that area).

Hint: As with any group discussion and dialogue, having a designated facilitator will assure full participation and maximize opportunities for shared learning among the group. This could be a person from the group, or it could be an outside facilitator. (See Attachment 1.)

Step 4: Determining a Direction

Remember, the intent of this tool is to develop a stronger collective judgment of the team’s or coalition’s current capacity and effectiveness *for the purpose of identifying a few key opportunities for improvement that will make a significant difference to long-term effectiveness and sustainability*. Throughout the dialogue process, have someone note and record what the group identifies as a need or opportunity for improvement. At the close of the meeting, reflect back and check for agreement on what emerged from the group's discussion and, if necessary, highlight areas in need of further discussion.

Hint: If the group chooses to complete the dialogue over two meetings, use the recording/planning template (Attachment 2) to capture the opportunities for improvement and initial suggestions for short- and long-term priorities for each of the fields covered at each meeting.

Once a few strategic opportunities for improvement have been identified, the group will need to develop a plan for addressing them, including seeking to understand how other efforts—either in their own community or in other communities—have been successful in building effective capacity and practices in these areas. To support the development process, a suggested recording/planning template (Attachment 2) can be used to identify directions and next steps that emerge from the group dialogue.

Hint: It may be helpful to make copies of the recording/planning template and distribute them to all participants before or at the beginning of each meeting.

Process Summary

Step	Notes/Reminders	Date
Orientation of group to tool and process	Include as agenda item of regular meeting	
Completion of tool by individuals	Allow about 20 minutes for individuals to complete; set deadline for submitting responses	
Compilation of results	Team coach, leader, or designated member should focus and report on distribution of responses as much or more than averages	
Group dialogue and learning	Plan for 60–90 minutes; consider one or two meetings	
Determination of direction	See Attachment 2 for suggested guiding questions and recording template	

Good luck, and have fun!

Attachment 1: Facilitation Refresher

An expert facilitator is not needed to have productive meetings. The following tips and ideas will help you to make your team experience as productive and enjoyable as possible.

Know Your Role

As the group's facilitator, you should do the following:

- Help the group understand its task and purpose
- Make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard
- Create a safe environment for dialogue (including disagreement)
- Keep an open and balanced conversational flow
- Focus energy of the group on the common task
- Manage the group's time
- Manage the group decision-making process
- Maintain neutrality (when playing the primary facilitator role; however, do not hesitate to share an idea)

Set Simple Operating Agreements

Review group operating agreements and ask the participants whether they agree with them or want to add anything. Basic operating agreements include the following:

- Listen respectfully (to understand and build on others' ideas)
- One person talks at a time (no side conversations)
- Tough on ideas, not on people (no personal attacks)
- Everyone has an opportunity to speak
- Stay focused on agenda items
- Start and end on time
- Take risks
- Use dialogue

Support the Group Process

Even though your team has agreed on some basic operating agreements, you will need to monitor how well the participants honor these agreements and communicate with one other—who has spoken, who has not, and who has points that have not received a fair hearing. Here are a few ideas to support the process:

- A well-thought-out agenda is the key to a productive meeting; the agenda needs to include desired outcomes, key questions, and time estimates. (It is always a good idea to give people a chance to shape or refine the agenda before the meeting and create the agenda for the following meeting.)

- Send relevant materials to be discussed a couple of days before the meetings to make sure people have enough time to review them.
- Give an estimate of the time you propose the group will spend on each question and provide updates as needed (i.e., have a “game plan” for how the group could use its time, and then be flexible).
- Do not be afraid of silence. (It sometimes will take a while for participants to offer an answer to a question you pose.)
- When deciding whether to intervene, err on the side of nonintervention. Facilitators frequently are trapped into taking too much responsibility for the group, which can undermine the group experience. Encourage the group to take responsibility for the quality of the process.

Focus on Content

In addition to helping the group with the process, you will need to help the group deal with the content of its discussion:

- Make sure the group considers a wide range of views
- Ask the group to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs
- Steer the group away from focusing too much on or being overly influenced by one point of view
- Remain neutral about content and be cautious about expressing your own values
- Help participants to identify common ground, but do not try to force consensus

Some Practices/Skills

<u>Ask open-ended questions</u>

- **Goal:** To encourage the person to think and talk about what is on his or her mind
- **Avoid:** Asking closed-ended or leading questions

<u>Listen, listen, listen</u>

Seek to understand things from the other person’s perspective:

- Listen with presence
- Listen with the eyes, ears, and heart
- Listen with curiosity
- Listen without judgment
- Listen without interruption
- Use attentive silence (allow for pauses)
- Use encouragers

—mm-hmm	*—I see*	*—go on*
—tell me more	*—oh?*	*—and?*
—for instance	*—really?*	*—what else?*

Use positive nonverbal behaviors:

- Eye contact is established—and maintained
- Facial expression is pleasant and open
- Bodily posture is open and forward
- Voice tone is warm and pleasant
- Rate of speech is not too slow or too fast
- Spatial proximity is not too close or too distant

<u>Reflect and summarize</u>

Reflect back in your own words what you heard people say. The better you get at listening, the less you will have to reflect back what a person said (to make sure you heard correctly) and the more you will be able to *summarize* the whole of what he or she said.

Examples:

"Sounds like …"
"So what I hear you saying is …"
"Let me see if I understand exactly what you've said …"
"Did I get it all?"

Summarizing examples:

"Let me see if I understand what you are saying …"
"In general, it seems …"
"Here is what I hear you saying … anything I missed?"

Handle Typical Challenges

<u>Challenge: The quiet or shy participant</u>

Possible responses: Try to draw out quiet participants, but do not put them on the spot. Make eye contact; it reminds them that you would like to hear from them. Look for nonverbal cues to see whether they want to speak. You can be more direct and ask them for their opinion: "Laurie, what do you think?"

<u>Challenge: The dominator</u>

Possible responses: As the facilitator, you are responsible for making sure that one or more participants do not dominate the discussion. Once it becomes clear that a person is dominating, you must intervene and set limits. Start by reminding the group (and the individual) that you want to hear from all participants. Next, you might ask the individual to wait until everyone else has had a chance to give their thoughts on the question. If the pattern continues, you may need to be more direct: "Joe, please finish your point, because I feel we are wandering a bit from our agreed-upon agenda and I'd like to give others a chance to speak."

Challenge: Lack of focus or wandering off track

Possible responses: Responding to this can be a hard call; after all, the discussion belongs to the group members. Yet, it is the facilitator's job to maintain group focus. You may wish to give some leeway to participants who want to explore closely related topics. However, if only a few participants are carrying the discussion in a new direction, the others are likely to be frustrated, resentful, and bored. As the facilitator, you should try to refocus the discussion, perhaps by asking, "How does your point relate to the ____?" or by stating, "That's an interesting point, but I'd like for us to return to the initial question."

Challenge: Lack of interest or excitement

Possible responses: When people help to craft the agenda, they are more likely to engage in the discussion. However, lack of interest or excitement can happen when the facilitator talks too much or does not give participants enough time to respond after posing the questions. It may help to pose a question and go around the group so that everyone has a chance to respond. Another possible reason for apparent lack of excitement about the discussion may be that the group seems to be in agreement. In this case, you might check this assumption and then gain agreement for moving on to the next question or topic on the agenda.

Challenge: Conflict or tension

Possible responses: If there is tension, address it directly. Remind participants that disagreement and conflicting ideas are fine and useful. You must interrupt personal attacks, name calling, or putdowns as soon as they occur, however. Remind the group or the individual that it is acceptable to challenge someone's ideas but it is not acceptable to challenge them personally. Do not hesitate to appeal to the group for help; if the group members have bought into the ground rules, they will support you.

Attachment 2: Recording/Planning Template

	How We Establish a Shared Vision	How We Lead and Organize	How We Plan, Act, and Adapt	How We Resource and Spread Impact
Areas of Strength				
Ideas/Opportunities for Improvement				
Priorities:				
Short-Term (easy or feasible; we can do this right away)				
Long-Term (potential high impact, but we need to learn more about how)				
Next Steps (for all of the above, including by whom)				

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