



Advancing Conditions for Achieving Promise Neighborhoods Results



Promise Neighborhoods

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Introduction

How can Promise Neighborhoods and similar place-based, collective impact initiatives achieve results in their communities? Backbone organizations can advance key conditions as they work toward achieving population-level results for children and families. These conditions help backbone organizations build capacities and mark stages of development in building complex, place-based cradle-to-career (C2C) initiatives. The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink and collaborators created

[*A Developmental Pathway for Achieving Promise Neighborhoods Results*](#) in 2014, which introduced a strategic framework designed to guide communities in building the infrastructure and partnerships necessary to support a C2C continuum of solutions. In 2025, Westat and the Urban Institute technical assistance teams reimaged the tool as *Advancing Conditions for Achieving Promise Neighborhoods Results* with input from the U.S. Department of Education, Promise Neighborhoods grantees, and the organizations that created the 2014 publication.

All Promise Neighborhoods grantees commit to achieving 10 results spanning the cradle-to-career continuum, which are measured by Government Performance and Results Act indicators. See the program's Results page for a list of the 10 results, guidance, and data from grantees starting in 2012.

Six conditions are important for place-based initiatives to achieve results.



Organizational & Leadership Capacity. This condition focuses on the ability of the backbone organization to coordinate partners, engage residents, align systems, serve as a fiscal agent, build leadership pipelines, and adapt to changing conditions while keeping results at the center.



Community Engagement. This condition represents the involvement of students, families, and community members in shaping the Promise Neighborhood's strategy, tracking its effectiveness, and refining the approach over time as leaders of the initiative.



Cradle-to-Career (C2C) Solutions. This condition represents strategies and solutions designed to improve results across the C2C continuum.



Strategic Partnerships. This condition involves the development and maintenance of strategic, data-informed, and responsive partnerships among schools, service providers, residents, and funders to support outcomes for children and families.



Sustainable Financing. This condition requires the procurement and alignment of financial resources with strategic priorities to drive results.

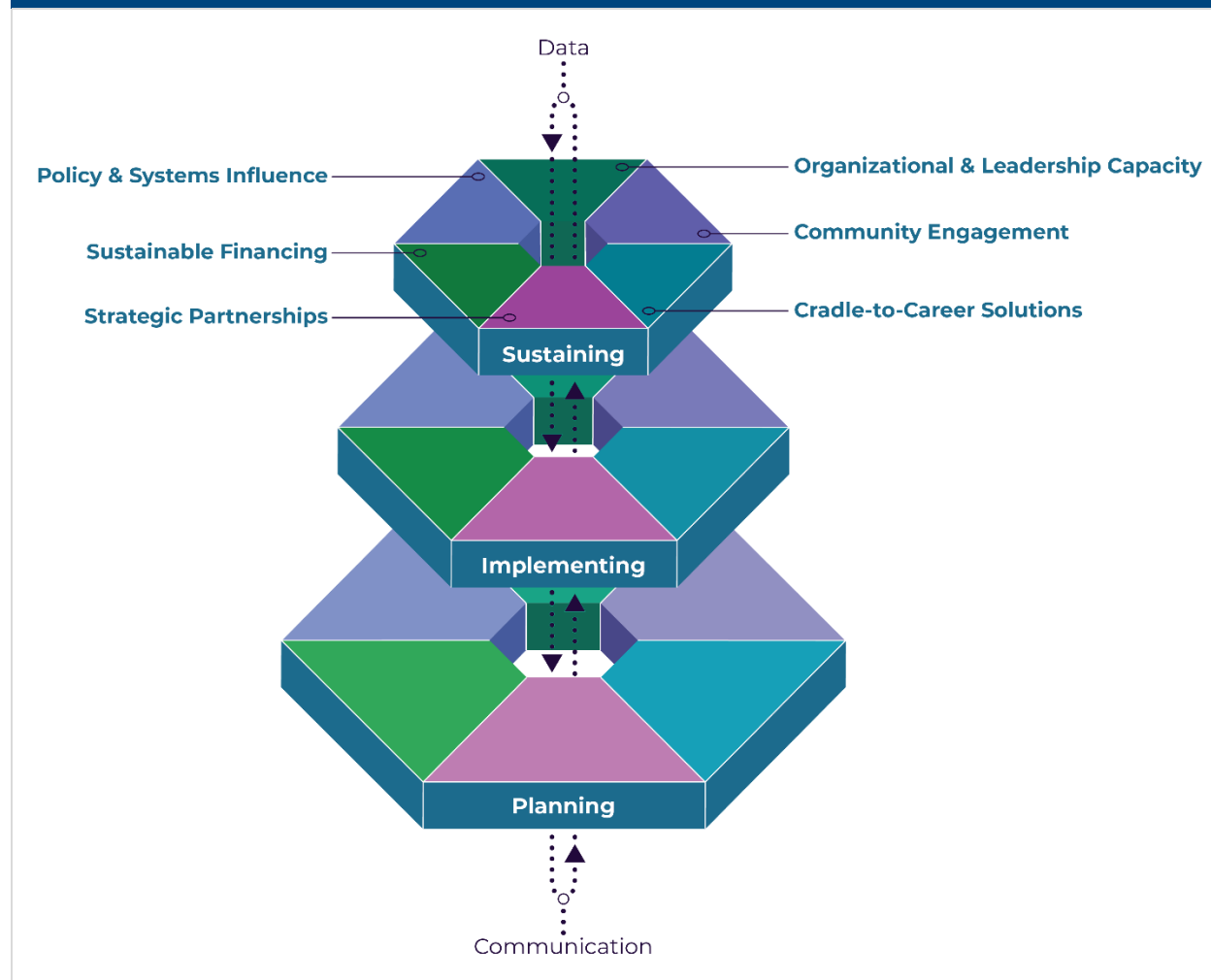


Policy & Systems Influence. This condition focuses on changes to local, state, or federal policies or systems designed to address the root causes of challenges that children and families experience.

Individuals or groups planning for Promise Neighborhoods may begin with the **Organizational & Leadership Capacity** condition because identifying an organization that can serve as a backbone is a critical initial step. A backbone agency guides vision and strategy, starting with **Community Engagement** activities to understand the strengths and needs of residents in the footprint. The needs assessment is a foundation for identifying a C2C continuum of solutions. The backbone organization may help identify partners that can provide strategic or programmatic **C2C Solutions**. It also serves as a hub for **Data and Communications**. The backbone agency is typically the fiscal agent of collective impact activities, responsible for **Sustainable Financing**. Finally, the needs assessment may identify policy- or systems-level opportunities in the C2C continuum that may best be met through **Policy & Systems Influence**. Backbone agencies, residents, and partners at any stage of

collective impact work may choose to self-assess. Because C2C solutions are a key aspect of place-based work, this tool includes a condition dedicated to the C2C continuum of solutions spanning early childhood, kindergarten through grade 12, college and career, and family and community. Data and communication (two of the original conditions) thread through all six conditions. Each of the six conditions has a planning, implementing, and sustaining stage with relevant milestones. The visual model (figure 1) represents the conditions and stages of a Promise Neighborhood's development.

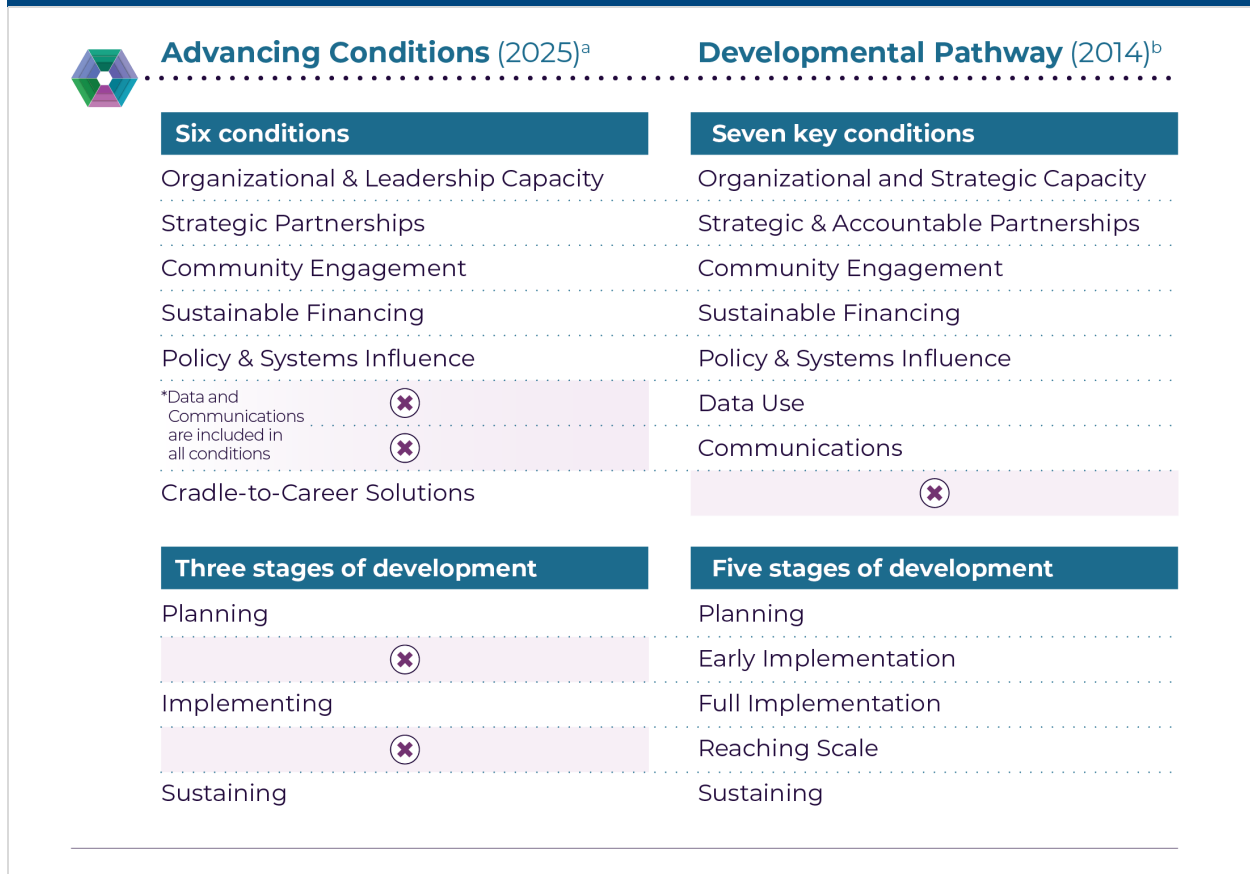
Figure 1. Conditions, threads, and stages for achieving Promise Neighborhoods results



Each condition includes specific actions that the backbone organization and its partners take to deepen and expand their impact. These actions are called milestones. Conditions sound linear, but their stages may be experienced iteratively, where earlier steps may be repeated or revisited when conditions change. Communities may revisit earlier stages, deepen their work in specific conditions, or shift focus based on emerging needs. Conditions can also overlap or intersect with one another.

This publication shares the same goal as the 2014 publication and benefits from more than a decade of practice. Technical assistance providers refined and updated the original model to reflect the experience of place-based initiatives leaders, simplifying the model and improving its usability. Figure 2 compares the 2025 and 2014 models.

Figure 2. Comparing components of *Advancing Conditions* (2025) and *A Developmental Pathway* (2014)



^a Nathanson, L., Gallagher, M., Scott, K., and Martin, V. (2025). *Advancing Conditions for Achieving Promise Neighborhoods Results*. Westat. U.S. Department of Education.

^b PolicyLink. (2014). *A Developmental Pathway for Achieving Promise Neighborhoods Results*. Retrieved from <https://www.policylink.org/resources/publications/developmental-pathway-achieving-promise-neighborhoods-results>.

How to Use This Tool

This tool is designed for Promise Neighborhoods backbone organizations, partners, community residents, and technical assistance providers that work collaboratively to plan, implement, and sustain the conditions necessary for achieving collective impact outcomes.

Users can

- **Self-assess** progress through stages across conditions using milestones.
- **Facilitate** reflection and planning sessions with initiative constituents using worksheets and guiding questions.
- **Document and track** action items using built-in templates.
- **Access** valuable resources to advance conditions.

Backbone organizations may use this tool to support learning, continuous improvement, adaptation, and strategic decisionmaking with partners and community members. Backbone staff, technical assistance providers, or coaches may facilitate the use of the tool. External facilitators may be helpful for initiatives in planning stages. As initiatives progress through stages, backbone organizations, partners, and community members may have increased capacity to serve as facilitators but may still choose to include technical assistance providers or coaches. Teams should include members who bring both strategic and operational perspectives, such as

- Executive and senior leadership of backbone organization;
- Program, operations, data, and evaluation staff;
- Partnership organization leaders;
- Resident and youth leaders; and
- Technical assistance providers and coaches.

You can use this tool to continuously improve one or more conditions by using the associated worksheet to reflect on the current stage of your initiative and discuss ways to advance it. Each worksheet contains a description of the condition, a list of individuals to include in reflection, milestones organized by stage, guiding questions to discuss, space for accountable action planning, and supporting resources to advance your initiative. To supplement the types of participants who comprise a working group, each condition includes a more specific list of recommended roles to help tailor participation and represent a mix of voices. Together, you can review and select relevant milestones and assess the state of your initiative. Select guiding questions that align with your current stage to get to your desired stage and create an actionable plan with responsible parties and deadlines. This process will help you further advance along one or more conditions, moving toward greater results in your community.

Companion resources

Scott, K., Tatian, P.A., Kumari, S., Comey, J., Freiman, L., Winkler, M.K., Hayes, C., Franks, K., and Jordan, R. (2025). *Measuring Performance: A Guidance Document for Promise Neighborhoods on Collecting Data and Reporting Results (Third Edition)*. Westat. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/pdf/Promise_Neighborhoods_Guidance_Document_508c.pdf.

This document provides guidance on the U.S. Department of Education's required Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) indicators. Promise Neighborhoods implementation grantees are required to report on these measures as part of their federal funding, but all place-based initiatives may benefit from the data collection strategies, sources, and methods.

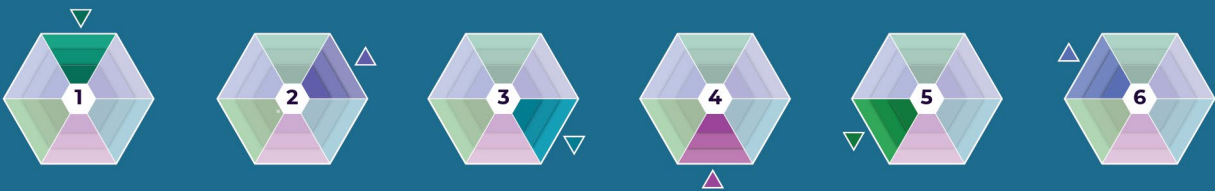
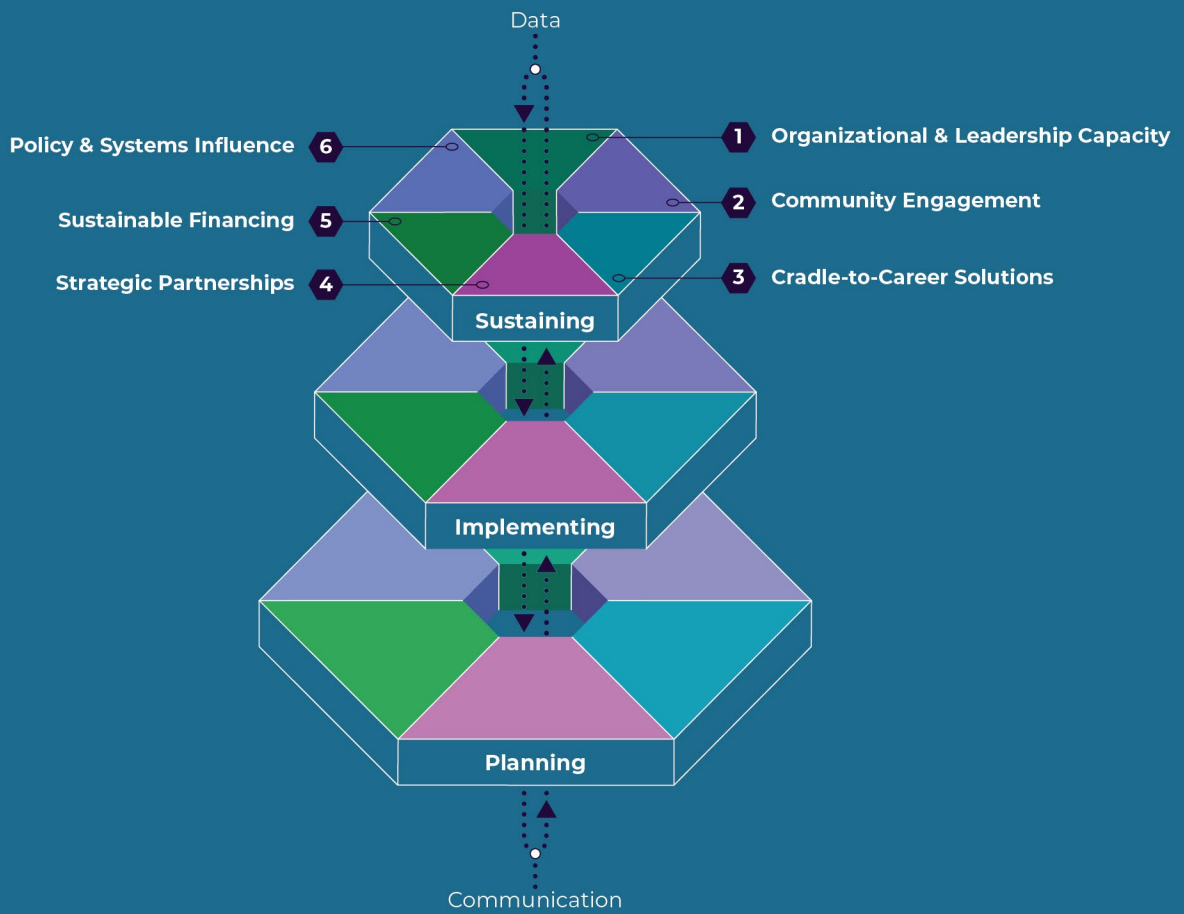
Gallagher, M., Nathanson, L., Tatian, P., and Crocker, J. (2024). *Making the Case for Promise Neighborhoods*. Westat. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from <https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/pdf/making-the-case-for-promise-neighborhoods.pdf>.

This brief features real-world examples from Promise Neighborhoods across the United States, including urban, rural, and Tribal communities. These examples make the conditions and stages more tangible and may inspire users with concrete examples in peer communities.

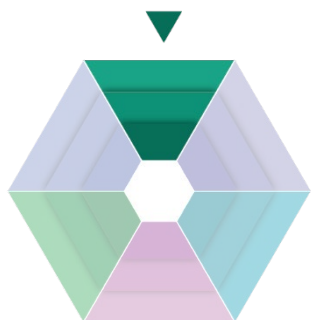
PolicyLink. (2014). *A Developmental Pathway for Achieving Promise Neighborhoods Results*. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from <https://www.policylink.org/resources/publications/developmental-pathway-achieving-promise-neighborhoods-results>.

Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink and collaborators introduced a strategic framework designed to guide communities in building the infrastructure and partnerships necessary to support a cradle-to-career continuum of solutions. Reference the 2014 publication for more detailed tasks and processes related to the revised milestones.

Advancing Conditions Worksheets



Organizational & Leadership Capacity



Strong organizational and leadership capacity is essential for a backbone organization that can grow and sustain a C2C continuum of services with a cadre of partners to advance 10 Promise Neighborhoods results. This condition focuses on the backbone organization's ability to coordinate partners, engage residents, align systems, serve as a fiscal agent, build leadership pipelines, and adapt to changing conditions while keeping results at the center. Leadership extends beyond formal roles and titles within the backbone agency and includes key stakeholders such as staff, partners, students, and residents who drive change collaboratively.

In the planning stage, the backbone agency begins to convene partners, engage stakeholders, and serve as the fiscal agent. Partners collaboratively define roles, competencies, and organizational strengths needed to implement solutions, and the backbone organization establishes governance structures that codify inclusive decisionmaking and plans for leadership development.

During implementation, backbone agencies activate a results framework (e.g., Results Count, Results-Based Accountability, Results-Based Management), coordinate cross-sector efforts, align systems, and mobilize community leadership. This includes engaging residents, staff, and partners in decisionmaking, leadership development, data use, and communications. To sustain progress, the backbone organization must remain adaptive by strengthening leadership pipelines, maintaining accountability structures, and deepening relationships across the ecosystem. The leadership bench of a sustainable initiative includes students, residents, and partners that drive change, bolster early results, and adapt to changing conditions.

Stakeholders to include in reflection

Category	Example roles
Executive and senior leadership of backbone organization	Executive director, chief operating officer, initiative director, leadership team members overseeing strategy and governance
Program, operations, data, and evaluation staff	Director of finance, director of operations, director of human resources, capacity-building coordinator, evaluation lead, data manager
Partnership organization leaders	Director of partnerships, school principals, partnership leads
Community and resident leaders	Advisory board members, resident leaders, youth advocates, parent leaders
Technical assistance providers and coaches	Leadership development coaches, accountability coaches, other technical assistance providers

Milestone reflection

What are the backbone organization's strengths and opportunities for growth as the initiative leader? Select milestones that reflect the backbone organization's status and add notes with evidence to support your choices.

	Planning	Implementing	Sustaining
Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Identify a trusted and credible backbone organization □ Demonstrate fiscal agent capacity □ Establish a governance structure for shared leadership □ Staff key positions, including a data team □ Plan for leadership development, including results framework training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use and refine governance structures □ Develop a pipeline to identify and support new leaders □ Maintain and adjust staffing □ Participate in leadership development, including the results framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Integrate succession plans in governance structures □ Maintain systems to onboard new staff and residents to results-based leadership □ Monitor changes in the social, economic, demographic, political, and funding landscapes and adapt systems
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Codevelop data plan including individual-, population-, and solution-level metrics □ Identify and purchase data infrastructure (case management, program-level, and population-level systems) □ Design, test, and implement a data system for performance data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use and refine a data system that aligns with the data plan □ Use performance data to improve initiative □ Grow a culture of results with partners and the community □ Collect and report longitudinal data for population-level results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Refine data plan to reflect emerging priorities □ Maintain operational systems that reinforce a collaborative culture □ Lead culture of results with all audiences
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Communicate the opportunity of building a Promise Neighborhood to key audiences □ Develop a strategic communications plan for internal and external audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use a range of communications channels to share success stories □ Use and refine a strategic communications plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Integrate the communications plan into Sustainable Financing and Policy & Systems Influence conditions

Guiding questions and action planning

Based on your reflections, which stage best describes the backbone organization and the initiative currently? What is needed to reach the next stage? Discuss one or more sets of questions and document action items, including responsible parties and due dates.

If you are planning:

- Have we assessed our organizational competencies and capacity needs?
- Which backbone functions or systems (e.g., serve as fiscal agent, manage data, engage community members) are strengths? Which functions or systems do we need to develop?
- Which competencies do staff have, and where are the gaps (e.g., serve as fiscal agent, manage data, engage community members)? Which competencies can staff develop? Which competencies should job descriptions for new hires include?
- Are leaders knowledgeable of the results framework? Do they participate in leadership training? What opportunities for leaders to develop exist, and where are the gaps?
- Have we identified and documented all data sources for all population-level measures in a data plan?

If you are implementing:

- Where are the gaps in staff roles and competencies? Which backbone functions or leadership roles need to be strengthened?

- How do we identify the next generation of leaders? What training do emerging leaders have and need to develop?
- Which backbone systems work well? Which systems need improvement? Which systems do we still need to develop?
- How do we use performance data to identify capacity-building needs? What performance data do we need to collect?
- How are we tracking population-level measures over time?

If you are sustaining:

- How are systems aligned to support all key conditions?
- How are leadership development opportunities expanded to partners and residents?
- Are we discontinuing services that do not improve performance?

Action item	Responsible party	Due date

Supporting resources

Nathanson, L., Iles, O., Martin, V., and Kostyo, S. (2025). *Investing in Impact: The Promise of Place-Based Initiatives*. Westat. U.S. Department of Education.

The brief shows how Promise Neighborhoods leaders build trust, align resources, and create sustainable systems that enable collaborative, data-driven decisionmaking for long-term community impact. Readers will learn how these efforts embed results-based leadership practices and strengthen organizational and leadership capacity in backbone organizations.

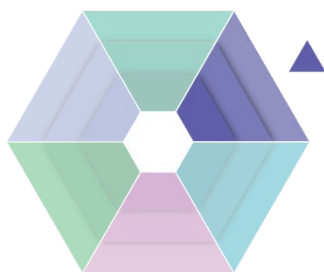
Sharma, A. (2020). *Advancing Results Through Leadership Development: Reflections on Technical Assistance for the Promise Neighborhoods Program*. Urban Institute. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/advancing-results-through-leadership-development-reflections-technical-assistance-promise-neighborhoods-program>.

This brief explores how leadership development supports Promise Neighborhoods grantees in their efforts to achieve population-level results. It provides frameworks, tools, and reflections from grantees and partners on the challenges and opportunities of using leadership development.

The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink. (2012). *Capacity-Building Toolkit Manual: Planning Back-Office Supports for Growing Promise Neighborhoods*. PolicyLink. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from <https://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org/sites/default/files/PNI%2BCapacity-Building%2BToolkit%2BManual.July%2B19.2012.pdf>.

This tool was specifically designed for organizations in Promise Neighborhoods to help them craft realistic visions and budgets for the back-office needs of managing their work. Given the variety of organizational structures across Promise Neighborhoods, this back-office capacity may be distributed among several partners or through a backbone organization.

Community Engagement



Authentic community engagement means that residents are more than passive participants. Residents, especially students and their families, cocreate and colead solutions. Their personal experiences in the community and voices provide a solid foundation for C2C solutions. Residents have opportunities to build data collection and analysis skills. Governance structures include students, families, and residents as active contributors and decisionmakers. Community engagement evolves from consultation to co-ownership, with residents shaping and sustaining the work. Sustaining engagement involves building

leadership pipelines and supporting residents in advocacy and decisionmaking, ensuring long-term community ownership and impact.

In the planning stage, residents participate in needs assessments, help define community boundaries, identify potential solutions, and co-design communication strategies that reflect their priorities. During implementation, residents deepen their involvement, using the powerful combination of their lived experiences and data to refine C2C solutions and shape messaging and storytelling about results. Resident leaders identify ways to scale solutions, influence decisionmaking, and hold partners accountable using performance data. In the sustaining stage, engagement is institutionalized. Policies ensure that the resident voice remains central, and leadership pipelines support residents in advocacy and governance roles. Residents colead accountability and scaling strategies, use data for advocacy, and communicate impact through compelling results stories. Community ownership becomes embedded in the initiative's culture, ensuring long-term relevance and resilience.

Stakeholders to include in reflection

Category	Example roles
Executive and senior leadership of backbone organization	Initiative director, community engagement director responsible for embedding resident voice in strategy and governance
Program, operations, data, and evaluation staff	Family engagement coordinator or manager, communications specialist supporting outreach and engagement structures, staff responsible for facilitating resident-led data collection
Partnership organization leaders	Community school director, afterschool or youth programming director, faith-based organization leader who regularly interfaces with residents
Community and resident leaders	Resident governance council representatives, parent leaders, youth advocates, or neighborhood association members with lived experience and expertise
Technical assistance providers and coaches	Providers and coaches that bring expertise in authentic resident voice, engagement practices, and community-driven data or communications

Milestone reflection

How are residents shaping the initiative and results? Select milestones that reflect community engagement and add notes with evidence to support your choices.

	Planning	Implementing	Sustaining
Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents are trained and involved in needs assessment □ Residents identify solutions □ Engagement structures are designed to include and elevate resident expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents codevelop practices for centering resident voice □ Residents serve in formal and informal roles in governance and solutions implementation □ Residents identify ways to scale solutions □ Residents are supported to lead and influence decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Policies exist to obtain and center resident voice □ Residents lead efforts to strengthen families and the community □ Residents colead accountability and scaling strategies □ Resident leadership pipeline is in place and active
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents define the footprint boundaries □ Residents are trained and supported in data collection and analysis □ Data collection tools are co-designed with residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents participate in data collection and analysis, using performance data □ Residents help refine solutions using data □ Data findings are interpreted through community-based discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents hold partners accountable with data □ Residents use data for advocacy □ Community-based data practices become part of a shared culture of learning
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents define their preferred communication and engagement strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents participate in communications training □ Residents cocreate key messages and results stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Residents are skilled at telling results stories

Guiding questions and action planning

Based on your reflections, which stage best describes the backbone organization and the initiative currently? What is needed to reach the next stage? Discuss one or more sets of questions and document action items, including responsible parties and due dates.

If you are planning:

- How are residents being prepared and supported to lead?
- How do you consult residents? How do residents actively participate in decisionmaking and governance?
- What are early indicators of resident ownership in data collection, communications, or strategy design?
- What gaps or barriers are limiting resident participation, and what supports could help address them?

If you are implementing:

- What structures or supports are needed to deepen engagement?
- How are resident leaders currently influencing governance and decisionmaking, and what structures exist to formalize their role?
- How are you documenting and sharing practices that strengthen resident leadership so they can be scaled?
- How are residents holding partners accountable with data, and how could that be deepened?

- What communication strategies or resident stories have proven most powerful?

If you are sustaining:

- What opportunities exist to expand leadership pipelines so more residents can step into formal roles?
- Which engagement strategies for residents are no longer effective, and how are you making decisions about what to discontinue or adapt?

Action item	Responsible party	Due date

Supporting resources

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2003). *Resident Engagement and Leadership to Improve Results: An International Tool Kit helping Children and Youth, Families and Communities*. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/resident-engagement-and-leadership-to-improve-results-for-children-and-yout>.

This toolkit describes the overall results-based approaches on behalf of children and families and shares information about effective strategies that are being used to ensure that residents are at the forefront of these efforts. The “tools” (i.e., the techniques, methods, processes, and products) include checklists and self-assessments.

Harrison, E., Mizota, M., Sumiko Daly, H., and Falkenburger, E. (2021). *Community-Engaged Surveys: From Research Design to Analysis and Dissemination*. Urban Institute. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/community-engaged-surveys-research-design-analysis-and-dissemination>.

This toolkit was created for researchers interested in community-engaged surveys. It focuses on incorporating community-engaged methods into survey research. This resource also provides guidance on research questions and contextualization; question testing; survey implementation; and analysis, drafting, and dissemination.

Shakespeare, J., O’Brien, M., and Harrison, E. (2020). *Youth Engagement in Collective Impact Initiatives*. Urban Institute. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103408/youth-engagement-in-collective-impact-initiatives_1.pdf.

This brief discusses the importance of expanding youth voice and agency in collective impact work, outlines a continuum of youth engagement strategies, highlights Promise Neighborhoods grantees that are providing a platform for young people to spur change, and presents promising practices for organizations to empower young people in their programs.

Cradle-to-Career Solutions



The C2C Solutions condition represents the strategies and solutions employed to achieve the desired results. The backbone organization, residents, and partners design and implement a comprehensive C2C continuum of solutions to deliver measurable results. Solutions may be programs, services, changes to practices, policies, or systems. Multiple solutions compose a strategy. C2C solutions will evolve, becoming a comprehensive continuum that adapts as needs are met or change. The backbone organization, residents, and partners will use data to expand high-impact solutions and improve or replace low-impact solutions.

At the planning stage, a backbone organization will engage a broad range of constituents to co-design solutions, define clear selection criteria (such as evidence base, scalability, and community relevance), and map strategies to the 10 Promise Neighborhoods population-level results. Planning includes developing rollout plans that identify sequencing, target populations, and lead partners.

During the implementing stage, the backbone organization and partners launch multiple solutions across the C2C continuum. Partners participate in regular meetings to better coordinate delivery and shared accountability processes. Stakeholders routinely analyze C2C solutions data to identify gaps, and partners refine solutions based on their contribution to results. In the sustaining stage, the initiative operates within policies, budgets, and governance structures to institutionalize high-impact solutions. The C2C continuum of solutions spans all 10 result areas to achieve results at the population level. Sustaining results through C2C solutions requires continuous improvement to scale and align solutions with evolving community needs.

Stakeholders to include in reflection

Category	Example roles
Executive and senior leadership of backbone organization	Initiative director, strategy leads coordinating the continuum of solutions across partners
Program, operations, data, and evaluation staff	Early childhood program manager, kindergarten through grade 12 program manager, postsecondary success manager, workforce development manager
Partnership organization leaders	School principals, Head Start director, college access partner leads, workforce board representative
Community and resident leaders	Parent or youth leaders providing feedback on solution design or delivery, resident governance council representatives
Technical assistance providers and coaches	Subject matter experts in education or workforce, external evaluators supporting evidence-based solution design

Milestone reflection

How comprehensive is the C2C continuum of solutions for meeting needs and producing results? Select milestones that reflect the C2C continuum of solutions and add notes with evidence to support your choices.

	Planning	Implementing	Sustaining
Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Engage a broad range of key constituents in developing the continuum of solutions □ Define clear selection criteria for solutions □ Map solutions to Promise Neighborhoods results □ Develop a rollout plan that identifies sequencing, target populations, and lead partners for each area of the continuum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Implement multiple solutions across the C2C continuum □ Coordinate solution delivery across partners through regular meetings and shared accountability processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Implement solutions affecting a critical share of the population across all results □ Institutionalize high-impact solutions within policies, budgets, and practices
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use needs assessment to develop and select solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Routinely analyze data to identify gaps and adjust solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Refine, scale, introduce, or discontinue solutions using data
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Communicate needs and opportunities and build support for the C2C continuum using needs assessment data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Share updates with the stakeholders using multiple channels □ Engage stakeholders in storytelling about impact of solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Refine communication strategies to share the impact of solutions

Guiding questions and action planning

Based on your reflections, which stage best describes the backbone organization and the initiative currently? What is needed to reach the next stage? Discuss one or more sets of questions and document action items, including responsible parties and due dates.

If you are planning:

- What are your criteria for selecting solutions (e.g., cost, evidence base, factor analysis, relevance to the community, scalability, alignment with community priorities)?
- How are you prioritizing which solutions to launch first? What criteria are you using to guide those decisions?
- How are you engaging different segments of the community in shaping the rollout of solutions?
- What structures or partnerships help coordinate solutions across the continuum, and where are the gaps?
- What does success look like in the first year of implementation, and how will you know if you are on track?

If you are implementing:

- Which solutions are demonstrating early signs of impact, and what factors are contributing to that success?
- How are you coordinating partners to ensure solutions span all results areas? What progress have you made toward a “tipping point” (65 percent of the population) in services that would lead to population-level results?
- What systems are needed to sustain high-performing solutions within policies and budgets?

- What communication or storytelling practices help scale solutions? For example, do you have dashboards, newsletters, or public meetings?
- What are the data routines to identify gaps, and how are you adjusting solutions in response?

If you are sustaining:

- How are you aligning solutions with evolving community needs using data that may include needs assessment, performance, and population data?
- Which solutions should be refined, scaled, or discontinued based on their contribution to the results? How are those decisions made transparently?
- What policies or systems changes are needed to secure long-term sustainability of high-impact solutions?
- How are you capturing and sharing lessons learned to inform broader practice or policy beyond your local community?

Action item	Responsible party	Due date

Supporting resources

Gallagher, M., and Kumari, S. (2022). *Building the Cradle in a Cradle-to-Career Initiative: Three Opportunities for Promise Neighborhoods to Promote Kindergarten Readiness*. Urban Institute. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/pdf/ThreeOpportunitiesforPromiseNeighborhoodstoPromoteKReadiness_2022.pdf.

This brief outlines three strategic opportunities for Promise Neighborhoods to strengthen early childhood systems and improve kindergarten readiness. It provides a framework for aligning early care, family engagement, and system-level supports within a C2C continuum.

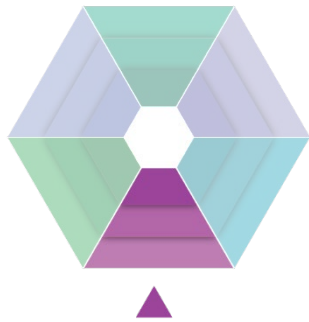
Robinson, C., Kraft, M., Loeb, S., and Schueler, B. (2021). *Designing Principles for Accelerating Student Learning With High-Impact Tutoring*. EdResearch for Action. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from https://edresearchforaction.org/wp-content/uploads/EdResearch-DP-for-Accelerating-Student-Learning-with-High-Impact-Tutoring_16-2.pdf.

This brief synthesizes research and field experience to identify key design principles for implementing high-impact tutoring. It is intended to help Promise Neighborhoods design tutoring strategies that are evidence-based, feasible, and aligned with broader student learning goals.

Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2017). *Maintaining and Expanding the Pipeline: Guidance, Strategies, and Reflections on Sustaining a Promise Neighborhood*. CSSP. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Promise-Neighborhoods-Sustainability-Brief-final-1.pdf>.

This brief provides a framework and guiding questions to support Promise Neighborhoods in preparing for sustainability, with the approach that sustainability should be incorporated into overall strategy development.

Strategic Partnerships



The network of partners is crucial to the formation and success of a Promise Neighborhood. This condition focuses on building trust, shared accountability, and aligned contributions among partners, including local educational agencies, schools, service providers, residents, and funders. The backbone organization and partners align with a results framework (e.g., Results Count, Results-Based Accountability) and a data-driven approach to decisionmaking. Partners understand the Promise Neighborhoods model and their roles within the C2C continuum of solutions to achieve results, including decisionmaking roles within the governance structure of the initiative. Effective partnerships are strategic, data-informed, and evolve to meet the needs of children and families.

At the planning stage, initiative partners work to develop a place-based C2C continuum of solutions, define partner roles through formal agreements (e.g., memorandum of understanding, performance-based contract, data-sharing agreement), and engage a broad range of constituents in needs assessments. For example, partners may help the backbone organization establish decisionmaking processes within a formal governance structure.

During the implementation stage, partners refine formal agreements to reflect community needs, and partners begin managing performance through established accountability processes. Partners pilot and expand data collection to include individual-, population-, and solution-level metrics aligned with the results framework. The backbone organization and partners use these data for continuous quality improvement processes within the results framework.

In the sustaining stage, partnerships deepen as formal agreements evolve to reflect scale and impact. The backbone organization and network of partners engage new partners as needed to reach broader populations, and all partners continue to align resources to support service delivery and results. Governance structures and communication strategies support public accountability, and partners use data not only for compliance but also to refine, scale, or discontinue solutions based on their contribution to results.

Stakeholders to include in reflection

Category	Example roles
Executive and senior leadership of backbone organization	Initiative director or other leads who are responsible for governance and accountability structures
Program, operations, data, and evaluation staff	Partnership or network manager, communications director, other staff managing partner communication
Partnership organization leaders	School district representative and partnership organization leads responsible for or involved in memoranda of understanding
Community and resident leaders	Resident governance council representatives, parent leaders
Technical assistance providers and coaches	Facilitators and governance coaches or technical assistance providers guiding results, accountability, and partner alignment

Milestone reflection

How are strategic and accountable partnerships evolving? Select milestones that reflect the partnerships status and add notes with evidence to support your choices.

	Planning	Implementing	Sustaining
Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ensure partners understand their contributions to results □ Define partner roles and contributions in formal agreements □ Develop and use decisionmaking processes within a formal governance structure □ Focus on strategic wins to unite partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Refine formal agreements based on data and stakeholder needs □ Manage partners' performance using an established accountability process and formal governance structure □ Analyze data to identify cost reductions and efficiencies across partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ensure partners consistently act in alignment □ Consistently align new resources to policies and practices to support the delivery of solutions
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ensure partners use a results framework to design solutions □ Engage a broad range of stakeholders in needs assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Collect data according to the data plan □ Use individual-level data to strengthen solutions and improve quality □ Pilot and develop a formal process for continuous quality improvement across partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ensure partners routinely analyze data to refine, scale, or discontinue solutions based on their contribution to the results
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Contribute to communications strategy aligned with public accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Publicly report progress using the established accountability process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ensure governance structure supports scale and public accountability

Guiding questions and action planning

Based on your reflections, which stage best describes the backbone organization and the initiative currently? What is needed to reach the next stage? Discuss one or more sets of questions and document action items, including responsible parties and due dates.

If you are planning:

- How well do current formal agreements reflect partner roles, contributions, and accountability for results? Which partnerships need to be strengthened or clarified?
- How do decisionmaking processes within the governance structure support shared leadership and ownership?
- Where are you seeing alignment between partner contributions and community needs?
- How are you engaging partners in the development of the data plan?
- What practices can you put in place now to set the foundation for a culture of accountability?

If you are implementing:

- How are you refining memoranda of understanding and partnerships to reflect the evolving scale and impact of solutions?
- Which partnerships show the strongest alignment to the results, and how can you reinforce and expand their efforts?

- What mechanisms are in place to ensure partners are consistently managing performance through data and accountability?
- Where are new and additional partners needed to reach scale, and how will you identify and engage them?
- How are you aligning resources and policies across partners to sustain delivery of solutions?

If you are sustaining:

- How are governance structures evolving to balance accountability, shared leadership, and adaptability as needs change?
- How are you institutionalizing contracts or agreements across partners?
- How are partners using data not just for compliance but for continuous improvement and innovation?
- What opportunities exist to deepen trust among partners as you scale?

Action item	Responsible party	Due date

Supporting resources

Goddard-Truitt, V., and Pillsbury, J. (2015). *High Action and High Alignment Assessment Tool. Results Based Facilitation Network.* Retrieved December 19, 2025, from https://www.jtgfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HA-HA-Assessment-Tool_App.pdf.

This assessment tool helps partnerships examine the extent to which their activities are aligned with shared results and generate meaningful action. It is designed to support continuous improvement by identifying where initiatives may be experiencing high alignment with limited action or where this alignment may be missing, thereby prompting course correction.

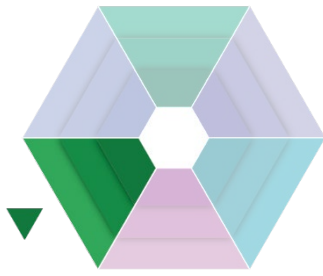
Nonprofit Finance Fund. (2021). *Place-Based Partnership Toolkit.* Ballmer Group, Community Solutions, and StriveTogether. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from <https://www.strivetgether.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Place-Based-Partnership-Toolkit.pdf>.

This toolkit provides practical guidance for building and sustaining place-based partnerships with a focus on shared governance, financial sustainability, and partner readiness. It supports collaboratives to clarify roles, align resources, and strengthen the infrastructure needed to support long-term results.

StriveTogether. (n.d.). *Accountability Pathway: Holding Partners to Results. The Training Hub powered by StriveTogether.*

This self-paced training introduces the Accountability Pathway tool developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and supports partnerships in clarifying roles, responsibilities, and contributions toward shared results. It is designed to strengthen accountability conversations within collaboratives and among partners.

Sustainable Financing



Promise Neighborhoods is a resource-intensive program that requires investment over time to achieve population-level results. The backbone organization typically serves as the fiscal agent for the initiative, so many milestones in the Sustainable Financing condition rely on it to align financial resources with strategic priorities that drive measurable results. Partners and residents also contribute to financial sustainability by identifying existing and potential resources to support solutions. The backbone organization uses best-practice finance and accounting tools for

estimating costs for planning, capacity-building, and implementing C2C solutions and support systems. Partners and residents engage in cost estimates, business plans, and public and private fundraising.

Planning activities include estimating costs, identifying funding sources, and drafting a business plan to align existing resources and secure new ones. Backbone agencies and partners develop a shared understanding of the financial landscape and begin crafting a long-term resource development strategy that aligns with community priorities.

As backbone organizations shift into implementation, they implement and revise the business plan and demonstrate capacity to manage multiple funding streams. A responsible fiscal agent ensures transparency and accountability. They must use performance data to refine funding priorities, incorporate costs for scaling and sustaining solutions into business plan updates, and revise communications strategies to attract resources. To sustain the initiative, the backbone organization and partners need to update financial strategies to reflect changing demographics and results, diversify funding sources, and use the results to secure new investments. Securing sufficient flexible funding streams can ultimately ensure that financing remains responsive and effective.

Stakeholders to include in reflection

Category	Example roles
Executive and senior leadership of backbone organization	Initiative director, executive director, chief financial officer, other leadership overseeing fundraising and resource alignment
Program, operations, data, and evaluation staff	Development director, grants manager, finance/operations director, other staff managing budgets and contracts
Partnership organization leaders	Funder representative, partner organizations' leaders contributing shared resources to initiative
Community and resident leaders	Resident governance council representatives, parent leaders who help identify funding priorities or help make the case for continued investment
Technical assistance providers and coaches	Sustainability planning consultants, fiscal mapping coaches, grant writers

Milestone reflection

How well do business and communications plans reflect sustainable financing? Select milestones that reflect the status of sustainable financing and add notes with evidence to support your choices.

	Planning	Implementing	Sustaining
Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Estimate initial costs for backbone infrastructure (baseline results data, delivering solutions, building systems) □ Establish a business plan that combines priorities, cost estimates, resources, and initial expenditures □ Estimate costs for infrastructure and solutions to achieve results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Analyze resources, expenditures, and performance data to revise the business plan □ Incorporate costs for sustaining the work at scale (results, scaling solutions, maintaining systems) into the business plan □ Identify flexible private and public funds for solutions in accordance with the business plan □ Revise cost structures by solution and partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Analyze existing and needed resources for scaling solutions and maintaining systems to refine the business plan □ Secure flexible private and public funds in accordance with the business plan
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Set funding priorities using needs assessment results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Analyze resources, expenditures, and performance data to revise the business plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Refine the business plan using performance data
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Establish a strategic communications plan to attract needed resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Revise the strategic communications plan to attract needed resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Refine the strategic communications plan to continue to influence sustainable finance

Guiding questions and action planning

Based on your reflections, which stage best describes the backbone organization and the initiative currently? What is needed to reach the next stage? Discuss one or more sets of questions and document action items, including responsible parties and due dates.

If you are planning:

- What funding sources have you identified, and how are they being prioritized for pursuit?
- How are you engaging partners and residents in defining sustainable financing strategies that align with community priorities?
- Where do you see gaps in funding for specific results or populations, and how are you planning to address them?

If you are implementing:

- Which financing strategies have proven most reliable or scalable?
- How are you diversifying revenue streams to reduce dependence on only one or two funding sources?
- How are you aligning partner resources (e.g., budgets, staffing, in-kind) to sustain solutions?
- How are you using performance or evaluation data, or both, to make the case to funders, policymakers, or other key constituents?

If you are sustaining:

- What financing mechanisms (e.g., dedicated budget lines, policy changes, long-term contracts) are institutionalized to secure sustainability?

- How are you building reserve funds or plans to protect against shifts in funding?
- How are you strengthening partnerships with funders to move beyond transactional relationships toward long-term shared accountability for results?
- How are you capturing and communicating the return on investment of your solutions to ensure ongoing support?
- What opportunities exist to expand financing strategies to influence broader systems or policy change beyond your community?

Action item	Responsible party	Due date

Supporting resources

Westat. (2025). *Sustaining the Infrastructure Behind the Promise: Sustainability Planning Guide and Workbook*. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from <https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/resources/sustaining-the-infrastructure-behind-the-promise-sustainability-planning-guide>.

This resource gives past and present Promise Neighborhoods grantees access to content and tools from a virtual sustainability planning course offered in spring 2025. The course introduced grantees to a process and considerations for sustaining their infrastructures. The guide provides the foundational concepts and completed examples of the planning activities.

Gallagher, M., Fernandez, E., and Meltzer, A. (2024). *Keeping a Promise: Case Studies and Annotated Resources for Promise Neighborhoods Sustainability*. Urban Institute. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from <https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/pdf/SustainabilityBriefKeeping-a-Promise-Revised-April2024.pdf>.

This brief describes the Promise Neighborhoods program, its grantees, and their approaches to sustainability. It includes case studies that present some of these approaches and provides a list of resources for sustainability planning.

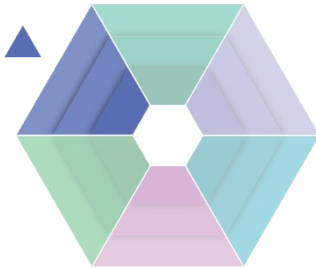
Children’s Funding Project. (n.d.). *Fiscal Mapping*. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from <https://childrensfundingproject.org/our-work/fiscal-mapping/>.

Children’s Funding Project provides tools and coaching to help local leaders implement strategic public financing. For example, the resources support fiscal mapping to promote enhanced decisionmaking to improve investments for children.

Deich, S., Padgett, H., and Neary, M. (2019). *Promoting Sustainability for Promise Neighborhood Grantees: Understanding Needs and Strategies*. Urban Institute. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101470/promoting_sustainability_for_promise_neighborhood_grantees.pdf.

This brief summarizes findings and recommendations from a needs assessment undertaken to help Promise Neighborhoods grantees and their technical assistance partners understand how the sites are approaching sustainability. The brief also reviews the financial landscape of Promise Neighborhoods grantees.

Policy & Systems Influence



The Policy & Systems Influence condition focuses on solutions at the level of local, state, or federal policies or systems, such as education, transportation, health care, and housing. The need for policy and systems change may emerge from needs assessments and root cause analyses. Some needs that residents and partners identified in needs assessments may require solutions beyond the C2C continuum of solutions and call for changes to the systems. Place-based C2C initiatives may advance results by engaging municipal, school, and school district officials or partnering with state and national organizations on state policy advocacy.

At the planning stage, organizations may be conducting scans of the policy environment, engaging partners with policy expertise, and mapping data sources to measure key policy outcomes. For example, a backbone team might collaborate with local advocacy groups to conduct a policy scan and codevelop a policy agenda that reflects community priorities and uses data to measure progress and results.

During the implementation stage, the initiative may advance priority opportunities, develop data-driven messages, and produce actionable briefs or dashboards to inform decisionmakers. This stage could include sharing timely data with coalitions to support advocacy or publicly celebrating policy wins to build momentum.

In the sustaining stage, organizations regularly use data in policy development, scale data-informed practices across jurisdictions, and successfully influence long-term policy changes. Sustained influence may also involve fundraising and expanding advocacy to drive systemic change.

Stakeholders to include in reflection

Category	Example roles
Executive and senior leadership of backbone organization	Initiative director, executive director, other leaders overseeing advocacy and systems-change strategy
Program, operations, data, and evaluation staff	Policy director, policy analyst, communications lead, advocacy lead
Partnership organization leaders	Policy coalition members, partnership organization leaders, civic sector leads such as housing authority or public health directors
Community and resident leaders	Resident and youth advocates or coalition members using lived experience and expertise to inform advocacy priorities
Technical assistance providers and coaches	Policy advocacy coaches, communication strategists, supporting systems-change strategy

Milestone reflection

Which policies and systems are current priorities? Select milestones that reflect the backbone organization’s status and add notes with evidence to support your choices.

	Planning	Implementing	Sustaining
Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Conduct a scan of the current policy environment □ Engage partners or others with policy expertise or influence □ Prioritize policy opportunities to develop an initial policy agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Track local policymaker engagement □ Refine policy agenda to support results □ Work on policy opportunities and address threats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Reassess and prioritize policy opportunities to sustain what works
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Map existing policy-relevant data sources and identify gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Develop data-driven messages to build public and political will □ Produce briefs or dashboards that translate data into actionable insights for decisionmakers □ Share timely data with coalitions to build advocacy efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Refine data-driven messages to build public and political will □ Embed the use of data in policy development and evaluation processes □ Build accountability systems that track policy implementation and outcomes □ Scale practices for data-informed policymaking across multiple levels (local, state, and federal)
Communications	<p>Not applicable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Communicate publicly about policy agenda and wins big and small 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Inform conversations about relevant policy and allocation of funding

Guiding questions and action planning

Based on your reflections, which stage best describes the backbone organization and the initiative currently? What is needed to reach the next stage? Discuss one or more sets of questions and document action items, including responsible parties and due dates.

If you are planning:

- How are you engaging residents and partners with policy expertise to codevelop your policy agenda?
- How are you prioritizing which policy opportunities to pursue first?
- How are you using data to better understand how existing policies affect different populations in your community?
- Where do you see the greatest risks or threats to advancing your policy agenda?

If you are implementing:

- Which policy changes or initiatives are showing the strongest evidence of success?
- How are you ensuring your products (briefs, data, etc.) are accessible and actionable for decisionmakers and the public?
- How are you engaging allies and coalitions in ongoing advocacy efforts to reinforce policy wins?

If you are sustaining:

- How are you institutionalizing the use of data in policy development?
- Which policy wins are being sustained, scaled, or embedded in long-term budgets, regulations, or governance structures?
- How are you informing broader policy and funding conversations with your data and evidence?
- What opportunities exist to expand your policy influence beyond immediate priorities to systemic change?

Action item	Responsible party	Due date

Supporting resources

StriveTogether and PolicyLink. (2021). *Policy Toolkit: A Guide to Systems Transformation Through Policy Change*. StriveTogether. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from <https://www.strivetogether.org/policy-toolkit-a-guide-to-systems-transformation-through-policy-change/>.

StriveTogether partnered with PolicyLink to create a policy toolkit—a comprehensive resource for local networks embarking on or deepening strategic policy work alongside their communities. It features tools, worksheets, and case studies for three policy phases: development, advocacy, and implementation.

Moyer, J., Benford, C., Connolly, N., and O’Neil, M. (2023). *Where We Thrive Communications Toolkit: Communicating About Resident-Centered Neighborhood Revitalization*. FrameWorks Institute. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from <https://purposebuiltcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/PB-Toolkit-04.03.23.pdf>.

This toolkit identifies key problematic patterns in public thinking and associated communications challenges. The authors designed and empirically tested a range of communications tools for addressing these challenges and then developed a cohesive framing strategy for driving a new, more productive narrative. The results are presented in the form of clear guidance and shared language that place-based community builders around the country can use to communicate effectively about the essential work they do.

Oneto, A.D., and Gallagher, M. (2019). *Taking Promise Neighborhoods to the State Level: Lessons From California and Minnesota*. Urban Institute. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101469/taking_promise_neighborhoods_to_the_state_level.pdf.

This brief highlights Promise Neighborhoods grantees that are developing partnerships to extend their impact beyond their neighborhoods to the state level. The brief explores how partnerships in California and Minnesota have established shared goals, invested their time and resources to achieve their goals, and engaged with new stakeholders to build a broader coalition.

About the Authors



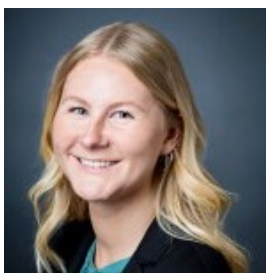
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About the Urban Institute



The Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization founded on one simple idea: To improve lives and strengthen communities, we need practices and policies that work. For more than 50 years, that has been our charge. By equipping changemakers with evidence and solutions, together we can create a future where every person and community has the opportunity and power to thrive.

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