



Sustaining the Infrastructure Behind the Promise

Sustainability Planning Guide

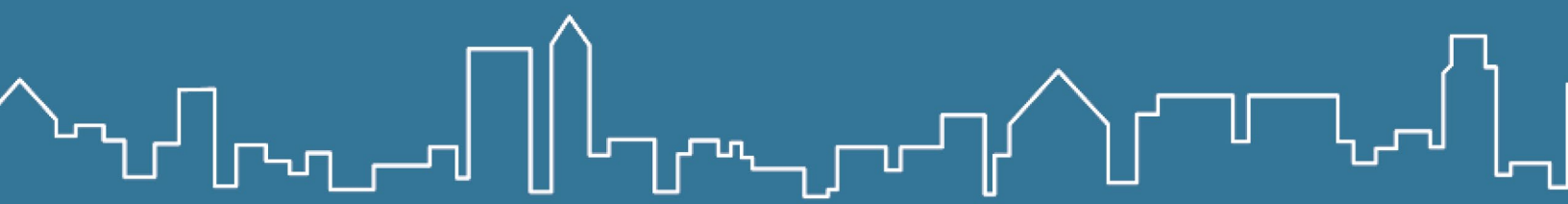


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From Grant-Funded Programs to Sustained Community Impact

Since 2010, the U.S. Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods grant program has fueled transformative work in communities across the United States. A cornerstone of this initiative has been the funding provided to grantees for building and strengthening an infrastructure to support collaboration and coordination among local partners.

Sustaining Progress

As the grants for Promise Neighborhoods sunset, how can communities effectively use existing resources or secure new funding to sustain the coordination efforts beyond the life of their grant?

The Promise Neighborhoods approach empowers whole communities to use their collective expertise and capacity to support children and families from birth through career. Adopting a Promise Neighborhoods approach is a new way of doing work for most communities that involves a strategy shift. Instead of focusing solely on expanding programs and increasing service slots, the emphasis is on forging new partnerships, developing innovative systems, and implementing practices that enable communities to

harness their shared resources and knowledge more effectively to achieve common goals. This very commitment to a new way of thinking and collective action is what underpins the success of Promise Neighborhoods.

This Sustainability Planning Guide 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. You now have access to key takeaways from the course content and practical tools introduced to grantees. This guide provides the foundational concepts and completed examples of the planning activities. To undertake the planning work with your planning team, you can use the accompanying [Sustainability Planning Workbook](#), an interactive Excel file that contains the blank activity templates and will be available on the [Promise Neighborhoods website](#). Although it is tailored to Promise Neighborhoods, this planning process is equally relevant to other collective impact initiatives and backbone organizations.

Key Outcomes of Your Sustainability Planning Journey

By working through this **Sustainability Planning Guide and Workbook**, your planning team will be able to

- clarify what elements of your infrastructure are most vital,
- evaluate current capacities and identify gaps,
- strategize about funding sources and sustainability options, and
- plan concrete next steps to extend infrastructure impact beyond the life of the grant.

When to Engage in Sustainability Planning

This planning is most effectively done after the Promise Neighborhood has gained some momentum. Whereas early sustainability planning is important, most communities will not know what they need to sustain—or have the capacity to dedicate time and energy to planning—until 1 to 2 years into implementation. For this reason, 2-year Early Implementation grants, launched in 2025, are specifically designed to support the planning and early implementation work that informs sustainability planning.

Defining Sustainability

Sustainability is the ability to support infrastructure and other operations necessary to achieve population-level change.

Why Focus on Infrastructure Now?

The long-term vision of the Promise Neighborhoods approach is achieving population-level change. Because this vision takes years to fully realize, sustainability is a crucial issue for these initiatives. With up to a 5-year implementation grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Promise Neighborhoods require a robust plan to sustain the backbone infrastructure that supports collective action after the grant funding concludes.

The following quote from a course participant at the Leflore Promise Community illustrates how this process helped them think beyond the grant and focus on the long-term sustainability of their work.

“This process challenged me to move beyond program implementation and focus on what it takes to sustain impact long-term—through strategic infrastructure, varied funding, and authentic community partnerships. We plan to use our elevator pitch [developed in the course] as a strategic tool to communicate the urgency, impact, and vision of the LPC [Leflore Promise Community] in a concise and compelling way.”

—Rhonda Lewis, vice president of education,
Delta Health Alliance, Leflore Promise Community

Infrastructures and Their Impact

Defining Infrastructure

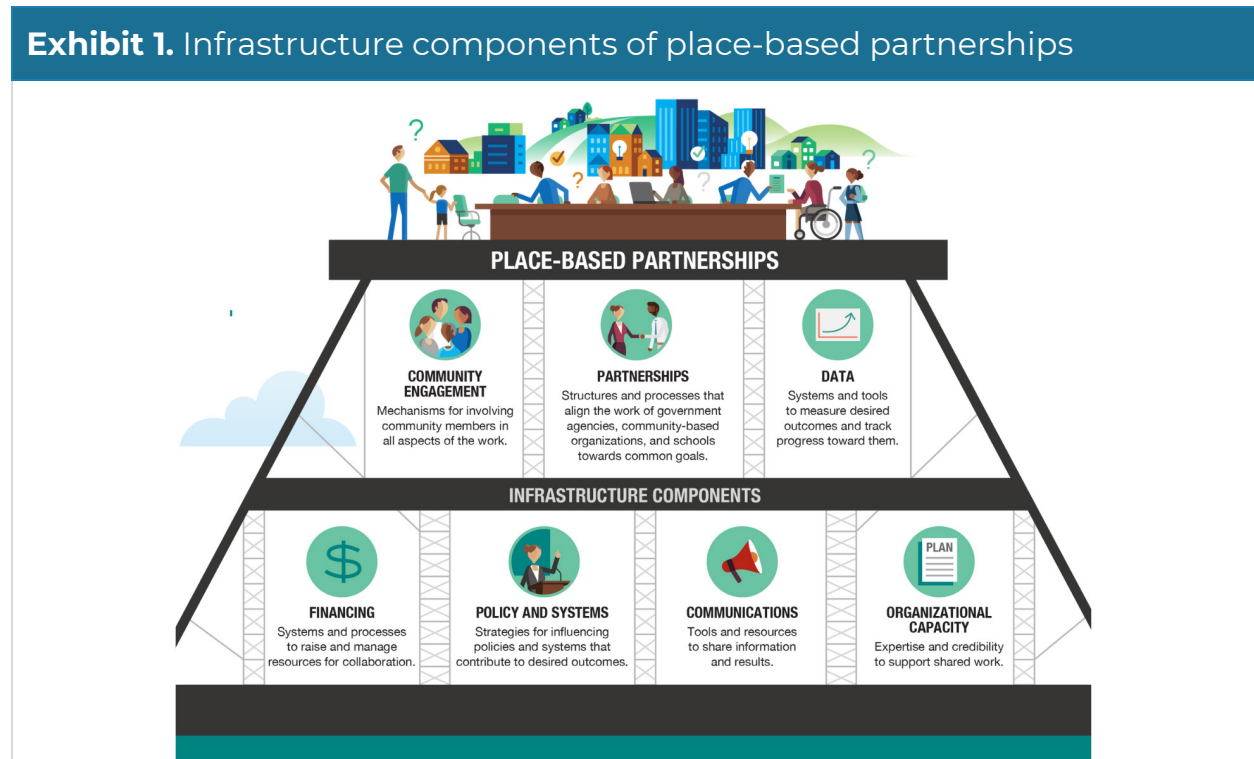
Infrastructure is the system that enables partners to work together effectively by establishing key conditions such as community engagement, partnerships, data, financing, policy and systems, communications, and organizational capacity (PolicyLink 2014, p. 3).

Partnerships working to improve outcomes for children and families require a strong infrastructure to operate effectively and achieve population-level change. This infrastructure acts as the “glue” that holds the work together, a concept effectively conveyed through the [Promise Neighborhoods Developmental Pathway](#) (PolicyLink 2014). Developing this infrastructure is critical for both the success and sustainability of collective efforts.

The process unlocks new capacities for community partners and members, allowing them to address a range of needs, such as

- reducing duplicative efforts,
- using data to inform decisions, and
- empowering residents to participate in key decisions related to their schools and communities.

Exhibit 1 illustrates the infrastructure components associated with each key condition in the Promise Neighborhoods Developmental Pathway.



Source: FourPoint created the infographic for the Sustainability Planning course based on Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink. (2014). A Developmental Pathway for Achieving Promise Neighborhood Results. Retrieved May 19, 2025, from <https://www.policylink.org/resources/pni-developmental-pathway>.

Promise Neighborhoods leaders who participated in the sustainability planning course shared that a strong infrastructure has enabled them to

- set a new standard of practice for how organizations and government entities (i.e., Tribes, counties, school districts) can work together on common goals;
- increase communities' capacity to use data for program and resource allocation decisions;
- create aligned systems and services for kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12);
- optimize partner strengths and address service needs across the cradle-to-career continuum;
- create a strong culture of trust, collaboration, and excellence across partners;

- help partners access new funds to build and sustain strategies; and
- maintain and generate new champions and resources for the work.

The following quote from Mission Promise Neighborhood provides a firsthand account of how a strong infrastructure can create this kind of impact on the ground.

“While these are things we always hoped would happen, the Promise grant allowed us to put real resources and energy behind coordination, which has made all the difference. We were collecting, using, and sharing data in ways we never had before.

We were able to convene partners to align on goals and collaborate on shared work. We authentically engaged our community to help shape our approach and identify and address roadblocks. And we created collective momentum to advocate for policies and resources to support our community and change the systems that blocked progress.”

—Richard Raya, CEO, Marin Promise Partnership, and former director, Mission Promise Neighborhood

Sustainability Planning Process—A Roadmap to Planning

Whereas good fortune and timing can be helpful, for most initiatives, careful planning is the deciding factor between success and failure in sustainability.

Who Should Participate in the Process?

Given that this planning focuses on your Promise Neighborhood's infrastructure, it is recommended that sustainability planning teams include a diverse group of collaborators:

- **Project leadership.** The project director and/or a designee has a big-picture view of the Promise Neighborhood and its partners and makes strategic decisions.
- **Financial manager.** This team member has financial knowledge of their Promise Neighborhood's costs and revenues.
- **Operations staff.** This team member can inform next steps for the operational aspects of the Promise Neighborhood (e.g., data, communications, policy, partner engagement).
- **Key partners.** Key leaders and staff from external organizations partner with the backbone agency on operational aspects (e.g., school districts, nonprofits).

A smaller subgroup can gather information, draft plans, or seek additional feedback as needed throughout the process.

How Much Time Will the Process Take?

Sustainability planning can take months. The amount of time will depend on whether the Promise Neighborhood infrastructure is centralized in a backbone organization or is distributed across multiple organizations. If the infrastructure is more centralized, the team can communicate its work to the organization's leadership, request financial information, and identify knowledgeable individuals in the organization. If the infrastructure is more distributed, getting buy-in and collecting key documents from multiple organizations and

scheduling team meetings across the organizations can lengthen the timeline. The full team should plan to meet regularly—at least once per month—to work through the sustainability planning process. Subgroup meetings may be needed to keep the process going.

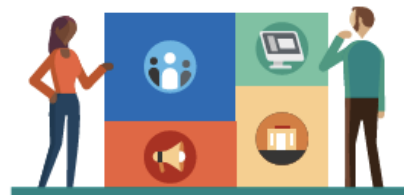
The Roadmap for Sustainability Planning

The planning process is organized into four structured steps, each supported by activities included in the Sustainability Planning Workbook.

- **Step 1: Define your current infrastructure and articulate why it is critical.** The first step **(1A)** is to identify core infrastructure components and investments through the Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity. Your work in 1A will help you complete the Elevator Pitch Development Activity **(1B)** to articulate why the infrastructure is critical to ongoing, collective work.
- **Step 2: Determine what infrastructure capacities you need and how much they cost.** Next, your team will consider how you expect your infrastructure to evolve for the remainder of the grant. The Capacity Assessment Activity will help you determine the needed changes, activities expected to taper off, and the approximate cost at the end of the grant.
- **Step 3: Identify resources to support the infrastructure.** Your team can use the Infrastructure Resource Strategy Development Activity to consider approaches for using existing resources and finding new ones to cover ongoing infrastructure costs and determine which would be the best fit for their contexts.
- **Step 4: Create your sustainability action plan.** Finally, through a Sustainability Action Plan Activity, your team will document a set of strategies that you will pursue to ensure that the infrastructure you built as part of Promise Neighborhoods endures beyond the grant.

Step 1: Define your current infrastructure and articulate why it is critical

The first step in sustainability planning is clarifying what you hope to sustain beyond the Promise Neighborhoods grant. This step requires two key actions:



- **Step 1A: Document your core infrastructure components and investments.** Identify the people, technology, goods, and services that your grant is currently supporting as part of your infrastructure.
- **Step 1B: Articulate why your infrastructure is critical.** Clearly explain why these infrastructure elements are essential to the ongoing success of your Promise Neighborhood.

Before You Begin

In preparation for steps 1A and 1B, gather any existing documentation on your Promise Neighborhood's infrastructure. This documentation might include an organizational chart, a current budget, and specific costs, such as professional development, consultants, data systems, case management tools, and communications platforms.

What You Will Achieve in Step 1

By the end of step 1, your planning team will be able to

- understand what has been built to date, including personnel, technology, goods, and services that your Promise Neighborhoods grant is currently supporting; and
- explain why these elements are essential to your initiative's ongoing success by developing a concise and compelling elevator pitch.

This foundation sets the stage for step 2, which focuses on what you will need to refine and maintain the infrastructure in the future.

Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity



The Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity will guide your team in documenting your current infrastructure investments and identifying potential ongoing costs.

Concepts and Context

Partnerships working to advance outcomes for children and families need a strong infrastructure to work effectively and achieve population-level change. Promise Neighborhoods' infrastructure is designed to ensure that partnerships establish seven key conditions (see exhibit 1):

- community engagement
- partnerships
- data
- financing
- policy and systems
- communications
- organizational capacity

In practice, a Promise Neighborhood's infrastructure is the system that enables partners to work together effectively. The following quote from the Klamath Promise Neighborhood demonstrates how its backbone team implements its infrastructure to address community needs and improve outcomes for young people.

“Our backbone team leads the charge in facilitating the collaboration of entities, Tribal and non-Tribal, to get to the root causes of our failure to improve outcomes for young people. We convene like service providers in four major groups or ‘buckets’: K–12 education and services, early learning, community supports, and college and technical education. We analyze specific data to look for patterns and holes in our programs and seek common ground where we can collaborate and zero in on the real issues preventing us from improving in these areas.

For example, we look at transportation and access issues, instructional aides and resources for the classroom, and improving attendance. ... We need funding to continue to support the work of the backbone team in convening our partners, as well as the ability to provide financial support to our partners to continue to improve their services.”

— Josh Norris, project director, Klamath Promise Neighborhood

Guidance for This Activity

To implement this activity with your team, open the [Sustainability Planning Workbook](#) and find the **Step 1A: Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity** tab.

Work with your planning team to document your current infrastructure investments for each key condition (see exhibit 1).

During this activity, think broadly about all resources—including personnel, technology, goods, and services—that your Promise Neighborhood is currently paying for or investing in. For example, for the data use/results condition, you might consider investments in a data system for tracking outcomes or support for building data capacity through training, which would involve staff or consultant time.

See exhibit 1A for an example of the completed Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity.

Exhibit 1A. Example Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity

Condition	Existing infrastructure investments
Data use/results	Program participation and referral data system, annual school survey administration, part-time district data analyst, consultant evaluator
Partnerships	Facilitated provider networks and advisory board
Community engagement	Community leadership initiative, network coordinator positions, social media, annual convening
Policy and systems influence	Engagement of local elected officials, partnering with state and national organizations on state policy advocacy
Communications	Social media maintenance, neighborhood outreach coordinators, digital collaborative tools (e.g., Padlet), flyer board, website
Organizational and strategic capacity	Community advisory board and partners that participate in continuous improvement cycles twice a year Findings that inform programming, partnership adjustments, and professional development
Sustainable financing	Grants team focusing on identifying and managing sustainable program funding opportunities Working with state and national coalitions and policymakers to advocate for funding

Note: This example activity is based on a completed course workbook from Hayward Promise Neighborhoods, modified for brevity and clarity to serve as an illustrative example.

Elevator Pitch Development Activity



This section will guide your team through developing a concise and compelling elevator pitch defining your infrastructure and explaining its importance to your continued collective impact. Your team will have a powerful message, tailored to each of your audiences, that you can deliver in 90 seconds or less.

Concepts and Context

Promise Neighborhoods are often skilled at advocating for continued investments in programs that serve their communities. However, grantees may have a harder time effectively communicating about their infrastructure to secure needed resources. An elevator pitch can serve as a vital tool for securing new funding, engaging partners, and building buy-in from a variety of collaborators.

Guidance for This Activity

To implement this activity with your team, open the [Sustainability Planning Workbook](#) and find the **Step 1B: Elevator Pitch Development Activity** tab. Collaborate with your team to craft your pitch by directly responding to the prompts provided in the workbook.

The goal is to get comfortable talking about the value of your infrastructure. The activity in the workbook will guide you through prompts to define the problem your infrastructure solves, explain how it provides a solution, highlight its unique benefits and value, and identify what makes your approach special. You will also be prompted to consider your “ask,” customizing it for a specific audience (e.g., a community foundation for this exercise). Be succinct in your responses to the prompts, aiming to distill your talking points down to 1 to 2 minutes.

As you develop your pitch, think about your core audience, which could include

- other backbone organization staff,
- resident leaders,
- local philanthropists,
- national philanthropists, and
- state legislators.

Also consider how your pitch might need to be adjusted for different audiences. Try it out with people by asking them the following questions:

- What did you like about that introduction?
- What points resonated with you?
- What questions do you have? Was there anything you expected to hear that you did not?
- Any constructive feedback?

See exhibit 1B, which features a complete example of the Elevator Pitch Development Activity from Hayward Promise Neighborhoods.

Exhibit 1B. Example Elevator Pitch Development Activity

Prompt	Response Target audience: Foundations
<p>Problem What problem does your infrastructure solve?</p>	<p>Too many students and families in Hayward’s most underresourced neighborhoods cannot navigate resources that are often not designed to address complex family needs. The neighborhoods we serve have child poverty rates that outpace both the city and county, creating barriers to success before children even enter school. Without coordination between education, social services, and community programs, families are left to navigate these challenges alone, increasing the risk of intergenerational poverty.</p>
<p>Solution How does your infrastructure solve this problem?</p>	<p>Hayward Promise Neighborhoods (HPN) goes beyond school support to help families understand and change the conditions that sustain the cycles of poverty in their neighborhoods. As the backbone organization hosted at California State University, East Bay, we connect and use Hayward’s greatest assets, including local nonprofits, city agencies, and educational institutions, to help children and families navigate seamless support from early childhood through college and careers. HPN convenes collaboration networks, collects and analyzes data, engages families in program design, implements cradle-to-career solutions, and engages residents through leadership training and outreach.</p>
<p>Benefit What is the added value of your Promise Neighborhood’s infrastructure? Why does it matter?</p>	<p>By focusing on neighborhoods where poverty rates are highest, HPN connects students and families who are most in need with the coordinated support necessary to thrive. Investing in families in these neighborhoods helps caregivers and children have access to education, career pathways, and essential resources that increase their chances of long-term success. When families are connected to the right resources at the right time, they build stability, breaking cycles of poverty and creating new opportunities for future generations.</p>
<p>What is special? Why is this approach unique?</p>	<p>Unlike traditional education programs that focus on just one part of a child’s journey, HPN takes a place-based, whole-family approach to change. What started as a single-neighborhood effort has grown to align with the City of Hayward’s vision of becoming an Education City, ensuring that all children—especially those in historically underresourced communities—have a seamless, supported path to success. We believe we have every resource in our city to make this possible. HPN has built a strong and dynamic network based on relationships, respect, and mutual responsibility to make institutions work better for everyone.</p>
<p>What is your ask? What is the next step you might want someone to take to support your infrastructure?</p>	<p>We invite your foundation to invest not only in one institution or program but in the coordinating power of a collective impact initiative that continues to strengthen Hayward’s capacity to better serve children and families regardless of their zip code. Although HPN works with partners to sustain programs and services, additional funding would enable HPN to preserve the parts of our work that address the unique challenges partners and families face:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • convening partnerships to align services so we are not replicating efforts, • gathering and responding to data that tell us where investments need to be made, and • sustaining and scaling evidence-based practices that are making an impact.

Note: This example activity is based on a completed course workbook from Hayward Promise Neighborhoods, modified for brevity and clarity to serve as an illustrative example.

Step 2: Determine what infrastructure capacities you need and how much they cost

Whereas step 1 helped you clarify your existing infrastructure and its importance, this step shifts your focus to the future to consider how your infrastructure will evolve during the grant cycle. You will identify any needed changes or refinements and begin to estimate the infrastructure's approximate cost at the end of the grant period. This forward-looking assessment is critical for building a realistic and actionable sustainability plan.



Before You Begin

Step 2 uses your completed Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity from step 1A, along with any relevant program reports, strategic plans, or partnership agreements that can inform your discussion about future needs and capacities. Cost estimates for future efforts are helpful for this step.

What You Will Achieve in Step 2

By the end of step 2, your planning team will be able to

- articulate a clear vision for your infrastructure at the end of your grant cycle,
- identify missing capacities or areas needing strengthening in each infrastructure component,
- determine plans for addressing identified needs and evolving your infrastructure, and
- estimate ongoing costs for your infrastructure beyond the grant period.

Capacity Assessment Activity



This step introduces the Capacity Assessment Activity: a set of comprehensive guiding questions designed to help your planning team evaluate the resources available to implement your Promise Neighborhood's infrastructure. It prompts a detailed internal assessment of your existing capacities across various infrastructure components.

Concepts and Context

Promise Neighborhoods infrastructures are works in progress. For sustainability planning, in addition to your current infrastructure investments, it is important to consider your:

- **Vision for your infrastructure at the end of your grant cycle.** What else is part of your long-term planning that has not been started yet? Consider emerging needs that may not have been part of the original plan. Visioning can also include a conversation about roles and responsibilities for the lead agency and partners related to infrastructure support.
- **Plans for achieving that vision.** This involves explaining how you are building your infrastructure, how you are working with partners to maintain the infrastructure, and how

you are making decisions. You will also identify any pieces of your current infrastructure that are no longer needed.

- **Ongoing costs at the end of your grant.** Consider that some infrastructure costs may be absorbed by partner organizations, that one-time costs for completed investments may fall away, and that other costs may increase or decrease as the Promise Neighborhood moves into its next phase of the work.

The following quote from the Hope Zone Promise Neighborhood illustrates the value of defining the ongoing costs and prioritizing what is most vital to sustain.

“[This tool supports our work by] defining and communicating the funding necessary to sustain our core infrastructure and prioritize the critical programs and services.”

—Rachel Ward, project director, Hope Zone Promise Neighborhood

Guidance for This Activity

To implement this activity with your team, open the [Sustainability Planning Workbook](#) and find the **Step 2: Capacity Assessment Activity** tab. Use the guiding questions for each Developmental Pathway condition to help you decide what changes are needed or desired for your infrastructure. Thinking this through for each condition ensures that all aspects of your infrastructure receive attention. If you are unsure how to categorize something or if it seems to fit in multiple areas, simply choose one; the most important thing is to document everything.

Sustainability planning is an iterative process. As you work through this exercise, you may need to revisit earlier decisions, which is a normal part of the process. You may also discover ways to streamline operations, more deeply engage partners, or use remaining resources from your federal grant to better position your initiative for long-term success.

See exhibit 2 for a complete example of the Capacity Assessment Activity.

Exhibit 2. Example Capacity Assessment Activity

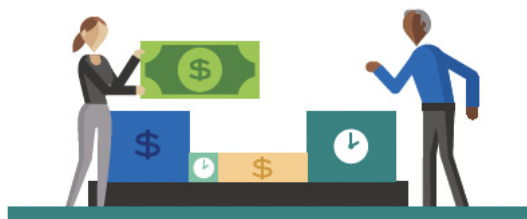
Condition	Existing infrastructure investment	Needed investment or improvement	Future investment	One-time or short-term cost	Ongoing cost	Estimated cost
Data use/results	Completed in step 1A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More public-facing data sharing and easier access to reports that partners can use for evaluation and grant writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a public-facing dashboard and a set of standard reports for partners with often-requested information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setup costs for dashboard • Partner reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data personnel (district data analyst and consultant evaluator) 	\$175,000
Partnerships	Completed in step 1A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger integration and communication across networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen network facilitation and collaboration • Share annual data insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial network setup (e.g., planning meetings, outcomes/data alignment) • Facilitation training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner-led network support 	\$150,000
Community engagement	Completed in step 1A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More youth-centered strategies • Easy-to-navigate resource website (in progress) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentionally design programs with youth input • Complete website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event supplies • Website development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leadership initiative • Network coordinator positions • Social media • Annual convening 	\$300,000
Policy and systems influence	Completed in step 1A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrestricted funds to support more intensive advocacy efforts • Dedicated position to lead advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to rely on policy and advocacy partnerships • Create a tracking mechanism to capture local policymaker engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual membership fees • Collateral for elected officials • Contractor to provide policymaking guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partial staff time 	\$70,000
Communications	Completed in step 1A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine newsletters • Updated contact info (including about potential donors) • Collaboration with partners to cross-post on their communications channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with a contractor to build out and implement a more strategic communications approach • Use student workers to support social media content and CRM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website revamp • Templates • A plan for social media postings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and contractor time for developing content • Maintaining website • Developing and distributing newsletters • Maintaining CRM 	\$60,000

Condition	Existing infrastructure investment	Needed investment or improvement	Future investment	One-time or short-term cost	Ongoing cost	Estimated cost
Organizational and strategic capacity	Completed in step 1A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular, detailed data sharing among neighborhood partners to increase transparency and responsiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the frequency and detail of data sharing to monthly share-outs Strengthen the role of networks as central hubs for data and information sharing and community-driven decisionmaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setup and initial training costs for enhanced data systems and network facilitation Initial technology and data system investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT support and maintenance of data systems Ongoing personnel costs for network facilitators Supplies for regular network meetings and activities 	\$100,000
Sustainable financing	Completed in step 1A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant management software for tracking and reporting Broader engagement with local businesses and community foundations Advanced data analytics for impact assessment and reporting Funding specifically for backbone support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand network to include more diverse funding sources and partners Upgrade technology for better data management and financial tracking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations with financial advisors specializing in nonprofit finance Initial setup of grant management and financial software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salaries for grants team and finance staff Ongoing software licenses and maintenance 	\$150,000
Total estimated						\$1,005,000

Note: This example activity is based on a completed course workbook from Hayward Promise Neighborhoods, modified for brevity and clarity to serve as an illustrative example. CRM = customer relationship management

Step 3: Identify resources to support the infrastructure

At the conclusion of step 2, your planning team created a future-state vision for each element of your infrastructure and estimated the costs to continue these operations. In step 3, you will consider three primary funding strategies and determine which resource types might be a good fit for specific aspects of your infrastructure.



Before You Begin

Step 3 uses your completed Capacity Assessment Activity from step 2, along with any local funding resource lists or collaborative tools that your team has for sharing new or unconventional ideas. Team members may be encouraged to brainstorm independently about potential resources in the organization, among partners, and elsewhere in the community.

What You Will Achieve in Step 3

By the end of this step, your planning team will be able to

- identify existing funding resources in your organization, among your partners, or in your community that could support your infrastructure;
- brainstorm strategies for coordinating and using resources that are already available;
- explore potential new funding streams (private and public) to support your infrastructure; and prioritize immediate next steps for pursuing viable funding options.

Infrastructure Resource Strategy Development Activity



Teams can use the Infrastructure Resource Strategy Development Activity in step 3 to identify potential resources to support ongoing infrastructure costs and the steps for pursuing the resources.

Concepts and Context

Whether you are seeking funding for programs or infrastructure, consider the following three main funding strategies:

- **Access existing resources.** First, review the available resources in your organization, among your partners, or among the public and private programs in your community. Ideas for supporting your infrastructure include the following examples:
 - Your backbone organization or partners might be able to dedicate in-kind staff to support the infrastructure (e.g., a university partner lending a graduate student for data analysis).

- Local municipal youth funds or state or other federal grants could be used. Many initiatives have secured multiple grants, and some have received Full-Service Community Schools grants.
- **Coordinate and use available resources.** This strategy requires you to take additional steps to unlock available funding. Blending and braiding of funds—a common strategy—falls in this category. Other examples of this strategy include the following:
 - Some collective impact initiatives find new backbone homes as they mature, or some backbone organizations transfer certain infrastructure responsibilities to other well-positioned organizations or agencies (e.g., a local data intermediary that can coordinate data collection, analysis, and reporting).
 - Backbone organizations may be able to convert one-time funds into ongoing contributions.
 - Backbone organizations may determine how they have engaged with matching partners listed in their grant applications and whether the partners can continue or increase their contributions.
 - Backbone or partner organizations may have opportunities to reallocate funding in their budgets. For example, if you now have in-house staff to lead training previously provided externally, the savings can be reallocated to support your infrastructure. If a partner has developed a new communications capacity you can use, it might free up some of your dedicated resources. When repurposing, prioritize activities that are not producing desired results.
- **Develop new resources.** Adding new money to your system is the third option and is usually the most time-consuming and complicated of the three. Examples may include the following:
 - Individual giving campaigns (e.g., breakfasts, galas, pledge drives) provide intermittent funding, which is great for one-time expenses, especially if the amount raised varies annually.
 - Businesses may sponsor parts of your infrastructure, such as an evaluation or communications strategy, and offer staff volunteers for budgeting, planning, or lobbying.
 - Some Promise Neighborhoods successfully lobby states for funding to support their infrastructures.

As you think about possible financing strategies, consider the following points:

- **There is no standard funding formula.** After a federal grant ends, a single source is unlikely to cover all infrastructure costs. Most collective impact initiatives use a mix of all three strategies, with the exact combination varying by location, community priorities, and the initiative's ability to address priority issues. For instance, if your school district is funding chronic absenteeism and your Promise Neighborhood is a key partner, the district might support a portion of your infrastructure to continue that work.
- **It is important to focus on funding streams and partners that are core to your mission.** Align your work with the goals of potential funders, such as foundations with specific funding strategies.
- **Strategies increase in complexity.** Coordinating and leveraging resources requires time-intensive collaboration, often with new administrative requirements and changes to accounting or data systems. Developing new resources is a long, complex process,

sometimes likened to a political campaign when voters need to approve new public resources dedicated to a particular cause.

- **Strategies build on and reinforce one another.** As you become more adept at blending and braiding funds and building robust financial management systems, you may gain access to additional opportunities, develop new relationships, and enhance your capacity to take on more complex financing strategies, making you more attractive to funders.
- **Fundraising for infrastructure is relationship-based.** Fundraising is more effective with established relationships where potential funders understand and appreciate your work. Several Promise Neighborhoods leaders emphasized nurturing relationships with school district leaders; when they witness the Promise Neighborhood's positive effect on students, they are more likely to support partnerships and share resources.
- **Promise Neighborhoods must be ready to show their added value.** At a minimum, this means having a finely honed elevator pitch (see step 1B) and a specific ask tailored to your target audience. Consider opportunities for potential funders to hear directly from those involved in the work about why it must continue (e.g., a speaker series).
- **It takes time to raise funds.** Individual donor campaigns can take 3 to 6 months; fundraising with foundations and corporations, 9 to 12 months; and securing public funds, 1 to 2 years. View this as ongoing work.
- **Assessing the expected return on investment of individual strategies is crucial.** For each financing idea, assess whether the potential funding justifies the time and effort required to secure and manage the resources.

Guidance for This Activity

To implement this activity with your team, open the [Sustainability Planning Workbook](#) and find the **Step 3: Infrastructure Resource Strategy Development Activity** tab. This activity will guide you in identifying potential resources to cover ongoing infrastructure costs, focusing on three primary funding strategies:

- Access existing resources.
- Coordinate and use available resources.
- Develop new resources.

For each infrastructure condition, your team will document ideas for each of these strategies and outline immediate next steps for pursuing those options. Think broadly about how in-kind support, blended funds, and new funding streams could contribute to your sustainability.

See exhibit 3 for a complete example of the Resource Strategy Development Activity.

Exhibit 3. Example Infrastructure Resource Strategy Development Activity

Condition	Access existing resources	Coordinate and use available resources	Develop new resources	What are your immediate next steps for these options?
Data use/ results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build resources for evaluators into existing grants and contracts • Consider hiring student interns for data support, technical system maintenance, and data visualization tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing dashboard, survey, and report templates • Ask the school district whether it can transition the costs of a data analyst to its budget 	Attempt to secure private donations to support data and evaluation capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with other program leads to assess the viability of writing evaluation tasks into existing grants • Meet with the university workstudy program lead to assess the viability of creating data-focused student intern roles • Meet with the school district's chief technology officer to understand their budget/office priorities and discuss the feasibility of fully transitioning a data analyst to their budget • Meet with the development team about an approach for seeking private support
Partnerships	Not applicable (N/A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition network facilitation responsibilities to other agencies and nonprofit partners • Engage additional intermediaries and agencies (local businesses, community foundations) to broaden partnership efforts and investment opportunities • Explore new city-led partnership to develop citywide data gathering and monitoring infrastructure 	Seek additional public and philanthropic funding to support backbone capacity by making a case for coordinating services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene existing network partners to clarify roles, share data, and establish common goals • Identify and reach out to potential new intermediary groups or community foundations • Schedule a meeting with the city manager's office
Community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore library community hub initiative resources • County early childhood grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition network facilitation responsibilities to other agencies and nonprofit partners 	Consider offering fee-based facilitation technical assistance (TA) to nonprofits to fund ongoing support to network facilitators, annual convening, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene existing network partners to clarify roles, share data, and establish common goals • Meet internally to map out a potential fee-for-service for facilitation training and ongoing support • Meet with community hub leaders at the library to understand resource availability and intended use
Policy and systems influence	N/A	Continue to coordinate advocacy efforts with other local/state/national collective impact organizations	Seek unrestricted funding for broader advocacy efforts	Continue on course

Condition	Access existing resources	Coordinate and use available resources	Develop new resources	What are your immediate next steps for these options?
Communications	Consider hiring student interns to support social media, regular newsletter development, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a staff member from backbone or partner organization who can provide strategic communications support, step into a lead role, etc. 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with the university workstudy program lead to assess the viability of setting up data-focused student intern roles Meet with lead partners/network leads to discuss possible internal lead on strategic communications
Organizational and strategic capacity	Explore library community hub initiative resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition network facilitation responsibilities to other agencies and nonprofit partners Explore new city-led partnership to develop citywide data gathering and monitoring infrastructure 	Consider offering fee-based facilitation TA to nonprofit organizations to fund ongoing support to network facilitators on continuous improvement, annual convening, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene existing network partners to clarify roles, share data, and establish common goals Meet internally to map out a potential fee-for-service for facilitation training and ongoing support Schedule a meeting with the city manager's office Meet with community hub leaders at the library to understand resource availability and intended use
Sustainable financing	[Verb] various grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly use a partner's grants management or financial software solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to advocate for new funding with state and national coalitions Broaden engagement with local businesses and community foundations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poll partners about which grants management/financial software they use and assess possibility of using their systems/licenses Meet with the chamber of commerce and other business groups to learn more about possibilities for engaging business networks Identify five high-priority businesses or foundations and develop engagement plans

Note: This example activity is based on a completed course workbook from Hayward Promise Neighborhoods, modified for brevity and clarity to serve as an illustrative example. The source for the named components is Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink. (2014). *A Developmental Pathway for Achieving Promise Neighborhood Results*. Retrieved May 19, 2025, from <https://www.policylink.org/resources/pni-developmental-pathway>.

Step 4: Create your sustainability action plan

Now that you have taken steps to clarify your infrastructure, estimate costs, and discuss potential resources with your planning team, it is time to create an action plan with at least three strategies you will undertake to sustain your infrastructure. This final step consolidates all your prior work into a concise, actionable plan for the future.



Before You Begin

Step 4 uses your completed materials from steps 1–3, including the **Infrastructure Cost Planning Activity**, **Elevator Pitch Activity**, **Capacity Assessment Activity**, and **Resource Strategy Development Activity**.

What You Will Achieve in Step 4

By the end of this step, your planning team will be able to

- synthesize your work into a comprehensive plan that pulls together your refined pitch, critical needs, and prioritized strategies into a single, cohesive document;
- create an actionable roadmap that serves as a clear guide for the next steps you will take to secure resources and sustain your infrastructure beyond the grant; and
- prepare for communication and engagement by using the completed plan as a practical tool to articulate the value of your infrastructure to potential funders and partners.

The following quote from a participant in the Leflore Promise Community highlights how a completed sustainability action plan serves as a roadmap for their work moving forward.

“We plan to use our Leflore Promise Neighborhood Sustainability Action Plan as a strategic roadmap to guide all efforts aimed at sustaining and scaling our work beyond the life of the grant.”

—Rhonda Lewis, vice president of education,
Delta Health Alliance, Leflore Promise Community

Sustainability Action Plan Activity



Your team can use the **Sustainability Action Plan Activity** to create a comprehensive sustainability action plan that summarizes all your work. This plan will communicate your infrastructure’s value, identify costs, and outline strategies and steps for pursuing resources.

Concepts and Context

In your plan, be sure to include the following elements:

- **Your elevator pitch.** Practice it with colleagues, keeping an intended audience in mind, and adjust based on their feedback.

- **A brief description of your most critical long-term infrastructure needs.** Focus your action plan on what is essential to the ongoing success of your partners' collective work.
- **Estimated ongoing costs for your infrastructure.** Use your estimates to create a total cost for your infrastructure, as well as the costs for your priority components.
- **A description of sustainability strategies you plan to pursue.** Summarize the next steps you documented in step 3. Although it is important to document sustainability plans for the most critical aspects of your infrastructure, your sustainability planning team may want to map out strategies for all your infrastructure conditions.

Share your action plan with key partners, use it to track progress, and review and adjust it as situations and funding change.

The following quote from BrowardUP Promise Neighborhoods illustrates how a completed sustainability action plan serves as a practical tool for both internal and external communication.

“We’re using our plan to reach out to potential funders and coordinate our work.”

—**Gregg Fields, vice president for research at Florida Atlantic University, BrowardUP Promise Neighborhoods**

Guidance for This Activity

To implement this activity with your team, open the [Sustainability Planning Workbook](#) and find the **Step 4: Sustainability Action Plan Activity** tab. This activity will guide you through synthesizing your prior work into a comprehensive sustainability action plan. You will be prompted to do the following:

- **Refine your elevator pitch** from step 1B, clearly defining your target audience for maximum effect.
- **Identify your most critical infrastructure conditions** by reviewing your completed tools from steps 1 and 2, focusing on what is essential to maintaining your collective work.
- **Estimate the ongoing costs** for your full infrastructure and specifically for your critical components, drawing from your cost planning in step 1A and capacity assessment in step 2.
- **Document three to five sustainability strategies** you are considering for these critical components, building directly on the resource strategies explored in step 3.

See exhibit 4 for a complete example of the Sustainability Action Planning Activity.

Exhibit 4. Example sustainability action planning activity

Prompt	Response
Who is your target audience for your elevator pitch?	Target audience: Community foundation
What is your elevator pitch?	<p>Pitch: In Hayward's most underresourced neighborhoods, too many students and families struggle to navigate a fragmented system, perpetuating cycles of poverty before children even enter school. They are left to tackle complex needs alone, often with resources not designed to truly address their challenges.</p> <p>Hayward Promise Neighborhoods (HPN), as the backbone organization hosted at California State University, East Bay (CSUEB), changes this. We go beyond traditional school support by connecting Hayward's greatest assets—our local nonprofits, city agencies, and educational institutions. We convene powerful collaboration networks, use data to inform our strategies, engage families in codesigning programs, and implement seamless cradle-to-career solutions. This collective, place-based approach ensures children and families have coordinated support from early childhood through college and careers.</p> <p>Our unique value lies in empowering families to navigate and transform the conditions that sustain poverty, not just manage symptoms. By connecting those most in need with the right resources at the right time, we build stability, breaking cycles of poverty and creating opportunities for future generations. What began as a single-neighborhood effort now aligns with the City of Hayward's vision of becoming an Education City, demonstrating a powerful network built on relationships, respect, and mutual responsibility.</p> <p>We invite your foundation to invest not in one program, but in the coordinating power of a collective impact initiative that strengthens Hayward's capacity to better serve children and families, regardless of their zip code. HPN works with partners to sustain vital programs. Additional funding would enable us to preserve the unique infrastructure that aligns services, uses data to drive investment, and scales evidence-based practices—making real impact.</p>
What are your most critical infrastructure components (i.e., what will you need to continue to pay for after the grant to keep your infrastructure intact)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backbone staff • The three key networks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cradle-to-Career Education Reform Network (Co-led by CSUEB/Hayward Unified School District) – Early Learning Network (mainly led by 4Cs of Alameda County) – Neighborhood Health and Empowerment Network (led by City of Hayward and HPN)
What is the approximate ongoing cost of your infrastructure overall?	Full infrastructure costs: approximately \$1.8 million (including indirect rate)
What is the cost of your critical infrastructure components?	Critical infrastructure component costs: These costs are largely embedded in the overall infrastructure budget, covering backbone staff salaries, network facilitation, data coordination, and the administrative support necessary for these key functions.
Which sustainability strategies are you considering for your critical infrastructure components?	<p>Strengthen network integration and communication: Enhance the effectiveness of existing network facilitators through regular training and shared leadership models. Improve integration across current networks through shared data insights and strategy alignment sessions.</p> <p>Develop dedicated policy and advocacy support: Seek unrestricted funding for broader advocacy efforts, policymaker engagement, and dedicated policy support roles or consultants to ensure the alignment of advocacy efforts across partners.</p> <p>Explore citywide partnerships for sustainability: Engage the City of Hayward to develop a citywide data gathering and monitoring infrastructure to support the long-term vision of Hayward as an Education City, thereby securing public funding and shared responsibility for backbone functions.</p> <p>Diversify funding streams: Pursue diversified funds from local businesses and community foundations to support the ongoing backbone capacity. Seek additional funding to strengthen internal capacity to manage diversified funding streams.</p> <p>Enhance organizational and strategic capacity: Conduct a gap analysis of current organizational capacity and invest in advanced grants management software and strategic planning consultants for sustainability and capacity building.</p>

Note: This example activity is based on a completed course workbook from Hayward Promise Neighborhoods, modified for brevity and clarity to serve as an illustrative example.

Sustaining Your Promise: Key Takeaways

To reach goals for children, youth, and families, Promise Neighborhoods have established strong infrastructures to keep partners coordinated and moving forward with coherence and efficiency. To maintain progress beyond their Promise Neighborhoods grants, communities must consider how they will sustain that infrastructure.

Sustainability planning is an iterative process that involves a range of leaders, staff, and collaborators who know and are deeply engaged in the work. Building a sustainability plan requires multiple meetings of a planning team that can work together to

- identify core infrastructure components and articulate why the infrastructure is critical to ongoing, collective work;
- consider how their infrastructure will evolve during the grant cycle;
- consider approaches for covering ongoing infrastructure costs by using existing resources and finding new ones that would best fit their specific contexts; and
- document a set of strategies they plan to pursue to ensure that the infrastructure they built as part of Promise Neighborhoods endures.

References

Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink. (2014). *A Developmental Pathway for Achieving Promise Neighborhood Results*. Retrieved May 19, 2025, from <https://www.policylink.org/resources/pni-developmental-pathway>.

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About FourPoint Education Partners

FourPoint Education Partners collaborates with education and community leaders to enhance schools and system capacity, promoting success for every student. They foster the creation and implementation of “opportunity ecosystems” to expand opportunities for all and prepare young people for life after graduation.



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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Westat improves lives by delivering exceptional data-driven research and technical assistance, fostering insights and solutions to advance health, education, and social and economic opportunity. Our approach is rooted in rigorous statistical and data science methods with an unflagging dedication to improving lives through research—we approach each project with investigative curiosity, data rigor, adaptive methods, and advanced technology. These attributes, unchanged since our establishment in 1963, combined with our innovative thinking, transparency, and adaptability, are why clients find exceptional value in our work.



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