

Finding Unity in Community: How Building Consensus Can Shift the Dynamics of Support



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Coalitions can support ongoing participation and shared decision-making power that impacts community outcomes for youth and families. This guide draws from many years of experience using coalition-driven tools and processes during the implementation of the [Evidence2Success framework](#).

Read this action guide to learn about:

- improving engagement, creating inclusive and productive environments for diverse stakeholders, and the importance of early engagement on sustaining participation and funding;
- what worked, what didn't, and questions to ask yourself before embarking on similar work in your community;
- expanding efforts once an initial effort takes root.

It's a long game that starts with a commitment to unity. How will your community get started?



PennState
College of Health and
Human Development

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This is the third of five
**Action Guides in the Guiding
Collective Change series**
based on the experiences of
communities implementing
Evidence2Success, a
framework for engaging
communities and public
systems in improving the
well-being of children and
youth, supported by the
Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Each Action Guide takes a
close look at a prevention
practice used by communities
to shift the way decisions
are made about programs,
resources, and strategies that
impact outcomes for youth
and family well-being.

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Introduction

Perhaps these voices will sound familiar:

As a principal in a local high school,

I see how poverty and now COVID have impacted the students. Learning achievement lags. Levels of depression, anxiety, and behavior issues are higher post-COVID. I see the effects on everyone, from the teenagers to the teachers, from the swamped counselors to the cafeteria staff. A crisis is brewing. I ask:

What can our school do before the problems get worse?

As a single mom raising teenagers in the neighborhood,

I know that “kids will be kids.” Still, I don’t want them doing things that could get them into trouble. And I want them to have opportunities. They’ve got to learn to make good choices, but it’s a message they need to hear from more than just “Mom,” especially if their friends are making risky decisions. I wonder:

What community resources are available so I can help my children thrive?

As a councilperson in a mid-sized city,

I know what to do with constituent calls about missed trash pickup. But what about the more complex complaints? I’ve been hearing about more fights and more absenteeism at school. Parents say that kids in this area have nothing to do. Meanwhile, violence has spiked. These issues require more than a simple phone call. I want to know:

What solutions are available and possible for my community?

These different perspectives from a community share a common focus—the health and well-being of area children and youth. They come from different places and represent different roles in the community—and we could just have easily heard the voice of a businessperson, faith leader, teenager, social worker, or clinic director. What does it take to address their questions? What would happen if, rather than tackling their problems in isolation, they started working together? **Community engagement** is a process of bringing together people and organizations from across the community to work in a unified way on a problem or range of issues. This guide looks at the benefits of using a community engagement process with tools developed and refined by communities over the last decade.

Engaging community members, leaders, and organizations can look very different depending on several factors. While models of community engagement frequently focus on how to bring community residents to the decision-making table, in this guide we consider community engagement more broadly. In addition to considering the key voices of residents, we aim to integrate residents with the more “typical” decision-makers such as government leaders, front-line service providers, faith and business communities, and others.^{[1][2]} This broad community engagement ideally includes **a range of stakeholders** to fully represent the community.

“

Community engagement is ‘the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people.’

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

”

This Action Guide examines how **broad, cross-sector engagement of community stakeholders in a coalition** can add value to prevention-focused community improvement efforts. It can lead to increased involvement, support, and ownership of activities. It can address challenges in sustaining programs and activities. Over the longer term, cross-sector engagement supports sustained positive change in communities.

We draw key benefits from the experiences of six communities that enacted community engagement strategies using various tools. Definitions of key prevention science terms used in the guide are hyperlinked to a glossary at the end of the guide. First, we take a closer look at what we already know from research about what supports community engagement.

What Does It Take to Engage Communities in Prevention?

Ready communities have an advantage.

Research shows that community projects are more successful when the community is **ready to participate**.^[3] Generally, “ready” communities have certain characteristics, as listed in the box at right.^[4] When present, these factors can encourage people to get involved and can lead to positive results related to cohesion, team culture, and unity.^{[5][6]} If these factors are not present, communities can focus initial efforts on building these readiness factors, thus improving their likelihood of success with a future community improvement initiative.

Certain characteristics and actions align with success.

Successful engagement efforts—like the Evidence2Success coalition building approach that we introduce on page 7—share common traits. Developing **effective, action-oriented guiding principles** is essential for fostering genuine community engagement and participation within organizations.^[7] **Supportive and transparent leadership**^[8] and **strong relationships**^[9] foster trust, collaboration, and connection.^{[9][10]} **Creating environments** that **encourage citizens** to contribute their views early and use **systematic representation** in decision-making^[11] enhances participation. This requires **adapting processes** to be more inclusive, accessible, and supportive of citizen involvement, especially for those with low incomes, leading to more comprehensive and productive collaboration between citizens and public systems or other stakeholder organizations.^{[8][12][13]}

Readiness factors that support community engagement success include:

- An awareness and experience related to community priorities
- A variety of existing stakeholder relationships and connections (e.g., schools, business, faith)
- A history of conducting small activities together with success
- A capacity to listen, authentically discuss, and create a shared vision for the work
- A commitment to building consensus
- A community identity (often place-based)
- Cohesiveness in the community
- Trust in institutions

Coalitions benefit from dedicated, skillful coordinators who are knowledgeable and empowering.

Community engagement often occurs *within coalitions*, where certain characteristics are important. Highly skilled *coalition leaders*, including a *paid coordinator*,^[14] and *coalitions with strong internal operations* (for example, clearly establishing how meetings will be conducted and how decisions will be made) are key to effective broad cross-sector¹ community engagement.^{[5][11][15][16]}

What makes a successful coalition leader? They use *skilled facilitation practices* and a *participatory* or *empowering leadership style* to direct coalition activities and member involvement. They *build trust* and *support learning*,^[11] and focus on both *tasks* and *team cohesion* to support positive and continual coalition operations.^{[5][15]} Successful coalitions also use up-to-date *scientific and local knowledge* to support community engagement and coalition operations.^{[5][17]}

Benefits of community engagement efforts can link to and build on each other.

Research shows that *community engagement efforts can reinforce each other over time*, leading to better outcomes. Participation appears to be boosted when there is a *shared vision* and *members see benefits* from their involvement.^[4] One study found that factors like *community champions*, *community support for prevention*, *sense of community*, and *participatory leadership* are positively linked—if one is strong, the others tend to be strong, too. This suggests that these factors are interconnected and can enhance each other, *building on existing community strengths*. A participatory and collaborative approach in a community with some readiness can further strengthen community health initiatives,^[18] predict financial sustainability, and lead to ongoing success.^[19]

Research shows that *high-quality coalition operations*, such as integrating new members and planning for change, are key to coalition health and sustainability success.^[19]

Tools and resources for engaging stakeholders vary by purpose, cost, and mode of delivery.

Many resources exist to help communities adopt and integrate the practice of engaging broad participation in a community. Online *theoretical frameworks* explain a spectrum of community engagement practices, from harmful nonparticipation to shared decision-making.^{[1][2][20][21]} There are also *live or prerecorded trainings* and *worksheets with instructions* for practicing community engaged decision-making.^{[22][23][24][25][26]} Some resources provide more direction and support, including one-on-one coaching, usually for a fee. With so many options, it can be difficult to choose the best way to move your community's work forward.

¹ Of note, *cross-sector engagement* is showing up as “multisectoral” in requests for proposals. In this Action Guide, we intentionally use the “cross-sector” term with its implied focus on *what happens between* sectors.

Introducing the Evidence2Success Coalition Building Approach to Community Engagement

A true broad cross-sector community engagement effort is one that:

- **engages everyone in the community:** residents, public system users, youth, parents, school staff, nonprofit workers, businesses, government representatives, faith leaders, policy makers, funders, and others.
- **recognizes and addresses power dynamics** among different sectors in the community to elevate diverse input and ideas on priorities and programs, involving individuals and organizations in decision-making.
- **includes and represents** the community's diverse races and ethnicities.
- **shares relevant information and accountability** within a connected network of individuals and organizations that are working together toward the same goal.

The Evidence2Success coalition building approach to community engagement is built on these foundational principles. **The core of Evidence2Success is developing a strong coalition²** that drives community involvement in decision-making. This coalition **shares power** between typical decision-makers, such as elected officials, school district leaders, and child welfare agency directors, along with those not frequently privy to power in the decision-making process, such as youth-serving community organizations and community residents, including parents and youth. Together, they gather resources and build relationships to engage the community, raise funds, implement and monitor evidence-based programs, and inform policy.



The Kearns coalition engaged a broad cross-section of members around a single table.

CHARLES HENDERSON

A distinguishing feature of the Evidence2Success coalition building approach is its **cross-sector composition**. Early on, key leaders with mutual interests and from various sectors are brought together to take on a decision-making role as a cohesive team. Resident leaders, civic leaders, direct service providers, business leaders, and faith leaders are among those who are actively and systematically sought out and invited to participate in the process. The work of building the coalition occurs in a community-directed, ground-up fashion facilitated by participation in the Evidence2Success framework.

This coalition **sets the vision and goals** of the collective effort, **agrees on shared priorities based on data**, and **guides program selection and strategic financing**. Tools are used to ensure **diverse participation and input** from the start and throughout each phase of the coalition's work. Everyone in the coalition commits to **shared accountability**, working together to achieve the health and well-being goals for youth and families in the community.

The following section will explore how a coalition building approach to community engagement was used in different communities and the benefits those communities experienced.

² Within the Evidence2Success framework, the coalition was called a "Community Board." The terms are used interchangeably here.

What Are the Key Benefits of Using a Coalition Building Approach in Community Improvement Efforts?

Key Benefit 1: *Using a Coalition Building Approach Can Enhance Community Engagement During a Community Change Effort.*

Key Benefit 2: *Using a Coalition Building Approach Fosters Inclusive, Collaborative, Productive Environments for Diverse Stakeholders, Especially as Reported by People of Color.*

Key Benefit 3: *Earlier Levels and Quality of Community Engagement Predict Later Levels of Funding and Program Participation.*

We base these benefits on the experiences of and data from six communities across the country who began implementing the Evidence2Success framework (the framework) as early as 2012: Providence, Rhode Island; Selma and Dallas County, Alabama; Mobile, Alabama; Kearns Township and Salt Lake County, Utah; Memphis, Tennessee; and Miami, Florida. See [Table 1](#) (in Appendix) to view demographic information about these communities. Though the communities that adopted the Framework varied in population density and demographics, they shared **low-income** and **racially and ethnically diverse** characteristics.

Each of the communities used the framework within a **coalition** structure called a [Community Board](#) embedded within a local [backbone organization](#) employing a [coordinator](#), who leads the coalition in both operations and decision-making, and a [finance lead](#) tasked with ensuring financial sustainability. All coalitions were supported by [technical assistance providers](#) commonly referred to as “coaches” to guide community leaders and coalitions on the process and tools.

For the findings in this guide, we reviewed data from the [process evaluation](#) conducted by a research team from Penn State that documented each community’s implementation of the Evidence2Success framework as it occurred. To collect the data, we interviewed coalition members and other community members yearly. Additionally, we conducted retrospective interviews with each community’s coordinator and other local leaders of the Evidence2Success framework. For details about the measures and individuals involved in these data collections, see [Table 2](#) (in Appendix).

Taking this bird’s-eye approach after implementation and data collection yielded lessons about what worked and what didn’t, as well as keys for successfully navigating the challenges that arose. The end goal, as always, is to improve outcomes for youth and families in local communities.

Key Benefit 1: Using a Coalition Building Approach Can Enhance Community Engagement During a Community Change Effort.

In interviews with coalition members and key leaders in Evidence2Success communities, we tracked levels of **five different dimensions** of community engagement and found that **all five improved over time across all communities** while the Evidence2Success framework was implemented (see [Box A](#)). For interview text and response options, see [Table 3](#) (in Appendix). Specifically, reports of how communities were engaged in decision-making improved over time in terms of who participated, in what ways, and to what degree.

Reported levels of engagement **increased across all communities**, and the increases occurred **across races, ethnicities, education levels, and work sectors**.

At the beginning of the Evidence2Success effort, each dimension of community engagement was reported at a **low to moderate** level, and this was reflected in interviews about expected barriers to successful engagement:

- “We have not had a lot of experience/practice looking across sectors in terms of the work we do...”*
- “There is a lot of knowledge being produced by different agencies and alignment of support is a challenge. There is no consistency or intentionality in coordination.”*
- “Many ethnic individuals don’t think this is their responsibility. They do not see this initiative as part of their community and therefore don’t want to be involved.”*



The increase in participation by individuals from **diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds** in program planning and implementation in Evidence2Success communities.

While there is still work to be done, by Year 3 of Evidence2Success implementation, **all types of community engagement were enhanced**, reaching **moderate to moderate-high** levels while using the coalition building approach. (See Appendix, [Table 4](#), [Figure 5](#), and [Figures 6-10](#)). The greatest improvement across the five dimensions was the level of participation by individuals from diverse backgrounds in planning and implementation, **an increase of more than 20%** from Year 1 to Year 3.

Interviews at Year 3 echo these changes. Members noted changes in relationships, communication, collaboration, and input from residents. It appears that with a coalition in place, a supportive context grew for many dimensions of community engagement:

Box A

Five Dimensions of Community Engagement

Community Input: How much opportunity do residents have to share their ideas and experiences about programs and service providers?

Racial Inclusiveness and Participation: How involved are racially and ethnically diverse individuals in program planning and implementation?

Community Voice: How much consideration do the preferences and needs of community residents receive in decision-making around programs?

Active Collaboration: How closely are different organizations working together to make decisions and share money and personnel when it comes to addressing issues of youth health and development in communities?

Networking Collaboration: How often are different organizations meeting with each other and sharing information about issues affecting youth health and development in our communities?

“There is a big change, more communication, more of the neighborhood is involved, more youth involvement. People are trying to go back and get their GED. They want to support their kids.”

“Success has come from creating a new table, and then the structure, the process, the structure we are using to inform the process.”

“The diverse committee of people, people from the community and professionals. It is really important to have more than educators at the meetings. It takes that kind of combination to remember all of the issues. Also, some of us knew each other from before which helped and new relationships were developed.”

“Being able to get the superintendents of both school boards involved. Both have been highly active in the initiative. Community leaders are very excited about the possible change being implemented as a result of the Evidence2Success work.”

Key Benefit 2: Using a Coalition Building Approach Fosters Inclusive, Collaborative, Productive Environments for Diverse Stakeholders, Especially as Reported by People of Color.

While the first benefit shows that community involvement in decision-making improved while using a coalition building approach, the second benefit looks more closely at the **inner workings of that coalition**. These results come from interviews with coalition members in Evidence2Success communities. Functioning of the Evidence2Success coalition describes the operations and dynamics of the group, including how well the body conducted activities and involved participants. We tracked coalition functioning in six different ways and found that **all six characteristics of coalition functioning were positive across all communities**. For a list of characteristics, see [Box B](#) on the following page.

Additionally, the positive coalition functioning was notable for these reasons:

- positive functioning was seen **repeatedly over time**;
- positive, stable results **applied across categories** and **did not differ** depending on a person’s race or ethnicity, whether they lived in the community, or what sector they worked in or were affiliated with in the community.

See results in [Table 11](#), [Table 12](#), and [Figure 13](#) (in Appendix).

Coalition members agreed that their coordinator was **knowledgeable** about prevention and Evidence2Success and was a **strong supporter** of the effort. Coalition members reported that their Board leadership **brought everyone into the discussion, asked for the input of many**, and **involved many in tasks and activities** rather than relying on just a few individuals to carry the load. Coalition members **reported feelings of connectedness** and a **sense of unity with others** involved in the coalition. Coalition members reported, overall, that they each were **somewhat to very involved in the effort**, and only minor disagreements or differences of opinion were reported.

We conclude from this data that a coalition can operate positively and efficiently and engage many different types of people and organizations in a variety of communities.

In addition to the overall positive reports of coalition functioning across many types of people, **coalition members of color** reported **slightly more positive reports** of **Coordinator Engagement** and **Opportunities for Participation**. In other words, Black and Hispanic coalition participants, a little more than White participants, reported experiencing an inclusive coalition environment facilitated by highly knowledgeable, skilled, and engaged coalition leaders. For these local communities, the results are encouraging since most have not historically included members of minoritized racial and ethnic groups at tables where decisions are made.

This conclusion comes from comparing ratings on the two measures by respondents who self-identified their race and ethnicity to only be White to ratings by respondents who self-identified as Black, African American, or Hispanic. See [Table 14](#) and [Figure 15](#), in Appendix.

Slightly higher reports from people of color pointed to an **inclusive environment** with highly knowledgeable, skilled, and engaged coalition leaders.

One leader’s story exemplifies the impact of an inclusive environment. Their coalition was helped to “go deeper,” she said, after a resident “dropped in to ask a question and stayed involved.” The contributions of this parent, who was an employed, high school graduate working hard in a non-professional role, were seismic: “She’s so proactive, and thoughtful...throwing us things, almost like she’s been sent for the group, to get a reflection of where things are, from an authentic place. She isn’t discouraged and she doesn’t blame, but seriously questions, ‘why?’”

Coalition participants described additional successes they observed two years after starting:

“Working with the school district has been difficult but we are seeing a lot of collaboration.”

“Being able to involve enough people to get to this point is a success... [and] we’ve now narrowed down the programs to be chosen...”

“...people ask questions now of the people that they’re serving, about what they think about what [systems providers] are doing...it is movement...”

In summary, using the coalition building approach worked for diverse stakeholders, but especially people of color, to foster inclusive and collaborative, productive environments.

Box B

Six Characteristics of Coalition Functioning

Coordinator Engagement*: How much did coalition members report that the coordinator had a strong understanding and knowledge of prevention, and strong knowledge of, and enthusiasm and passion for, Evidence2Success?

Collaborative Leadership: How much did coalition members report that the coordinator intentionally sought out their views, asked them to assist with specific tasks, and created an environment where differences of opinion could be shared?

Opportunities for Participation*: How much did coalition members report that everyone was involved in the discussion, and that everyone’s skills and capabilities were used?

Cohesion: How positive were reports of a sense of unity, cohesion, and bonding by coalition members?

Productivity: To what degree did coalition members describe the coalition as work-focused and work-oriented, focused on getting work done and making progress?

Self-rated Involvement: How involved did each coalition member report themselves to be in the Evidence2Success process?

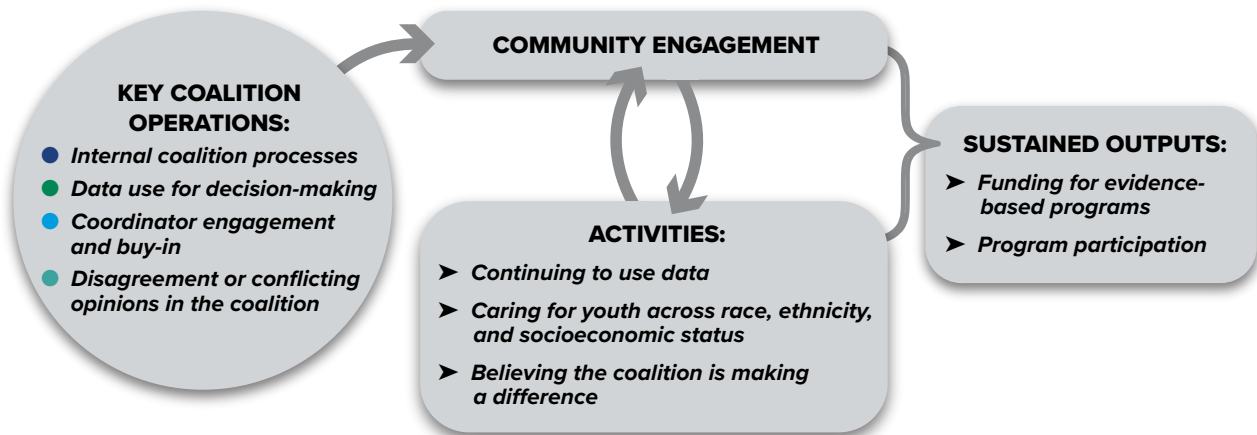
**Coalition members of color reported higher levels of this characteristic compared to White-only respondents.*

Key Benefit 3: Earlier Levels and Quality of Community Engagement Predict Later Levels of Funding and Program Participation.

There are real benefits for coalitions that engage a broad cross-section of community members, organizations, and systems in their community change effort. According to the data, those benefits unfold in stages over time. We saw that the **quality of coalition operations** and the **strategies used for community engagement** really matter for later implementation and sustainability of evidence-based prevention programs for youth. Specifically:

- **How the coalition operates impacts future engagement.** This is based on four key components that predicted levels of community engagement one year later.
- **Enhanced community engagement relates to other important activities and characteristics.** Specifically, levels of community engagement connect with using data to make decisions and caring for youth across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. These were identified as important in the [Evidence2Success logic model](#).
- **Sustaining later program funding and participation** was connected to levels of community engagement, care for youth, and data use from three years earlier.

This diagram shows how these components are related and how they benefit coalitions over time:



Our analysis draws on the Evidence2Success logic model, which expects that a coalition that works efficiently, productively, cohesively, and collaboratively will spur future community engagement and will also encourage the active use of data to make decisions and care for youth well-being across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. All of this is important for creating **lasting community-wide improvement** for youth and families. Diving into the Evidence2Success community sample, including information collected in interviews with coalition members and key leaders, reported program participation, and total dollars leveraged, we see **what may be possible** when using a coalition building approach for a community change effort.

“My experience here has told me that people come together around a grant or funding but without something concrete to keep this in the forefront it can fall to the bottom of the list...”

it is not just the money but something concrete that keeps it up at the top of the priority list. We have a lot of people involved in a lot of things and you just can't sustain all that as a top priority."

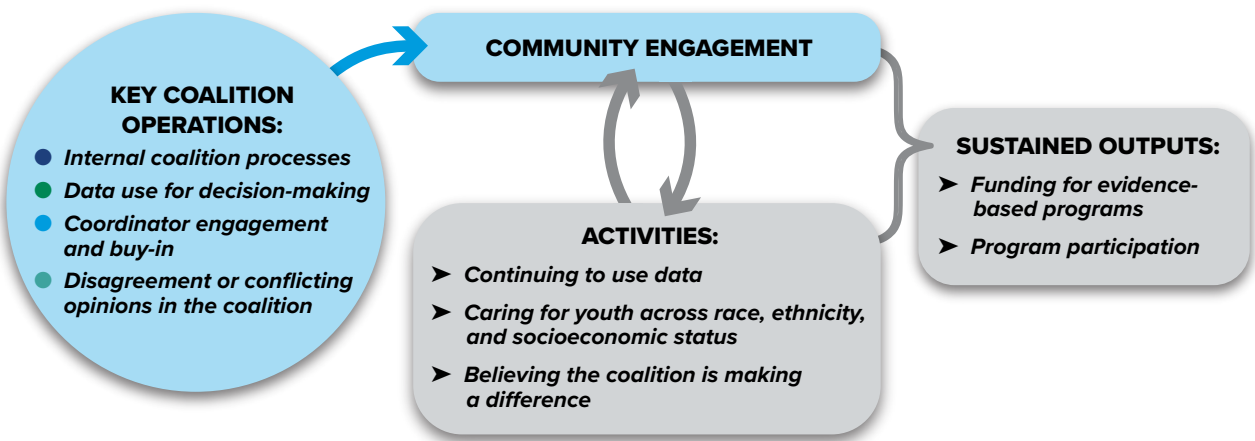
"Over twenty years, I've seen very little happen to bring together people and public systems to take responsibility for youth health and development. The Children's Youth Cabinet is starting to take on that role and responsibility. Its Evidence2Success workgroup is using school absenteeism data and juvenile justice's detention data as a baseline for monitoring. This is testament that they are starting to look at problems using data..."

Now, let's dive into each piece of the three-step process. Read on for more details on how this process seems to unfold.

How the Coalition Operates Impacts Future Engagement

Using existing research, Evidence2Success theory, and analyses with Evidence2Success coalition data, we identified four key components of coalition operations:

- collaborative and engaging internal coalition processes;
- data use for decision-making;
- coordinator engagement and buy-in; and
- disagreement or conflicting opinions in the coalition.



Specifically, our analyses of coalition interview data at Year 2 and Year 3 suggest that the four key components of coalition operations may lead to engaging communities in different ways one year later, more than two years after the coalition began meeting in each community. For a coalition timeline, see [Table 16](#) (in Appendix). All four key components of coalition operations related to types of community engagement one year later. For item text, methodology, and analysis, see [Table 17](#) and [Table 18](#) (in Appendix).

Here are the takeaways on how each of four components of coalition operations impacts community engagement as a whole:

- **Attention to internal processes enabled a more positive coalition culture**, including engaging meetings and interactions. These connected to **higher levels** one year later of:
 - **community input**, with residents sharing their ideas and experiences about programs and service providers, and
 - **racial inclusiveness and participation**, involving racially and ethnically diverse individuals in program planning and implementation.

Surprisingly, this also related to *lower* levels of community voice and broad cross-sector participation in Evidence2Success. Perhaps residents and racially and ethnically diverse individuals are sharing their ideas yet are not quite actively involved in decision-making about those programs and activities.

What **impact do you think a positive coalition culture** might have on community voice and cross-sector participation in your community?

- **Using data as a key coalition process** for making decisions about priorities and programs, and ongoing evaluation and monitoring, connected to **higher levels** one year later of:
 - **community input**, with residents sharing their ideas and experiences about programs and service providers one year later;
 - **community voice**, with community residents themselves being actively involved in decision-making about those programs and activities;
 - **broad cross-sector participation**, with higher levels of involvement across a wide variety of community stakeholders, from school board administrators and staff to young people and parents, from the support and involvement of individuals involved in media to those in for-profit business; and
 - **networking**, with higher reported rates of sharing information broadly across a connected group of individuals and organizations one year later.
- **Actively engaged coordinators who totally “bought into” the process** connected to higher levels one year later of:
 - **community voice**, with community residents themselves being actively involved in decision-making about those programs and activities one year later, and
 - **active collaboration**, such as sharing staff and finances, and grant writing, one year later.

At the same time, the engaged and supportive coordinator connected to *lower* levels of racially and ethnically diverse individuals sharing their ideas.

● **Slightly higher levels of disagreements or differences of opinion** in a coalition connected to **higher levels** one year later of:

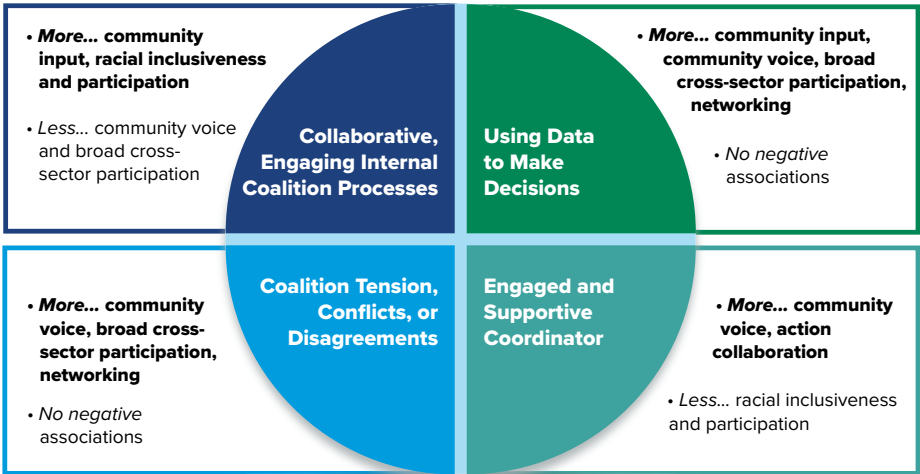
- **community voice**, with community residents themselves being actively involved in decision-making about those programs and activities;
- **broad cross-sector participation**, with higher levels of involvement across a wide variety of community stakeholders, from school board administrators and staff to young people and parents, from the support and involvement of individuals involved in media to those in for-profit business; and
- **networking**, with higher reported rates of sharing information broadly across a connected group of individuals and organizations one year later.

Having disagreements and differences of opinion shared in your coalition may be a sign that diverse opinions are welcomed and that there is a constructive way to process differences of opinion. In fact, a lack of diversity of opinion could even be a sign that there isn't a space for open discussion and differing points of view.

Meanwhile, these slightly increased levels of disagreements or differences of opinion did not reliably predict negative outcomes for community engagement.

You can see in the graphic below how each component of coalition operations connected to community engagement one year later.

These four distinct components of coalition operations—**collaborative and engaging internal coalition processes; using data to make decisions; coordinator engagement and buy-in; and**



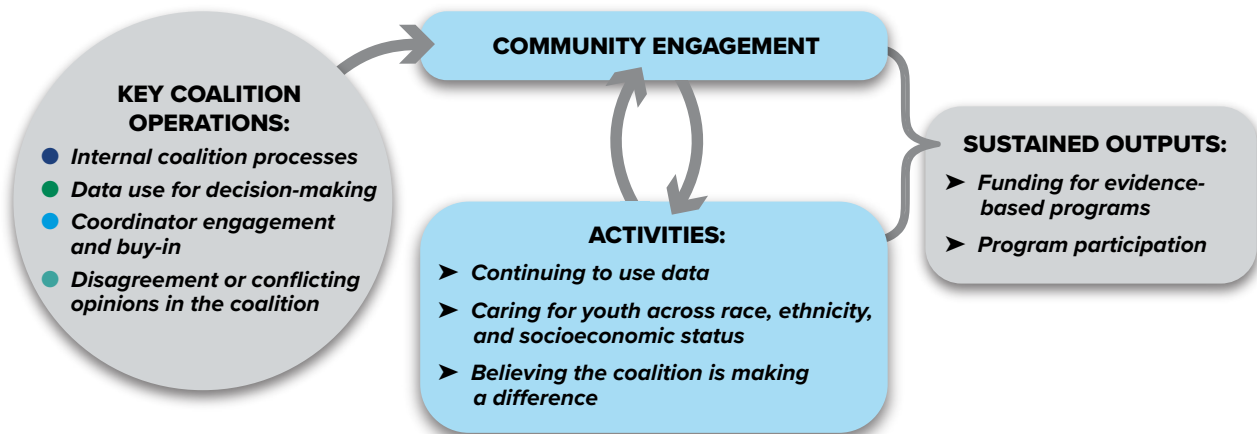
levels of disagreements or differences of opinion in the coalition—all seem to be important to an understanding of levels of community engagement reported in the community two years after the coalition started operating.

In summary, each component appears to contribute in some similar and some unique ways to enhancing future community engagement.

How might an **engaged coordinator** impact your community's efforts, especially the participation of individuals from **diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds**?

Enhanced Community Engagement Related to Other Important Activities and Characteristics

Specifically, enhanced levels of community engagement connected to ***continued data use***, ***perceived improvement in the community***, and ***care for youth across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status***.



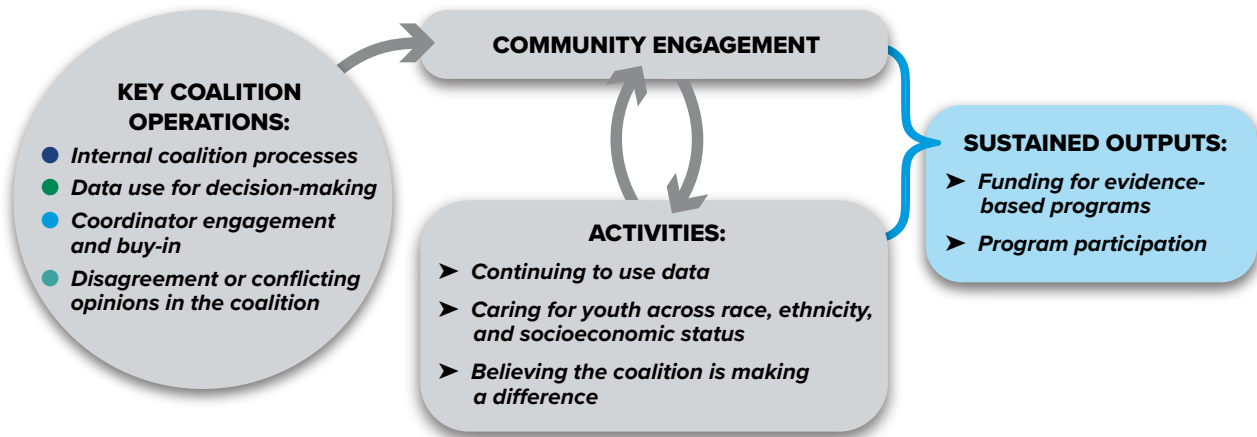
Each of these activities and characteristics is considered important in the Evidence2Success logic model. When we measured levels of each one during interviews and at the same time as the community engagement variables, we found that different types of community engagement were associated with each characteristic. See the item text and methodology in [Table 3](#) and [Table 17](#) and the results in [Table 19](#) (in Appendix). Specifically:

- **Community engagement and using data over time appear to reinforce each other.** That is, using data can be a way to draw together a broad cross-section of people and organizations to make decisions about the health and well-being of youth and families.
- **Higher levels of community input and racial inclusiveness and participation related to higher reports of perceived improvement within the community over the last year due to coalition efforts.** Areas of improvement included the well-being of people in the community, involvement from people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and communications and planning between community members and public systems.
- **Higher levels of community voice, networking, and using data connected to higher levels of people and leaders caring for the well-being of young people across the ranges of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES).** Active involvement of community residents in decision-making about programs and activities, using data to make decisions, and broadly sharing information across a connected group of people and organizations linked with increased levels of care for all demographics of the community's youth.

In summary, engaging your community in planning, implementing, evaluating, and making decisions about youth programs seems to relate to reports of community improvement and caring for youth that come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Data use and community engagement appear to reinforce each other and build on each other.

Early Community Engagement Supported Future Funding and Program Participation

Now we look at the last stage: how earlier community engagement and other capabilities relate to later coalition success. We look specifically at the **amount of funding received** and the **number of participants involved in evidence-based programs (EBPs)** six years after each community began using the tools of Evidence2Success.



We see a consistent story: the **earlier levels and quality** of many activities and characteristics of community engagement **predict later levels** of funds received and program participation three years later. For description of measures, see [Table 20](#); for results, see [Table 21](#) (in Appendix). Specifically, Year 3 levels of the following activities and characteristics of community engagement predicted Year 6 funding and program participation:

- Community voice, broad cross-sector engagement, and networking
- Data use for decision-making
- Care for youth across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status

In summary, attention to elevating community voice and other dimensions of community engagement; using data for decisions; and caring for youth across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status pays off in sustainability for coalitions focused on youth and family well-being.

An Insider's View: Important Considerations When Building a Coalition to Facilitate Your Community Change Effort

At this point, you might be thinking, “This sounds great, but how can I get this coalition building approach to work in my community? How can I turn our community work, whether it’s already collaborative or not, into one that supports and facilitates broad cross-sector community engagement?”

Getting sustained, active participation is a **complex undertaking** that requires different activities and strategies depending on whom you are trying to reach over the life of the effort. According to practitioners, it also requires, first and foremost, trust. If trust is not attended to and nurtured, engagement efforts may falter. One coalition member observed, “These aren’t one-and-done efforts; they are ongoing and must grow deep if you are going to penetrate to depths needed to achieve the desired outcomes across the broader community.” See the second Action Guide in this series for a comprehensive section on building and maintaining trust. Building trust as a foundation of community engagement is woven throughout the recommendations that follow.

“

One of the biggest themes is trust.

—Rebecca Boxx, Providence Children and Youth Cabinet, Rhode Island

”

We’ve learned that establishing and maintaining a coalition enhanced success and had explicit benefits. This section is designed to help you reflect on the key benefits and lessons learned in Evidence2Success communities and to prompt you to consider **how they apply to your situation in your community**. We offer three themes that give an insider’s look at how engagement was fostered:

- [Reflect on Your Community’s Historical and Current Context for What May Impact Success.](#)
- [Take a Holistic Approach to Engaging and Supporting Continued Community Involvement.](#)
- [Draw On and Validate Data from and with the Community.](#)

In addition to sharing insights from communities that implemented the tools, activities, and strategies of Evidence2Success, we pose questions to help you think through the details of engaging more of your local community in decisions affecting youth.

Reflect on Your Community’s Historical and Current Context for What May Impact Success.

In order to build a comprehensive community collaboration, you must understand the context in which the coalition will be established. **What could support, delay, or discourage engagement?**

Understanding the context entails knowing your community’s history of success and readiness and discovering what situations, conditions, or trusted community members may motivate individuals and organizations **to get involved** in community change efforts.

Identify and Invest in the Current Moment

Our evaluation documented the motivation for change in every Evidence2Success community. In some communities, there was a precipitating event; in others, there was an unrelenting situation that finally reached a critical point, pushing community members and leaders to call for change, get involved, and fund a dedicated, paid, full-time coordinator. Essential questions to ask include:

- ☐ What makes my community open to change and ready **right now**? Is there an identifiable event or an accumulation of factors that are motivating openness? If so, how can we capitalize accordingly?
- ☐ Who is/are emerging as the **leader(s) or champion(s)**? Who can coordinate the effort, and how will we assure they can commit the necessary time and effort to the role?
- ☐ How can a focus on these culminating factors be used to bring different sectors of the community together to progress **toward a shared goal**?

In Providence, several events coalesced to motivate change. Initially, when state budgets shifted, cuts had to be made. Then, when the mayor learned about competing federal grant applications for the City of Providence, he brought all the parties into one room, directing representatives from the various public systems and community organizations to work together toward a solution. Though the mayor left office soon after, the cross-sector engagement and collaboration persisted and took root, with the coordinator coming from those in attendance with the initial group.

In Kearns and Salt Lake County, a fatal shooting involving teens from Kearns High School resulted in the death of one teen and the incarceration of another. Initial change efforts were not yet focused on the long term. Later, when the mayor promoted a county-wide health initiative called “The Future We Choose in Kearns,” it involved the community in planning, and Evidence2Success and its coalition became core to the work, with a paid coordinator designated within the county government. One participant active in those planning sessions recalled, “We talked more about the children, the kids, and Evidence2Success covered all of that. There were folks that said, ‘Yes, we want to make this happen.’ We were wanting to make sure that something positive was happening in our community.”

In Miami, the coordinator described a “perfect storm” of factors that brought people together to work on youth priorities. During the pandemic, youth who depended on public facilities lost outlets when schools, parks, and libraries shut down. Leaders recalled the stress among youth living in the densest public housing, compounded by the lack of space inside small apartment

A Readiness Assessment of stakeholders can help a coalition gauge the assets and barriers to proceeding with a community change effort.

[Here is the tool used by Evidence2Success coalitions.](#)

units. A spike in “senseless violence perpetrated by youth with guns” motivated collective action. Meanwhile, several community-based organizations were engaged in programming for youth; two groups had an anti-violence focus; and a coalition focused on youth well-being. Still, no one table focused on prevention. According to Coordinator Misty Brown, “When Evidence2Success showed up on the scene, it brought all kinds of stakeholders to one table. It became an answer to try to address a desperate situation.”

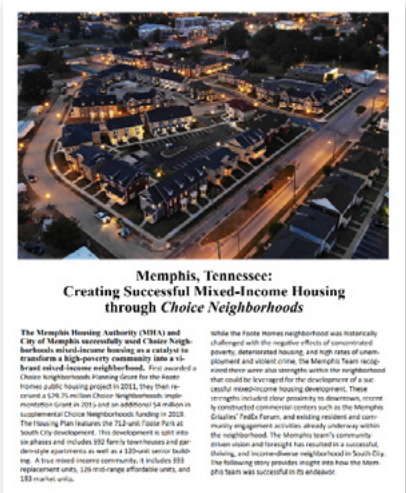
Look to Previous Community-Wide Success

Our evaluation looked at prior success with community change efforts in the six communities. Over time, having a history of some success with prior change efforts connected to higher ratings of community engagement, including broad cross-sector support and involvement, two years later. See [Table 22](#) and [Table 23](#) (in Appendix). With your community in mind, consider these key questions:

- ❑ How can the existing civic infrastructure support engagement in the current community engagement effort? Is there an existing collaboration that is working on these or similar issues?
- ❑ What individuals or organizations have been impactful leaders in work affecting youth and families in our community?
- ❑ Thinking expansively about other successful efforts in our community, what strategies worked to get people to the table? What helped them commit to the effort and stay engaged? Which individuals, organizations, and other parts of the community were involved and heard from? Which ones were not but should be?
- ❑ How were obstacles to progress previously addressed? How can this effort benefit from those experiences?

Four out of six Evidence2Success coalitions connected to existing city or governmental infrastructure.

- **Providence** and **Kearns and Salt Lake County** each built on a foundation of capacities gained through Making Connections grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- **In Memphis**, the Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis (WFGM) had been a partner with the City of Memphis and the Memphis Housing Authority (MHA) for a Choice Neighborhood grant to redevelop the South City neighborhood’s crumbling public Foote Homes and to provide services to families. That project brought together partners working in different spheres around a common goal: building a community that people would want to return to and live in. According to Patria Johnson, focusing on a single target exemplified for partners that “if we all pulled resources together, we would have a greater impact.” When WFGM expanded their work toward



As a key partner in Memphis's Choice Neighborhoods planning process, Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis was well-positioned to lead coalition-based community change work. [Citation](#)

a more holistic continuum of care that included evidence-based programs for youth, they were able to leverage partnerships through Choice Neighborhoods into the Evidence2Success coalition.

- See **How They Did It**, below, to find out how **Selma and Dallas County** leveraged existing infrastructure.

All communities invested in a paid coordinator to plan, manage, and lead the overall effort. The paid coordinator does not conduct all the activities needed to move the collaborative change effort toward the goals and objectives—that is the work of the coalition. Instead, the paid coordinator kept track of all the details, milestones, and processes related to work carried out by many individuals and subgroups. This complex work required an employed individual who could skillfully facilitate meetings and manage tasks and timelines to move the whole effort forward. One coalition member called coordinators “the secret sauce” but cautioned that a coordinator whose time is split among competing priorities or programs can hamper community engagement if consistency falters.

Understand How Your Community Context May Impact Change Efforts

Though significant improvement occurred across all types of communities, those with higher levels of poverty and those with a higher percentage of families of color reached lower levels of engagement one to two years after starting the Evidence2Success work. See [Table 22](#) and [Table 23](#) (in Appendix). Why the difference between communities? Possible explanations may be related to other differences, like levels of existing and historical trust; access to services and resources; decision-making practices; and employment hours and how they related to scheduled community engagement activities. Essential questions to ask include:

- ☐ What hours and days of the week allow for greater participation from residents, including adults or youth (e.g., evening sessions that accommodate inflexible daytime work hours)? What activities or responsibilities bear consideration that may influence resident participation (e.g., Wednesday Bible study)?
- ☐ What does my community’s history of disadvantage, discrimination, disinvestment, or systemic racism look like? How do these factors show up in the services and resources that residents, especially youth and families, have access to?
- ☐ What activities and messengers in my community promote trust? Which ones sow distrust?
- ☐ What groups have been historically marginalized or minoritized in this community? How have demographics shifted, and what has been the impact on community identity and well-being?

The Evidence2Success communities with the highest levels of poverty and those with a higher proportion of residents of color took more time to assemble and orient their coalition than communities with lower levels of poverty and higher proportions of White residents.

How They Did It

Reimagining Infrastructure: Moving from Detention to Prevention in Selma and Dallas County, Alabama

Dallas County ranked #1 in Alabama for violent juvenile crime in 2005. Judge Robert Armstrong had run on a progressive platform to defeat a three-term incumbent district judge. Once elected, he noticed a disturbing trend: the same young, mostly Black offenders were returning to the Dallas County courtroom. He responded by leveraging existing infrastructure: the [Children's Policy Council \(CPC\)](#). Established by Alabama law, county-level CPCs support children and families involved with the juvenile justice system. Taking inspiration from another county, Dallas County courts decided to convene a cross-sector coalition to develop evidence-based solutions through its CPC.

the Division of Youth Services called out the judge, urging diversion over detention and supplying funds to make the shift.

Probation Officer Astrid Craig became the coalition coordinator. “We saw that detention was not a solution to crime... Instead we asked, ‘How can we help the families?’” she said.

Probation officers began to find and utilize existing community-based options—including therapy, mentoring, after-school, and sports programs, and jobs for families—and prioritize them or residential programs before detention. The coalition began to collect youth data and install evidence-based programs. They sought additional funding. Then, courts began to partner with schools for referrals before kids landed in court.

When Judge Armstrong retired 17 years later, significant change had occurred. By 2021, the shift to diversion had resulted in a **71% decrease in the DYS commitment rate from 2005**. Violent crime has decreased significantly—by nearly 90% among juveniles, and over 70% overall. The coalition-based work transitioned in 2021 out of the county courts into a nonprofit organization called the [Dallas County System of Services](#), which acts as a hub for youth and family services across Dallas County.



Probation staff, including Astrid Craig (lower left), began to seek solutions with the schools and other community-based organizations.



Prevention programs that supported families offered a therapeutic alternative to automatic detention.

Change took time. When 97 Dallas County youth were sentenced to juvenile detention in a single year,

DALLAS COUNTY SYSTEM OF SERVICES

DALLAS COUNTY SYSTEM OF SERVICES

In Memphis, from the start, the finance lead had reiterated that change in Memphis would take time. Shante K. Avant had worked at the Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis (WFGM) for over 15 years and had seen that this kind of work could be slow, even in the best of times. Then, when COVID-19 shut down schools in 2020, the Evidence2Success coalition’s focus shifted to meeting the basic needs of children in the most impoverished neighborhoods, including South City. The school-based coordinator assisted with issues like moving the onsite school lunch program to an external food distribution program for families. Avant and the WFGM focused on providing information about and advocacy for needed resources, like access to food and other supports, and to Wi-Fi at home and laptops for students in Memphis Shelby County Schools, including in South City. When the whole world was in lockdown, the leaders in Memphis had to dig even deeper for families lacking basic access to nutrition and education, those living in the lowest income neighborhoods—all more likely to be families of color.



Normal operations shifted during the pandemic to meet basic needs like feeding families in the most impoverished neighborhoods.

Two coalitions piloted tools that can help build a shared awareness—the [Racial Equity Impact Analysis](#) tool and the [Backmapping](#) tool—that asked participants to consider their community’s history with a focus on the impact of race-based policies. In one community, the use of the tools shined a light on “root causes.” According to one respondent, “If you are looking at making a change for a community, you have to look at root causes and barriers. Are there policies and structures that inhibit people’s ability to be successful? If you’re not looking, you are not helping the issues.” Others noted that the use of the tools helped them see how children were impacted as well as created a better understanding of what residents were dealing with.

A coalition coordinator who anticipates these barriers and coordinates this work can design an engagement plan, and an associated timeline, that addresses the barriers specific to their community. This work may include trial and error and takes time and stick-with-it persistence through the inevitable ups and downs of coalition work.

Take a Holistic Approach to Engaging and Supporting Continued Community Involvement.

We have mentioned coalition coordinators as being key for community engagement work. Our evaluation ([Key Benefit 3](#)) suggests that depth and breadth of community engagement activities may be important to building and sustaining community engagement in decision-making. As a result, we suggest that communities take a holistic engagement approach that: (1) recognizes and addresses the multidimensional nature of community, (2) builds a culture of participation and accountability, (3) creates an environment that encourages the sharing of experiences and expertise, (4) recognizes and incentivizes participation, and (5) anticipates turnover and transitions. In each of the six communities, the **coalition coordinator** coordinated and facilitated these activities of engagement. See [Appendix pages 55 and 56](#) for a list of “Skills and Qualities of a Successful Coordinator” from the Evidence2Success community change work.

Recognize and Address the Multidimensional Nature of Community

A community is not just one group or set of individuals. Many different people—from those who live there to those who work and learn there—comprise a community. Their diverse perspectives can bring a greater understanding of problems and possible solutions. Essential questions to consider include:

- ❑ What is the usual understanding of community here? How will this effort communicate its commitment to a cross-sector engagement approach that includes community residents—those served by public systems?
- ❑ How will we ensure that we are reaching out to, listening to, and considering all who have a stake in local youth well-being, including youth themselves?
- ❑ Which organizations and agencies in our community fall into different sectors? Who are the contacts, and how will we get in touch with them?
- ❑ What will outreach to different sectors look like? How can the coordinator facilitate conversations about which messengers make the best sense for reaching out to people in the various sectors?
- ❑ How will we engage residents in this effort? What will encourage or prevent community resident participation, and how will we attend to those factors in ways that facilitate participation? How do we identify, recruit, and encourage community residents to participate (i.e., using a “key-informant” recruitment process)?

At least four Evidence2Success communities engaged young people when making decisions about community priorities and programming.

In Mobile, the organizational lead had roots in community organizing at the neighborhood level, in barbershops, in churches, and around kitchen tables. When they shifted their focus to neighborhoods where they did not have deep community connections, they invited community leaders to the table without organizing at the resident level. The effort stalled. According to community leader Jeremiah Newell, “The challenge happened because the effort was not authentically led from the neighborhoods. We lacked the infrastructure between neighbors and those reps.” Of a new effort underway in Mobile, Newell says, “We’re starting now with organizing and with youth. We’re back to not skipping that step.”



Mobile's recent efforts are returning to its roots in organizing and with youth.

All Evidence2Success communities were encouraged to use the [Stakeholder Analysis tool](#) to assure a thorough cross-sector recruitment effort and assess readiness to engage in a community prevention effort. The tool is a step-by-step guide with accompanying worksheets that help organize notes and track progress, and sample scripts that can facilitate outreach conversations with stakeholders. These tools were used by coalition coordinators and leaders to make sure they were considering participation from a broad range of organizations and individuals, including residents of the focus neighborhoods.

In Miami, Coordinator Misty Brown inherited an already-established coalition from two previous coordinators. Using the stakeholder analysis, she recognized that the faith community—an influential sector “not typically heard from”—was missing from the coalition. She reached out and involved a local pastor, who joined the representatives from other sectors already at the table. This was the first of many times she and coalition Finance Lead Andrew Britton used the tool. “We used it at key points—when there was a fallout, once we selected a program, when we were ready to issue a Request for Proposals, when we were elevating the implementation work... We were constantly reevaluating the coalition to ensure you have the right members for the right activities,” said Brown.

Build a Culture of Participation and Accountability

Aligning many voices and perspectives behind a single purpose can be both galvanizing and challenging. Essential questions to ask include:

- ☐ What expectations are important to put in place for our coalition to function productively and reliably?
- ☐ How can we ensure that the people working on these issues are connected and working together?
- ☐ What tools and procedures will we use to promote broad participation in our coalition?
- ☐ What resources can we use to help monitor inclusivity and manage dynamics at meetings?
- ☐ What guardrails will we put in place to ensure that participants, especially those from previously disenfranchised groups, will have an opportunity to share ideas and that their feedback will be listened to?

In Miami, a diverse group of individuals who believed the work was “worth their time and effort” joined the coalition. It came to light that a handful of members thought that by participating in the coalition, they might be able to receive funding through the coalition. When that false expectation was quashed, some disgruntled members fell away. As one leader reflected later about what participation means and doesn’t mean, “You need to be transparent from the very beginning.”

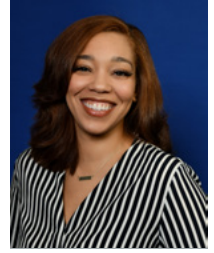
All six communities used the [Milestones and Benchmarks](#) tool to guide their work. For example:

- **In Selma and Dallas County**, Coordinator Astrid Craig found that the Milestones and Benchmarks offered “a very standardized process with detailed checklists that reminded you not to forget your next moves, like remembering to get a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#).”
- **In Memphis**, the tool helped a new coordinator, Amber Moore, transition into the role after a yearlong vacancy. Using the tool meant that she “didn’t have to recreate the wheel...and also helped me understand the history of what happened in Memphis beforehand.” The method of assigning to each milestone and benchmark a percent achieved out of 100% every six months was a helpful way both to



Coordinator Astrid Craig, Selma and Dallas County

see progress, measure fidelity to the process, and be able to pivot for the next time. In Moore's experience, "It's easy to get pulled in different directions quickly and move on, but the Milestones and Benchmarks help promote reflection and accountability."



Coordinator Amber Moore, Memphis

THE WOMEN'S FOUNDATION
FOR A GREATER MEMPHIS

All six communities were encouraged to develop a [Conflict of Interest](#) policy and protocol to ensure that the community's best interests were at the core of financial and other related decisions, such as the distribution of financial resources. In one community, that policy helped make sure that a local community-based organization instead of the largest social service provider in the state received the contract to hold the position of neighborhood coordinator and convener.

All six communities worked with an external coach who functioned both as a thought partner who was well-versed in an array of community engagement strategies and as an accountability partner whose check-ins helped assure continued forward movement.

Create an Environment That Encourages the Sharing of Different Perspectives and Ideas

It is possible that bringing together individuals from different community sectors, organizations, and levels of the traditional power and decision-making hierarchy will stimulate differences of opinion and disagreements within coalition operations. Yet, our evaluation suggests that it is also possible, and **perhaps even productive**, for individuals to share differences of opinion and integrate and address those differences respectfully. As we saw in Key Benefit 3, disagreements or differences of opinions within coalitions predicted higher levels of community residents speaking up for youth programs, more sectors participating in the coalition, and more organizations collaborating for youth well-being one year later. See [Table 22](#) and [Table 23](#) (in Appendix). Essential questions to consider include:

- ☐ What is my organization's or coordinator's level of comfort and skill with handling discussions among diverse members? How will we strengthen our ability to handle difficult conversations?
- ☐ Have we invited people to join our collaborative change effort who possess a range of perspectives and points of view and who are committed to youth?
- ☐ What procedures and processes will we put in place to assure that different ideas and voices are heard and that disagreements and differences of opinion can be addressed fairly and productively? Who will assure that these procedures and processes are introduced, committed to, and adhered to?
- ☐ What materials will we use with coalition members to promote shared responsibility of creating an inclusive environment for discussion and decision-making?

In Mobile, early on, the coalition **established a set of shared norms and values** that included engaging with mutual respect along the lines of difference. Coalition members regularly referred back to the norms during meetings, and this helped them navigate multiple points of view during discussions. In one consequential meeting, the agreed-upon values and norms provided a framework for robust and respectful deliberations about which risk and protective factors to prioritize. The coalition made its decisions having first given space to varying perspectives among members.

In Providence, the coordinator came from a school resource background and had to learn critical facilitation skills to coordinate successfully. “Facilitation is not teaching, or presenting, or managing. It’s a unique skill set” that includes understanding goals, drawing out all voices, staying results-focused while prioritizing process, and listening a lot. What helped her get better? “Good coaching, observing other skillful facilitators, and using annotated agendas. Also, doing badly and getting better from learning from my mistakes.”

All communities were encouraged to use a formal consensus-building process called the [gradients of agreement](#). This process facilitated the sharing of, listening to, and considering of each person’s perspective as decisions were being made. The back-and-forth process of sharing ideas, offering slightly different solutions, voicing one’s degree of agreement with the proposed solutions, and cycling through this process until strong agreement was achieved actively engaged everyone in the decision-making process and made sure all voices were heard equally.

All communities were encouraged to use the [Meeting Checkup](#) to assess and improve the interpersonal dynamics, meeting productivity, diversity of perspectives, and inclusion present in meetings based on feedback from participants. Specifically, this tool helped three communities identify and address possible imbalances in representation and contribution that were suggested by the collected data.

How They Did It

A Zone for Fostering Better Representation in Kearns and Salt Lake County, Utah

Maintaining diverse engagement in the Kearns coalition was challenging. The Hispanic population grew from just over one tenth of the population to over one third in the prior 20 years, yet there was no Hispanic or Latino representation on the coalition. This gap was pointed out initially with Meeting Checkup data and then in the annual coalition survey results. The coalition selected this topic as an area for growth and action planning at a data review meeting. Presenting and discussing the reality of the collected data helped create a productive, no-judgement, problem-solving zone in which the coalition created a plan to improve representation and involvement.

In the end, addressing this gap required pointed outreach and an understanding of the local minoritized experience.

Efforts to reach out resulted in cautious participation by people of color who would pull back if they heard or saw something of concern. Charles Henderson, the only Black coalition member on a Community Board led out of County Youth Services, attributed this to “a minority community kind of wary of government” due to promises historically made that were not always kept. The Board’s refrain was to prioritize transparency in sharing reports and data and to invite the public as much as possible: “We didn’t want anybody to assume anything,” Henderson said. “Transparency in leadership must transcend all entities involved, especially government and municipal resource suppliers, agencies, etc.”

Kearns aims to reverse troubling trends affecting its teens



(JENNIFER HENDERSON) | The Salt Lake Tribune | JENNIFER HENDERSON, left, Health Education Coordinator with the prevention coalition in Kearns, speaks with local residents Heidi Castillo, Marisol Garcia and Esther Estrada, from center left, about programs to help reduce vaping and alcohol use among youth during a health fair at the Kearns Community Center on Tuesday, March 5, 2024.

By Heather May | Special to The Tribune | May 3, 2024, 7:00 a.m. | Updated: May 5, 2024, 3:30 p.m.

The Kearns coalition prioritized outreach to Hispanic residents at events in the community.

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Recognize and Incentivize Participation

No matter which sector participants come from, they likely have many demands on their time and energy already, regardless of how important they deem the effort. Participants may be motivated and even enabled differently to continue involvement. Essential questions to consider include:

- ☐ What will help different sectors maintain engagement in the work over time?
- ☐ Have we asked participants, including residents, what they need in order to continue offering their expertise?

In Memphis, training and resource opportunities at coalition meetings were incentives for participation. Coalition members valued the reinforcement of core values and the practical skill development these opportunities presented. For example, racial equity training that taught participants to use a process called Backmapping attracted attendance beyond active coalition members and organizations. Not only did it give the current coalition language to center racial equity when setting priorities; it also served as an introduction to the work for those who had been curious to learn more about it.

In Kearns and Salt Lake County, the coalition conveyed its appreciation for the time that members spent on coalition work. Volunteers received certificates of appreciation, and their photos were taken and shared. The local high school newspaper, *The Cougar Claw*, also reinforced participation by featuring coalition members and activities.

How They Did It

Systematic, Authentic Engagement of Residents in Providence, Rhode Island



The CYC's resident Advisory Board provides expertise about current conditions and what works in their community.

In Providence, the Evidence2Success effort hosted public forums early on to share back data collected in the Youth Experience Survey and to get input from residents on priority concerns. When the residents' top priority

differed from a strict reading of the data, the organization learned to **listen to the residents**. Over time, the Children and Youth Council of Rhode Island (the CYC) began to identify the **residents as experts** based on their lived experience growing up and raising families in the local neighborhoods.

Language mattered: the CYC learned that calling for participation from "residents" over the more general "community" struck a chord. They found that a **resident advisory group** comprising only people with lived neighborhood experience was the most effective structure for gaining community input. They **recruited from program alumni**. They recognized the **value of resident expertise** and the time commitment to the advisory work. Unlike organizational members whose salaries covered meeting participation, participating residents had been volunteers. That changed with the new resident advisory group: the CYC paid members \$1,000 per year for coalition work that included activities like data collection in the community and participation in meetings where they shared their expert input. "We made sure that we had public systems, reps and leaders and all that sort of thing. But for us the heart of communities is residents."

Proactively Address Turnover and Transitions

There is one thing you can count on in coalition work: turnover will occur. Important questions to consider here include:

- ☐ How can we prepare for turnover of coalition members?
- ☐ What can we do to plan for smooth transitions between coalition leaders?
- ☐ What are other key positions prone to changes in leadership or personnel that we need to watch in order to track and proactively address?
- ☐ How can we make sure to keep relationships with organizations strong when there is turnover of key leaders or staff?
- ☐ How should we handle an unexpectedly long leadership vacancy, either in the coalition or in the broader community?

In Selma and Dallas County, the coordinator saw four superintendents in nine years, principal changes every year, a new mayor, and then a new judge. This has led her to recognize the importance of community input and youth voice as the core. Also, she has come to understand that being ready for new leadership and change in public systems is part of the work. She has learned to lean on resources and processes, like previously collected fund map data, to orient new leaders to the work. “You are continually readjusting while being careful not to overwhelm [newcomers],” she said. “It’s always a sales pitch. You have to continually have those conversations.”

In Memphis, it took a long time to fill the coordinator position after the first coordinator resigned during the pandemic. Coalition meetings ceased during this time without the personnel to make high-quality meetings and outreach happen. Patria Johnson of the Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis noted that they continued to recruit and interview, but “no one was the right fit.” The WFGM took the necessary time to make sure they hired someone who possessed the right skill set and was interested in serving the community in this capacity. The work is again growing and expanding with the right person in the role and with the continued support of experienced colleagues.

All communities established coalition operating procedures and expectations within the first few months of formation. Typical topics addressed included expectations about attendance, communication, ground rules for meetings, workload distribution, and agreement about how decisions would be made.

All coalitions took the time to summarize key decisions in written documents that could be shared broadly with the public and act as background/historical context training material when turnover or transitions occurred.

Draw On and Validate Data from and with the Community.

Evidence2Success coalitions use data as the bedrock of their work. Our evaluation suggests that using data as a core decision-making function is essential. Important questions to ask as you consider how your coalition may draw on data include:

- ☐ What kind of data about youth and family well-being do we have access to? Is there a youth survey in schools that can give insight into the particular needs of youth living in this community?
- ☐ Who has the skill set to help us obtain and effectively use the data to support our work?
- ☐ What other sources of data exist in our community, and which ones are relevant to the task at hand?
- ☐ Who is represented in the data? Are all relevant groups represented equally and fairly?
- ☐ What activities or processes will we use to make certain that the data is validated by the population surveyed and understood by a broad cross-section of community stakeholders?
- ☐ How will our coalition establish priorities after reviewing and understanding the data?
- ☐ How will we share the data with local stakeholders from different sectors of the community?

Our process evaluation documented that data was consistently drawn on to engage people, organizations, and leaders, and to make decisions, in the Evidence2Success work. Some of the data-focused work is highlighted in the [first Action Guide](#) in this series about the [Youth Experience Survey](#), but that is only one piece of data that supports community operations.

All six communities used youth survey data collected in local middle and high schools to drive coalition operations and decisions. This work is described in the [first Action Guide](#), on using data from youth surveys.

All six communities engaged partners with data expertise and a background in evaluation who assisted with data identification, collection, and processing. These local data partners have come from local universities, private evaluation firms, and nonprofit data-focused partnership organizations.

In Salt Lake and Kearns, the Data and Evaluation workgroup has used [SHARP](#) youth survey data, collected every two years, to review previously selected priorities. Group members have included school personnel, police officers, parents, and various youth providers. A previous member explained that “the data is used to determine whether or not we are actually effecting the change that we are setting out to achieve.” Coordinator Britta Watts noted that this year, between 10 and 12 people participated in reviewing data to plan priority programs for Kearns, with recommendations going back to the coalition’s board.



Residents reviewed youth survey data at data party events organized by the Kearns coalition.

CHARLES HENDERSON

In Providence, the coalition prioritized building the capacity of neighborhood residents and practitioners to enable equal participation and shared power in data-based decision-making. In meetings with the neighborhood-based coalition, which included residents, youth, and family program providers, the coordinators conducted interactive, data skills-building activities that taught attendees how to read the tables, charts, and statistics like frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. They discussed the data and what it seemed to suggest with attendees using small group activities. At a later, big meeting, the coordinators brought



CYC

Coordinators took the data to the neighborhoods where the data had been collected to listen to the residents' interpretation of the numbers.

everyone together—the residents from the neighborhoods who were served by public systems alongside high-level decision-makers from those public systems, including the school superintendent, the director of child welfare, principals, teachers, and youth program providers. They reviewed the data as a whole group before dividing into smaller groups for conversation that allowed individuals to share their perspectives and ideas about what they saw in the data. Reconvening as a large group, they made joint decisions about priorities or programs, using the [gradients of agreement](#) process. The coordinators then took the data and decisions “on the road” with more residents, giving them

confidence that coalition activities addressed and met their needs. Quickly communicating community-selected priorities when turnover among decision-makers occurs has helped sustain the work. Twelve years later, decisions that stemmed from everyone’s involvement have stood the test of time.

In three communities, coalition members conducted brief interviews with local organizations to learn where evidence-based programs were already operating in the community. This data collection provided an opportunity for purposeful, hands-on coalition work and allowed for a deeper understanding of evidence-based program implementation in their communities. The coalition then used the collected information to discuss gaps in programming and to propose recommendations to fill those gaps.

In Miami, the coalition conducted focus groups with high school students to better understand the data from the Florida Youth Survey. “It was absolutely worth it,” according to Coordinator Misty Brown. “The teens said a lot. Things we would think would be important to them weren’t. Adults thought drug use was a major problem, but it did not resonate with the students. But the lack of community cohesiveness did.” Brown and Finance Lead Andrew Britton also recalled that the focus groups alerted the coalition to the priority of mental health.

What's Next? Let's Think About Systems Integration

It's great that a single community can reap benefits when employing a community-engaged coalition process. But let's think more broadly than about just one community at a time. What would a systematic community-engaged decision-making process look like on a larger scale? What would it look like to have it more routinized or permanently embedded into regular decision-making procedures? What if cross-sector community engagement strategies expanded to **other communities** in the same metropolitan area, county, region, or state? What if cross-sector community engagement strategies expanded into **specific public systems**, such as child welfare, juvenile justice, public health, and public education? Let's take a moment to consider these possibilities.

“

You have to keep the work at a human level first, then the data and then the technical... It has to be fulfilling to keep people engaged.

—Misty Brown,
Miami Evidence2Success

”

Changing the way things have “always” operated is neither easy nor quick. A consequential incident or a charismatic leader can open a window of opportunity to rally broad support. The question is, how do you sustain, grow, and routinize that kind of broad cross-sector engagement once the moment has passed or the leader has moved on? What does it take? For which circumstances, decisions, and times or places does it make sense? How do you move beyond an initial area of focus to engage other neighborhoods or parts of the region in a cross-sector way?

Expand broad engagement beyond the initial neighborhood. Once the initial effort in an area takes root and members have had a chance to see that it works, and how, you may consider expanding a community engagement approach, perhaps with a coalition or using other community engagement tools, to other neighborhoods. This happened in Memphis: the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis initially focused work in one zip code, then expanded over time to surrounding zip codes. Their expansion strategy focused on supporting an evidence-based program operating in the public schools in those additional areas. Also, they built on a relationship with an existing partner with “boots on the ground” in the initial zip code to expand a successful evidence-based program for African American families there. According to leaders, “it's about seeing alignment, and positioning ourselves to move the work forward.”

Consider to what degree you plan to expand the existing coalition to include additional neighborhoods. How similar or different are their racial/ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics? How similar or different are their priorities? Whom will you need to reach out to and involve so that the voices from this expansion area are represented in your coalition? Will the work operate as one bigger coalition, possibly with subcommittees, or will there be a network of smaller, neighborhood-based coalitions? There is no single right answer. All strategies have pros and cons and can work with the right planning, execution, and communication.

Broadening the scope of this work is an exciting prospect. But before expanding preexisting decisions and well-oiled processes, it is important to remember that your success was built on broad cross-sector community engagement, including resident participation. Though it may not be necessary to replicate the entire process in every new neighborhood where you expand, those decisions need to be intentionally made in consultation with the new community members. Oftentimes, the existing collaborative will broaden and begin to divide into smaller neighborhood-based committees or workgroups, offering a way to quickly integrate new individuals and organizations into your new way of doing things. It also capitalizes on existing infrastructure, making the process more efficient, yet still allowing for true broad cross-sector community engagement, including resident engagement.

Integrate across systems. Consider encouraging the adoption of community engagement processes, tools, or decisions by an entire community-wide (or statewide) system.

In key partner organizations or systems, **at least one champion** is needed to keep the work moving forward. These relationships or connections must be **tended to continuously**; people who are taken for granted are apt to move on to other places where they are recognized and appreciated. Integration of broad cross-sector community engagement could take several forms when integrated across an entire system:

- There could be **specific program decisions or specific areas of policy** identified as requiring broad cross-sector input in an ongoing way.
- A **coalition or resident advisory council** could be enacted for priority setting within a public system, such as child welfare.
- Elected government leaders could use a **public participatory budgeting process** to make decisions about a certain funding stream. For example, city council districts could use a **neighborhood nomination system** and **gradients of agreement** in a public meeting to secure broad feedback on how financial resources are used.
- People working in public systems could consider **engagement activities that seek input** on social-emotional programs, or on a specific segment of programming. For example, the school system may have a guidance or advisory class at the middle and high school levels in which a **youth leadership, positive youth development, or mental health skills-building course** could fit; middle or elementary schools may want to replace their health curriculum with an **evidence-based curriculum that aligns with state academic standards** and has been shown to delay early experimentation with substance use; or elementary schools may want to integrate a **social and emotional skills curriculum** into the regular school day or during after-school activities.
- Neighborhood organizations or collaborations around schools could **engage community members to collect, interpret, and communicate data** in and from their own community that shines a light on concerns among residents from a thoroughly residential perspective.



When elected leaders take the budgeting process to constituents' neighborhoods, more residents and broader feedback can inform decision-making.

- Community organizations, government leaders, legislative bodies, and public systems could commit to using the **Backmapping tool** when onboarding new employees; the **Racial Equity Analysis tool** could be used in these settings when making policy or procedural decisions.

As you can see, there are many ways this work can be integrated within and across public systems, cities, communities, regions, or states.

Attend to roles. When leaders move on, the degree to which key engagement practices have been integrated in a system will become clear. A smooth transition can signal a level of success that may promote continued practice and stability in the effort. The new leader(s) continue to support these practices because they know they are the “right” ones for best serving their constituents.

Coalition leaders identify relationships with middle management as critical. These public servants tend to stay in their positions beyond the term of the top leaders. In one community, the individual who was a steady contact for over 12 years is now the director of data in child welfare, which has seen countless leadership changes. A coordinator from another community concurred that those middle management connections tend to endure over the long haul. Still, she cautions, it remains important to keep everyone informed and engaged, including those at the top levels.

Everyone involved in the effort has a role to play. This is a team effort—not a one-person job. In fact, it cannot be accomplished by one person leading, driving, and doing everything on their own. So, build out the local team and share the load. Define, communicate, and share the vision and its successes, and make sure that everyone involved is doing the same.

Examples of various roles include:

- A leader who gets others to rally and holds the vision;
- A designated coalition member who can serve as a back-up person—ready, willing, and able to fulfill the lead role as needed;
- Champions from inside and outside the effort who support the work, facilitate new opportunities, connect needs to resources, and promote the impact of the effort on individual and collective goals. Those from different workspaces can promote synergy and efficiency.

Make sure the work is community owned and driven. It takes many people rooted in the community and the work to accomplish, sustain, and grow it.

It takes time and continuous tending. Scaling programs and the broader effort means continuously attending to the values of inclusion and community-rootedness that got you started. As one coalition coordinator reflected, “Relationship building is the priority: we have to learn to get along.” So, bringing the work to another zip code means reaching out to and building trust with residents living in and sectors serving that area at that time—not just relying on past experiences. It means recognizing the power dynamics at play there. Efforts to expand have to stay grounded in what can be a complicated process that simply takes time. Connecting that effort to an emerging, larger network can then draw on tested experience and grow the power of the overall initiative.

After all, positive community change is a long game.



ANDERSON COELHO/ISTOCK.COM

When voices from the community are heard and integrated in planning, future developments can change in a community.

Conclusion

Remember those voices from the very start of this Action Guide? An aim of this was to give you an approach that begins to yield answers to questions like theirs—and the questions that members of *your* community raise about how to improve the well-being of the youth and families who live there.

As you grow in the approach and expand your efforts, you will find that the questions keep coming, the resident and sector partners shift, and the answers and solutions evolve. The deliberate, step-by-step approach introduced in this Action Guide equips you for the marathon of community change work in a way that steadily moves you toward a finish line while keeping you prepared for the next start.

Tools are available to you, as are the learnings from the Evidence2Success effort.

Now, it's up to you...where will you go from here?

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Glossary

BACKBONE ORGANIZATION

A separate organization with staff and specific skills that position it to create and manage an entire collective impact initiative, including coordinating with the other participating organizations and agencies within the initiative.[27]

BACKMAPPING TOOL

A method that begins with a racial disparity on a specific indicator (e.g., staff retention rate, program participation, health status, unemployment). Then, using race-informed research, the perspective of those most affected by the issue, and practitioner perspectives, users ask questions of the data and create a visual narrative with answers that yield insights into the causes at the root of the disparity. The process aligned with the Evidence2Success framework's key tenets of adopting a science-based approach to decision-making and embedding REEI principles in the work.[28][29]

COALITION

A voluntary, formal arrangement between groups or sectors of a community in which each group retains its identity but all agree to work together toward a common goal with the coalition serving as a catalyst for change (e.g., building a safe, healthy, and drug-free community).[30] In prevention, community coalitions are citizen driven and involve citizens at every step of the problem-solving process.[31]

COMMUNITY BOARD

The Evidence2Success Theory of Change identifies the Community Board as the cooperative governance structure responsible for leading the collaborative community change initiative focused on child and family well-being, as a coalition. Duties include creating and implementing an action plan, getting broader buy-in and engagement in ways that partner effectively across systems and planning bodies, and engaging those who live, work, play, and worship within an initial community of focus. The Community Board identifies governance and funding infrastructure and conducts strategic financing.

COMMUNITY CHANGE

Refers to shifts in system-wide and community-level policies, practices, and procedures within a county, city, or neighborhood that change how priorities and programs that affect youth and families are selected and funded. In Evidence2Success, prevention and early intervention strategies with evidence of effectiveness are elevated over remediation for reasons of cost and efficacy.[32]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A situation in which a person in a position of trust and authority with decision-making power has a professional or personal interest sufficient to raise the likelihood of or have the appearance of influencing that person's objective exercise of duties related to coalition. Generally, in Evidence2Success, a conflict of interest is a situation in which a decision-maker (such as the member of a Community Board, committee, or workgroup) has the potential to benefit personally from his or her decisions as a participant in Evidence2Success.[33] A [Conflict of Interest policy](#) is often used to make the conditions transparent and recommend appropriate follow-up action.

COORDINATOR

Known in the Evidence2Success communities as the “Site Coordinator,” this individual leads the Community Board through the five phases of Evidence2Success in both operations and decision-making. In this role, the coordinator facilitates workshop presentations of materials to the Community Board and workgroup activities. The coordinator supports the Community Board to identify priorities in youth data and to use that data to choose and work toward implementing appropriate evidence-based programs that promote youth and family well-being.[31]

EVIDENCE2SUCCESS FRAMEWORK

A service-delivery system that brings together stakeholders in systems and communities to select and integrate tested and effective programs into communities based on youth-reported risk and protective factors, and outcomes, developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and partners.[34]

EVIDENCE2SUCCESS LOGIC MODEL

This theoretical logic model, which drives the five-phased approach (see below), divides the Evidence2Success framework into five sections: Inputs, Activities, Short-term Outputs, Intermediate Outputs, and Outcomes. Using the inputs, communities perform the activities in the Framework, thereby producing short-term and intermediate outputs and, eventually, outcomes. The process and outcomes have a foundation of attention to racial and ethnic equity and inclusion that prioritizes reducing disparities.[35]

Evidence2Success Logic Model, 2018

PROCESS				OUTCOMES
Inputs	Activities	Short-term Outputs	Intermediate Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Casey Inputs<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Framework• Tools• Technical assistance• Initial program funding• Site Inputs<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site coordinator• Finance lead• Data partner• Convening structure• Management for fund pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Core trainings• Youth Survey• Strategic Financing• Identify joint priorities• Select appropriate tested, effective programs• Program training, implementation, monitoring• System trainings• Developing plan for scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased capacity to work together and make joint decisions• Changes in policies and procedures, including using data to make decisions• Greater confidence in prevention and tested, effective programs• Designated funding source for programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shared accountability• Public systems invest in and adopt prevention, prevention science• Greater availability of tested, effective programs implemented with fidelity and cultural competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short-term<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved child well-being for children in TEPs• Intermediate<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced risks• Enhanced protection• Improved system indicators• Long-term<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved youth outcomes• Reduced disparities for youth
Attention to increasing equity and inclusion, and reducing racial disparities in well-being				

FINANCE LEAD

The Finance Lead works with the Finance Coach to introduce and conduct the fund-mapping process with local funders, facilitates the finance workgroup’s planning and implementation, and acts as the point person for the community’s development of a strategic finance plan.[31]

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

A tool that provides an alternative to yes/no decision-making by allowing every participant in a group to register an individual response along a continuum.^[36] This tool supports democratic decision-making and enables members of a group to view nuances of support for a proposal. Responses range from 1 – 5, with one end of the scale (1) “Won’t Support As Is” to the other end (5) “Enthusiastic Support.” A facilitator assists a group to use the response data to adjust proposals under consideration to better meet participant preferences and needs. The goal is to get everyone to at least a 3 on the scale; ideally, all responses will be 4s and 5s. Also known as the consensus spectrum.



Annie E. Casey Foundation Evidence-based Practice Group. (n.d.). Gradients of Agreement [Slide show; Powerpoint]. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.).

MEETING CHECKUP

A tool developed to assist community coalitions focusing on the concerns of young individuals in monitoring attendance and demographics, and gaining valuable insights into the quality and effectiveness of their meetings aimed at identifying community priorities. It includes questions about racial and ethnic equity and inclusion (REEI), positive interpersonal dynamics, meeting productivity, and diversity in perspectives and ideas to assess these fundamental aspects of well-organized meetings.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

A non binding written agreement between two or more parties that describes the mutual goals, vision, and declaration of intent of the participants to actively proceed together toward those ends.

MILESTONES AND BENCHMARKS

A tool outlining the key steps and sub-steps of the Evidence2Success process in a checklist format that allows users to track percent progress toward completion and fidelity to the process. It is designed to assist the coordinator, working with the Community Board, to track several different streams of effort across five phases of work. In Evidence2Success, the Milestones and Benchmarks helped communities determine when to transition to the next phase. While sequential, actual implementation may vary due to local conditions, culture, or other contextual factors.^[37]

PROCESS EVALUATION

Determines whether program activities have been implemented as intended and resulted in certain outputs.^[38]

RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ANALYSIS TOOL

Provides guidelines for undertaking a systematic assessment of how different racial and ethnic groups have been or can be affected by existing or newly implemented policies, practices, programs, and systems. By examining critical questions regarding how institutional and structural conditions can differentially impact certain subgroups, the Community Board is better able to delineate how specific decisions and activities can result in unexpected consequences within and across community contexts.[\[28\]](#)[\[39\]](#)

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS TOOL

A resource for coalition-building and community prevention efforts, this tool helps engage the appropriate stakeholders and recruit suitable members for the coalition. It also assists in assessing the community's readiness for a successful prevention initiative and helps identify and address any lingering issues that could hinder readiness, thus enabling the coalition to proactively overcome barriers and ensure the success of its efforts.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TA) PROVIDER OR COACH

Trained and skilled individuals who provide a form of implementation support, often within a broader infrastructure, that individuals or organizations receive in order to improve operations and achieve high-quality delivery of evidence-based programs (EBPs).[\[40\]](#)[\[41\]](#)[\[42\]](#)[\[43\]](#) Typical TA services include: coaching, training, consultation, problem-solving, feedback, and assistance with program evaluation.[\[40\]](#)[\[44\]](#) TA is usually ongoing following an initial period of training.[\[45\]](#)

TA providers aim to build general and EBP-specific prevention capacity among program implementers while supporting the quality delivery, fidelity, and long-term sustainability of EBPs.[\[46\]](#)[\[47\]](#) Other areas of TA focus may include: administrative processes and fiscal management,[\[48\]](#) policy development,[\[49\]](#) and organizational development and systems change.[\[50\]](#)[\[51\]](#)[\[52\]](#)

TA providers come from different places and have various backgrounds, including:

- evidence-based program developers and those that disseminate evidence-based programs;
- statewide, university-affiliated, regional-level, or even national organizations, sometimes referred to as an intermediary or center of excellence;
- independent consultants.

Some individuals and organizations charge a fee to provide TA. Some provide training and TA for free. Other times TA is provided as part of a community-systems change grant program (for example, by a public or private funder).

Appendix

Table 1: Demographics of the Evidence2Success Communities and Neighborhoods Initially Involved in Evidence-Based Programming

<i>Note: The community information is presented in size order, from smallest community population (left-most column) to largest (right-most column).</i>	Smallest	Medium		Large		Largest
	Selma City, Dallas County, AL	Providence, Four-cluster,* RI	Mobile, Three-cluster,* AL	Memphis and Shelby County, South City, TN	Kearns, Salt Lake County, UT	Miami-Dade County, Liberty City, FL
Population						
Community	37,196	179,883	188,720	937,166	1,160,437	2,716,940
Focus Neighborhood	17,231	37,978	27,300	7,673	36,330	136,293
Primary Racial/Ethnic Groups						
Community (Percent)						
White	27.6	54.2	44.8	40.9	87.1	79.0
Black, African American, or African	70.7	16.0	50.6	54.3	2.2	17.1
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	1.2	43.0	2.6	6.6	18.8	69.4
Focus Neighborhood (Percent)						
White	17.0	11.3	n/a	12.5	66.6	23.6
Black, African American, or African	81.5	18.9	81.0	84.0	1.0	72.7
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	1.0	60.5	n/a	n/a	35.3	27.6
Financial Indicators						
Community						
Median family income	\$31,602	\$42,158	\$40,588	\$49,782	\$71,230	\$48,982
Poverty	31.4%	26.0%	22.0%	21.7%	9.0%	16.0%
Focus Neighborhood						
Median family income	\$24,820	\$31,231	n/a	\$11,350	\$61,924	\$21,539
Poverty	41.0%	35.5%	37.3%	64.6%	9.9%	22.8%

These data are reported from 2020, when the third cohort of two communities was under way and two other cohorts of a total of four communities had completed the start-up period with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

*Providence and Mobile designated clusters of three to four neighborhoods as their areas of focus.
n/a=Data not available; the geographic area is not a census-designated area, or the boundaries are not well defined such that archival data from the census, American Community Survey, or other city or county websites does not exist to the best of our knowledge.

Data was sourced for focus neighborhoods from site applications to Evidence2Success.

Community-level data came from the U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts> (accessed July 2020).

Table 2: Data Used in the Analysis

Method	Sample	Time Period
<i>Implementation Progress Interviews / Surveys</i>		
WAVE 1 / YEAR 1		
In-person Interview	Providence – Citywide Community Board members and Key Leaders	Sep – Dec 2012
Paper Survey	Providence – Local Community Board members	Jun – Jul 2013
In-person Interview	Dallas County - Community Board members and Key Leaders	May – Jun 2016
In-person Interview	Salt Lake County – Community Board members and Key Leaders	Jun – Jul 2016
In-person Interview	Mobile – Community Board members and Key Leaders	Sep – Nov 2016
In-person Interview	Memphis – Community Board members and Key Leaders	Nov – Jan 2019
Phone/web Interview	Miami Dade County – Community Board members and Key Leaders	Dec – Jan 2021
WAVE 2 / YEAR 2		
In-person Interview	Providence – Local Community and Regional Community Board members and Key Leaders	Mar – Jun 2014
In-person Interview	Dallas County - Community Board members	May – Jun 2017
In-person Interview	Salt Lake County – Community Board members	Jun – Jul 2017
In-person Interview	Mobile – Community Board members	Sep – Oct 2017
In-person Interview	Memphis – Community Board members	Jan – Feb 2020
Phone/web Interview	Miami Dade County – Community Board members	Feb – Mar 2022
WAVE 3 / YEAR 3		
In-person Interview	Providence – Local Community and Regional Community Board members	May – Jun 2015
In-person Interview	Dallas County - Community Board members and Key Leaders	May – Jun 2018
In-person Interview	Salt Lake County – Community Board members and Key Leaders	Jun – Aug 2018
In-person Interview	Mobile – Community Board members and Key Leaders	Sep – Nov 2018
In-person Interview	Memphis – Community Board members and Key Leaders	May – Jul 2021
<i>Interviews</i>		
Zoom Interview	Structured Conversations with Evidence2Success Community Leaders	Sept – Oct 2023

KEY BENEFIT 1

Table 3: Item Text and Response Options for Five Dimensions of Community Engagement in Implementation Progress Interviews (Community-Rated)^

Question Text	Response
Community Input	
There are forums or procedures in place that provide residents with an opportunity to voice their opinions about what programs need to be implemented in [ppt_region].	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
Residents review program outcomes and have decision-making power over what programs are implemented in [ppt_region] / [community].	
...There are forums or procedures in place that provide residents with an opportunity to review the performance of service providers and agencies in [ppt_region] / [region].	
Racial Inclusiveness and Participation	
Individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds are highly active in the planning and implementation of youth health and development programs and activities.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
Community Voice	
My community’s needs are considered when making decisions about youth programming in [REGION].	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
My community’s preferences are considered when making decisions about youth programming in [REGION].	
Active Collaboration	
Organizations in [REGION] participate in joint planning and decision making about issues related to youth health and development.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
Organizations in [REGION] share money or personnel when addressing issues related to youth health and development.	
Networking Collaboration	
Organizations in [REGION] work together to address youth health and development.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
Organizations in [REGION] participate in joint meetings to address youth health and development.	
There is a network of people concerned about youth health and development who stay in touch with each other.	

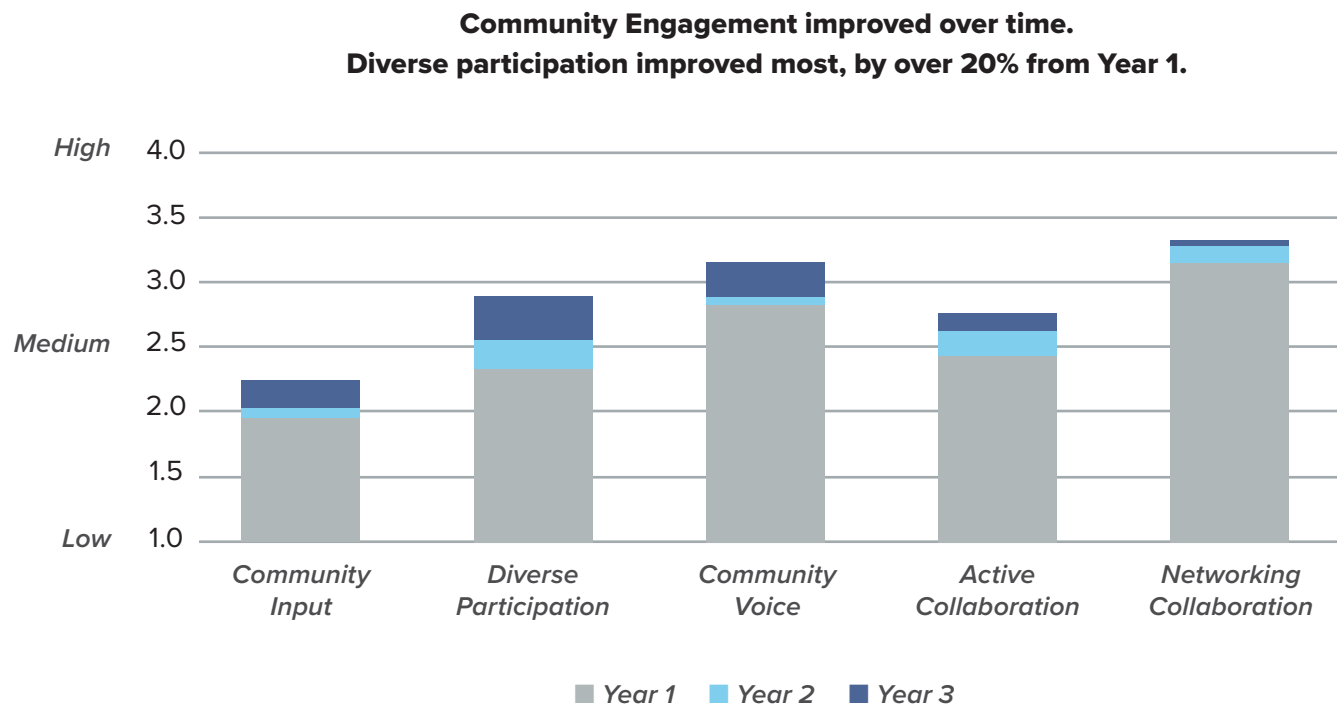
^Methodology: The Implementation Progress Interview was delivered to members of the Evidence2Success community board at annual intervals at Wave 1, Wave 2, and Wave 3. Interviews were conducted in person and over Zoom and responses were entered into Qualtrics, between 2014 and 2022. Questions for the Implementation Progress Interview were created by Penn State University project staff using the Evidence2Success materials for the Finance Planning meetings, and with feedback from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Social Development Research Group, and Mainspring Finance Coaching team. Slight variations in wording or the addition of questions occurred among cohorts.

Table 4: Five Measures of Community Engagement and Percent Improvement from Year 1 to Year 3

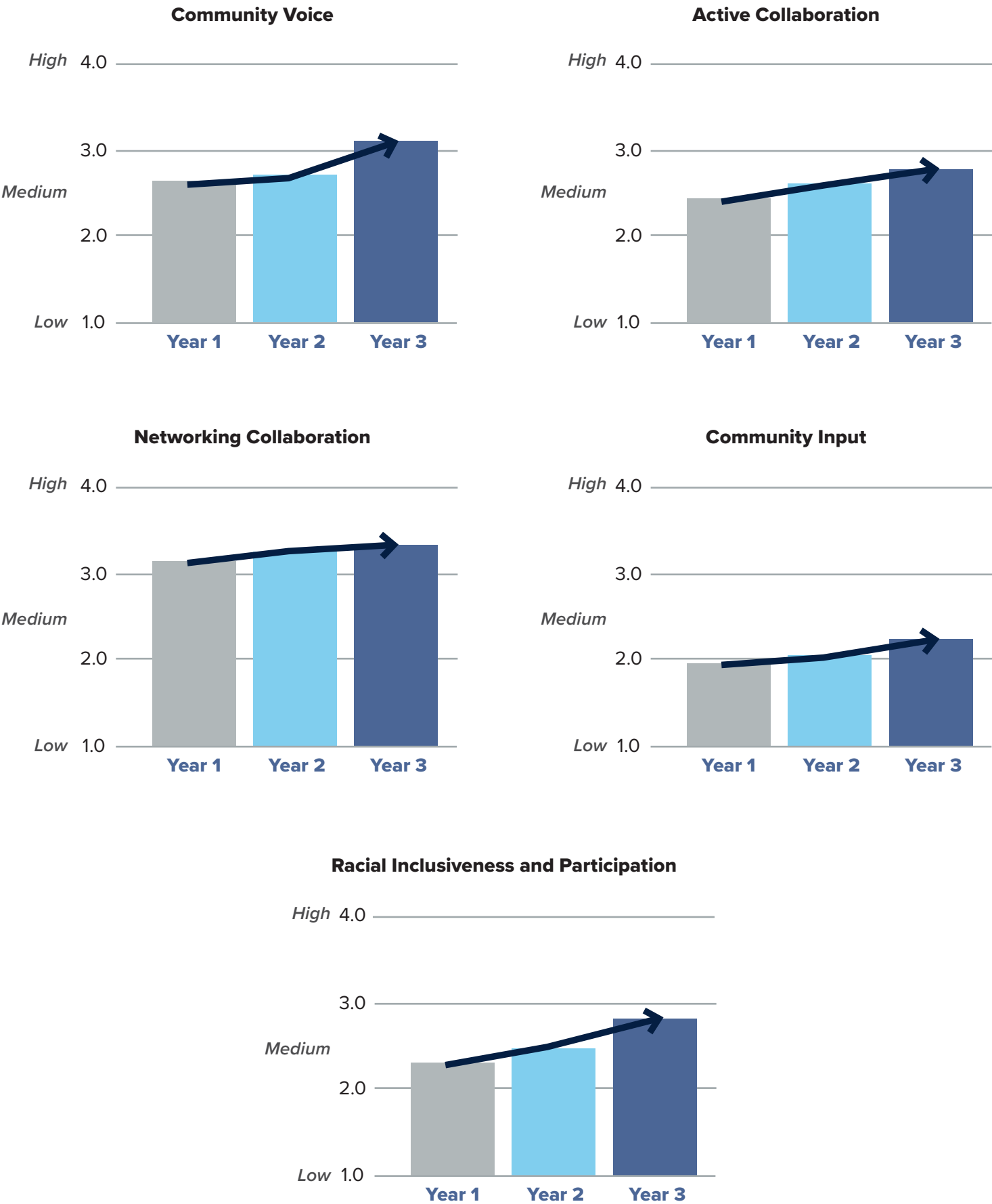
Scale	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Percent Improvement ^
Community Input	1.95	2.01	2.17	11.28%
Racial Inclusiveness and Participation	2.36	2.55	2.86	21.19%
Community Voice	2.80	2.85	3.10	10.71%
Active Collaboration	2.45	2.61	2.74	11.84%
Networking Collaboration	3.09	3.20	3.25	5.18%

^Note: By reporting on ‘percent improvement’ we are implicitly treating the survey items as having ratio or interval response scales. Strictly speaking, it might be the case that respondents interacted with the response options as an ordinal scale, but it is common practice in social science research and evaluation to make the assumption that scales like the ones featured in our survey can be analyzed as interval or ratio scales.

Figure 5: Changes in Means in Five Measures of Community Engagement, Year 1 to Year 3



Figures 6 – 10: Each Characteristic of Community Engagement Improved from Year 1 to Year 3



KEY BENEFIT 2

Table 11: Item Text and Response Options for Six Characteristics of Coalition Functioning in Implementation Progress Interviews (Community-Rated)^

Question Text	Response
Site Coordinator Engagement	
Enthusiasm and passion for the Evidence2Success mission.	1=Needs Work 2=Adequate 3=Strong 4=Very Strong
Understanding and knowledge of prevention and Evidence2Success.	
Collaborative Leadership	
...intentionally seeks out your views.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
...asks you to assist with specific tasks.	
...creates an environment where differences of opinion can be voiced.	
Opportunities for Participation	
Everyone is involved in the discussion, not just a few.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
The partnership uses the abilities of all, not just a few.	
Cohesion	
There is a sense of unity and cohesion in our partnership.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
There is a strong feeling of belonging in this partnership.	
Productivity	
There's a lot of time wasted because of inefficiencies.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
This is a highly efficient, work-oriented effort.	
Involved individuals work very hard.	

^Methodology: See [note](#) in Table 3 above.

Table 12: Measures of Coalition Operations and Means at Year 2 and Year 3

Scale	Year 2	Year 3
Site Coordinator Engagement	3.49	3.45
Collaborative Leadership	3.49	3.68
Opportunities for Participation	3.14	3.27
Cohesion	3.31	3.37
Productivity	3.47	3.24

Figure 13: The Community Board Was Rated Positively Repeatedly Over Time, by Many Types of People and Organizations, and in a Variety of Communities

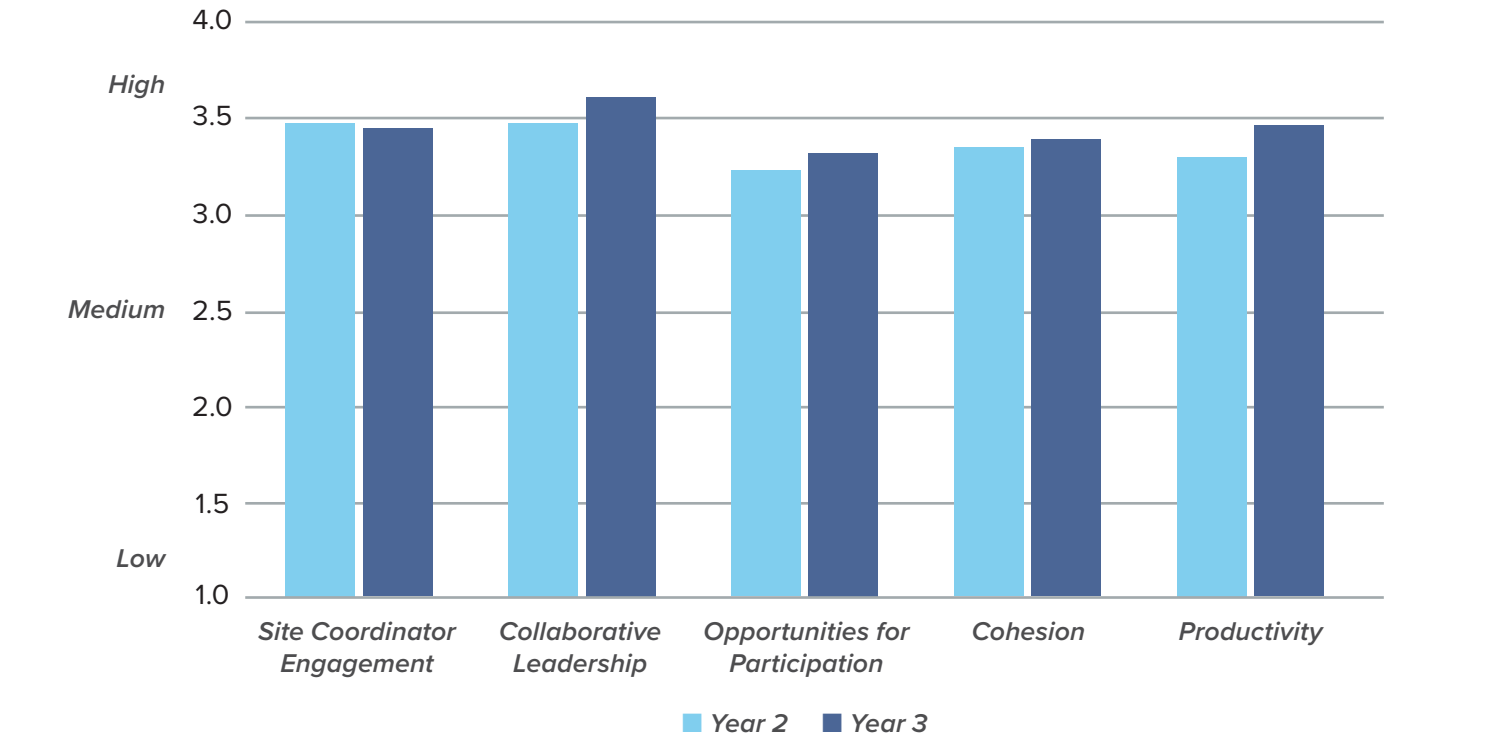
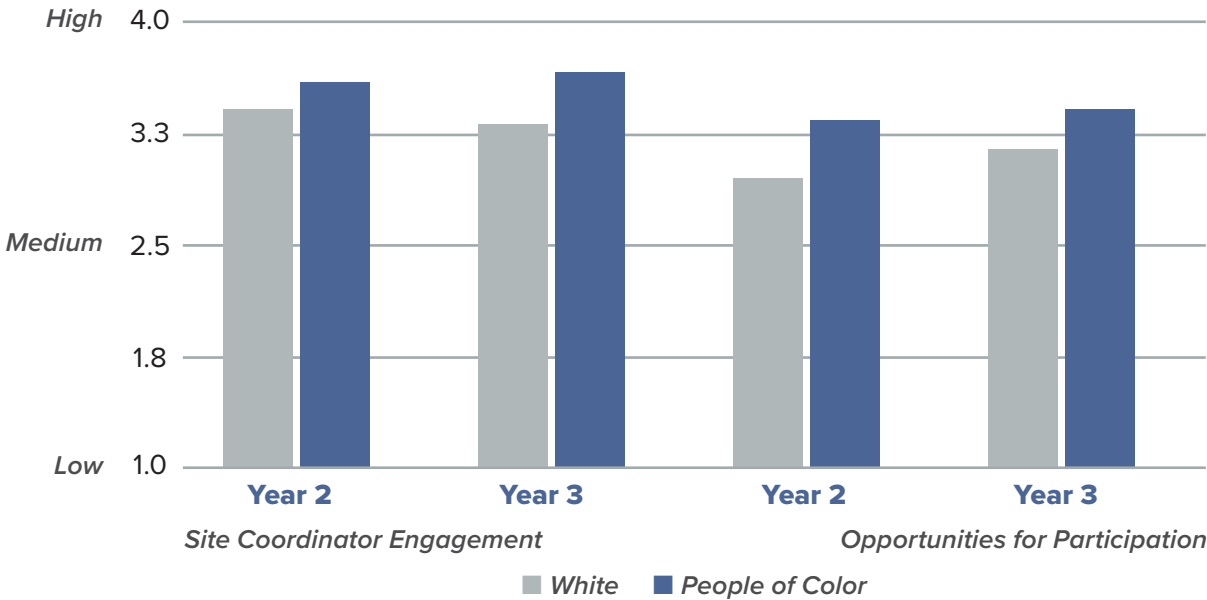


Table 14: Comparison of Mean Ratings of Coalition Functioning by Respondent Type: White Only Versus People of Color*

	Year 2			Year 3		
	White	People of Color	Difference in mean	White	People of Color	Difference in mean
Site Coordinator Engagement	3.41	3.58	0.17	3.29	3.65	0.36
Opportunities for Participation	2.93	3.35	0.42	3.13	3.38	0.25

*People of Color included all individuals who selected at least one of the following racial or ethnic identities: Black, African American, African, or Hispanic. Black, African American, African, Hispanic, and White were the only racial or ethnic identities contained in the Evidence2Succes interview participant sample.

Figure 15: People of Color Especially Reported That the Community Board Fostered an Inclusive Environment



KEY BENEFIT 3

Table 16: Timeline of Activities of Evidence2Success Coalitions

	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Year 1	Convene coalition Plan for and administer Youth Survey	Year 1 Interviews Administer Youth Survey	Conduct fund mapping	Conduct fund mapping Consider priorities
Year 2	Set and finalize priorities	Year 2 Interviews Share fund-mapping data	Select programs Conduct strategic finance planning	Conduct strategic finance planning
	--- Continue coalition operations ---			
Year 3	Start to implement, monitor, and evaluate programs Plan for Youth Survey	Year 3 Interviews Administer Youth Survey Implement, monitor, and evaluate programs	Implement, monitor, and evaluate programs	Implement, monitor, and evaluate programs Finalize 3 - 5 year Community Action Plan
	--- Continue coalition operations ---			
Year 4	Implement, monitor, and evaluate programs / Grants and fundraising / Revisit strategic finance plan --- Continue coalition operations ---			
Year 5	Implement, monitor, and evaluate programs / Grants and fundraising / Plan and administer Youth Survey --- Continue coalition operations ---			
Year 6	Implement, monitor, and evaluate programs / Grants and fundraising / Revisit strategic finance plan --- Continue coalition operations ---			

Note: In Evidence2Success, the coalition was called the Community Board.
Items in **gray text** were revisited in some communities and encouraged in all during years 4 through 6.

Table 17: Item Text and Response Options for Five Activities, Characteristics, and Outputs of Coalition Functioning in Implementation Progress Interviews (Community-Rated)^

Question Text	Response
Data Use	
As part of the annual Implementation Project Progress interview, Community Board members answered a series of questions about their knowledge and regularity of use and collection of data. We used their answers to determine to what degree they had adopted a prevention science framework for decision making. Stages are listed from zero (lowest level) to five (highest) at right.	Stages of Adoption: 0 = Little or no awareness of prevention 1 = Knows prevention terminology 2 = Decided to use data 3 = Collect survey and archival data 4 = Use data to identify priorities and programs 5 = Use data to continually evaluate programs for quality (CQI)
Perceived Community Improvement	
As a result of the Evidence2Success efforts, please tell me how much each of the following areas have changed in [REGION]. How has...	
...the quality of local services and programs changed?	1=A lot worse 2=A little worse 3=No change 4=A little better 5=Much better
...the well-being of people in our community changed?	
...peoples preparedness to work collectively on community issues changed?	
...involving people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in planning and decision-making changed?	
...school-community planning and communication changed?	
...planning and communication between juvenile justice and communities changed?	
...planning and communication between child welfare and communities changed?	
Care for Youth across a Variety of Races, Ethnicities, and Socio-Economic Status	
Leaders in this [REGION] share the responsibility for the health and development of children across different racial/ethnic & economic backgrounds.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
People in this [REGION] share the responsibility for the health and development of children across different racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds.	
Broad Cross-Sector Participation	
Next I'd like to ask you for your impressions on the support for and involvement in the Evidence2Success process. How involved would you say the following people are in the Evidence2Success process in [REGION/COMMUNITY]?	

Question Text		Response
Elected community leaders?		1=Not at all involved 2=A little involved 3=Somewhat involved 4=Very involved
Parents?		
School building teachers and staff?		
School district administrators?		
Social service providers?		
Students?		
Business leaders?		
Faith community leaders?		
Law enforcement?		
Media representatives?		
Recreation officials (e.g., city parks and rec, YMCA, or other similar leaders or staff)?		
Community volunteers?		
Other (unelected community leaders)?		
Child welfare officials?		
Juvenile justice officials?		
Other human service officials?		
Collaborative and Engaging Board		
The quality of coalition functioning was measured using a scale created with the responses from the following four scales:		
Scale	Question Text	Response
Collaborative Leadership Style Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the leadership in [city]/	...intentionally seeks out your views.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
	...asks you to assist with specific tasks.	
	...creates an environment where differences of opinion can be voiced.	
Experience at E2S Project Meetings How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing your experience at Evidence2Success project meetings?	There's a lot of time wasted because of inefficiencies.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
	This is a highly efficient, work-oriented effort.	
	Involved individuals work very hard	
Opportunities for Participation Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about your Community	Everyone involved in the discussion, not just a few.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
	The partnership uses the abilities of all, not just a few.	
Cohesion Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about your Community	There is a sense of unity and cohesion in our partnership.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
	There is a strong feeling of belonging in this partnership.	

^Methodology: See [note](#) in Table 3 above.

Table 18: Associations (Spearman Correlations) between Key Components of Coalition Operations and Types of Community Engagement

		Community Engagement Ratings, Year 3					
		Community Input	Diverse Participation	Community Voice	Broad Cross-Sector Participation	Active Collaboration	Networking
Coalition Operations, Year 2	Collaborative and Engaging Board	.60	.50	-.80	-.80	.20	-.20
	Data Use	.60	-.10	.80	1.00	.30	.70
	Site Coordinator Engagement	-.10	-.90	.40	.20	.70	.30
	Disagreements	-.10	-.10	.80	.80	.20	.70

Methodology: We looked at associations between ratings of coalition operations one year into implementing Evidence2Success with ratings of community engagement a year later, more than two years after the coalition began meeting in each community.

Correlations Key: This is used for each of the correlations tables (i.e., Tables 18, 19, 21, and 23).

Strength of Correlation	Range of Correlation	Interpretation
STRONG POSITIVE	.70 to 1.00	Items in this range have a strong positive relationship.
POSITIVE	.40 to .69	Items in this range have a positive relationship.
NEUTRAL	-.39 to .39	Items in the neutral range have no relationship.
NEGATIVE	-.69 to -.40	Items in this range have a negative relationship.
STRONG NEGATIVE	-1.00 to -.70	Items within this range have a strong negative relationship.

Table 19: Associations between Types of Community Engagement 2 to 3 Years after Beginning Evidence2Success with Continued Data Use, Perceived Community Improvement, and Care for Youth across a Variety of Races, Ethnicities, and Socioeconomic Statuses

	W3: Data Use	W3: Perceived Community Improvement	W3: Care for Youth Across Race, Ethnicity, and SES
W3: Community Input	.20	.90	.00
W3: Racial Inclusiveness and Participation	-.30	.60	.30
W3: Community Voice	1.00	.00	.80
W3: Broad Cross-Sector Participation	.80	.20	.40
W3: Active Collaboration	.50	.20	.10
W3: Networking	.90	.30	.60
W3: Data Use	---	-.10	.70

Note: See [Correlations Key](#) for interpretation of results.

Table 20: Community-Level Data on Money Leveraged and Program Participation, Year 6

Respondent	Item Name	Item Text	Response Options
Community	Money Leveraged Year 6	Total money leveraged for Year 6; 2018 for Cohort 1 and 2021 for Cohort 2	Open-ended Numeric
Community	Program Participation Year 6	Number of participants that attended at least one session for Year 6; 2018 for Cohort 1 and 2021 for Cohort 2	Open-ended Numeric

Table 21: Community Engagement, Data Use, and Care for Youth across Race, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Statuses Related to Funds Received Six Years after the Beginning of Evidence2Success and Number of Participants Engaged in Evidence-Based Programs

	Year 6: Funds Received	Year 6: Program Participation
W3: Community Input	-.20	-.32
W3: Racial Inclusiveness and Participation	.00	-.21
W3: Community Voice	.80	.74
W3: Active Collaboration	.00	.21
W3: Networking	.80	.74
W3: Data Use	.80	.74
W3: Perceived Community Improvement	-.40	-.63
W3: Care for Youth Across Race, Ethnicity, and SES	1.00	.95

Note: See [Correlations Key](#) for interpretation of results.

Other items that either were not strongly correlated or had a negative association with funds and program participation are still important dimensions of community engagement, though perhaps are not sufficiently strong on their own to relate to these outcomes. They may be understood as necessary background work and context that supports and promotes community voice, data use, networking collaboration and care for youth across racial, ethnic, and SES lines.

AN INSIDER’S VIEW

Table 22: Item Text, Response Options, and Sourcing for Variables in Table 23

Question Text	Response
<i>History of Success with Community Change</i>	
<i>The next few questions ask about resident involvement and/or investment in [REGION]. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each statement.</i>	
In the past two years, [REGION] has been successful at addressing social problems.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
[REGION] never seems to be able to accomplish much at all.	
<i>Census-reported Percent Black</i>	
The percent of individuals identifying as Black, African American, or African in the focus neighborhood as reported in the 2020 United States Census.	Numerical
<i>Census-reported Percent Poverty</i>	
The percent of individuals identifying as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin in the focus neighborhood as reported in the 2020 United States Census.	Numerical
<i>Disagreements</i>	
The Community Board disagrees about our goals and objectives.	1=Strongly Disagree 2=Somewhat Disagree 3=Somewhat Agree 4=Strongly Agree
This Community Board has a hard time resolving differences of opinion.	
<i>Respectful When Disagree</i>	
The Community Board is generally respectful when there are disagreements.	1=Strongly Agree 2=Somewhat Agree 3=Somewhat Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree

^Methodology: See [note](#) in Table 3 above.

Table 23: Associations among Variables Referenced in Insider’s View

	W3: Broad Cross-Sector Participation	W3: Racial Inclusiveness and Participation	W3: Community Voice	W3: Care for Youth Across Race, Ethnicity, and SES	W3: Networking	W3: Active Collaboration
W1: History of Success with Community Change	.40	-.40	.40	.10	.70	1.00
W1: Census-Reported Percent Poverty	-.40	.90	-.80	-.10	-.30	-.30
W1: Census-Reported Percent Black	-.40	.90	-.80	-.10	-.30	-.30
W2: Disagreements	.80	-.10	.80	.90	.70	.20
W2: Respectful When Disagree	1.00	-.40	1.00	.40	.80	.40

Note: See [Correlations Key](#) for interpretation of results.

Some example associations of the Wave 1: Census-reported Percent Poverty and Wave 1: Census-reported Percent Black. Other variables including change scores were used in this analysis but are not reported here for brevity. If interested, contact the first author.



The Role of the Evidence2Success Coordinator

The **coordinator** plays a crucial role in Evidence2Success by ensuring that the **community board's** work keeps moving forward in partnership with community and its public systems. The coordinator ensures that all parts of the effort cohesively support its goals. It is envisioned as a full-time role, especially in the first two years. The position may be located in a local public agency, foundation, community-based organization or other non-profit.

The coordinator works directly with the **coaches** to ensure that Evidence2Success is implemented as planned. The coaches, provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its partners, draw on a strong background in public systems, strategic financing and community organizing. The coaches help to build capacity by providing technical assistance in the site. Coaches also provide guidance and support to the coordinator in how to work collaboratively with the mayor, agency department heads and staff and community leaders to accomplish Evidence2Success goals. A central tenet of this coaching is that efforts will be most effective when led locally with the benefit of local expertise. The coordinator brings in-depth knowledge of the city, its public systems and its neighborhoods to the work. Close cooperation between coordinator and coaches ensures the sustainability of Evidence2Success by preparing the coordinator to maintain the Evidence2Success effort after the direct technical assistance support from the Anne E. Casey Foundation winds down after three years.

The Coordinator's Responsibilities

Foster support from stakeholders:

- Obtain commitment from relevant elected leaders, public agencies and schools for support of Evidence2Success; serve as liaison to senior leaders
- Support outreach efforts to maintain strong participation by appropriate stakeholders

Support the community board and key leaders:

- Identify and lead outreach to potential community board members
- Collaborate with Evidence2Success finance lead or assume finance lead's duties, if necessary
- Work with executive leadership (mayor, public agency directors, superintendent of schools), community board and finance workgroup to secure funding for Evidence2Success programming, program support infrastructure and ongoing staffing to support the community process
- Work with community board chair(s) to create and maintain a productive board by setting meeting objectives, facilitating meetings and articulating roles, responsibilities and expected results.
- Manage key community board tasks: collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; community outreach and public relations; strategic financing
- Work with chair(s) to arrange for capacity building (training and technical assistance)

- Work with executive leadership and board chair(s) to ensure Evidence2Success objectives are achieved:
 - Facilitate board discussions to specify desired outcomes (changes in priority outcomes and risk and protective factors, by age, neighborhood and ethnicity)
 - Facilitate selection of a portfolio of proven programs, policies and practices to address priority risk and protective factors and fill gaps
 - Facilitate planning for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financing of the selected programs, including specification of partnership and stakeholder roles and responsibilities
 - Facilitate implementation of Evidence2Success financing structures and strategies
 - Ensure new two-year plans are developed through regular community board meetings and regular monitoring of program-level performance
- Manage project planning, timelines, and maintenance
- Participate in periodic peer learning opportunities with other Evidence2Success sites
- Represent the Evidence2Success board in local, state and national conversations as opportunities arise

Skills and Qualities of a Successful Coordinator

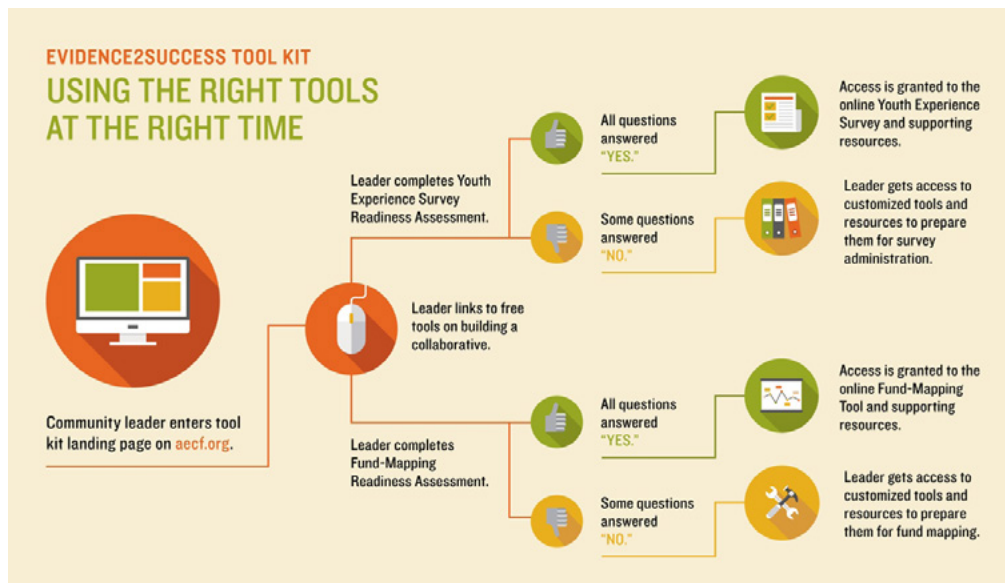
- Able to form relationships with strategic partners such as representatives of government agencies, nonprofit agencies, schools and faith-based communities
- Professional in demeanor, with effective communication skills (writing and public speaking)
- Skilled in group facilitation
- Process-oriented
- Able and willing to delegate tasks and responsibilities
- Able to identify problems, develop solutions and take the lead
- Familiar with local community; experienced with prevention efforts in community and its neighborhoods
- Organized multi-tasker; able to set objectives and prioritize
- Self-directed but a team player
- Outgoing
- Self-aware and confident
- Able to accept feedback graciously

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.) *The Role of the Evidence2Success Coordinator*. Unpublished manuscript. Downloaded from Evidence2Success Resource Catalog (2024- Toolkit- Intro Videos), on Box drive, The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Evidence2Success Tool Kit

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has developed a tool kit of resources to help any city, state, or collective understand and address the underlying causes of social problems and improve the well-being of children, young people, and families. Tools in the kit were developed as part of the Evidence2Success framework, which has helped community members and public systems in six localities improve the well-being of children and youth over the past decade. With tools that include the Youth Experience Survey and Fund-Mapping Tool, these communities have used data to understand how young people are doing, and selected proven programs to address challenges and improve outcomes. Communities using those tools have also developed financing and action plans to support those proven programs over the long term. These proven tools are being made available virtually and at no cost.

To ensure leaders are prepared to use these tools, the tool kit starts with a [road map](#) and two readiness assessments that users must take to access resources, including the survey and online fund-mapping tool.



The following link will take you to the online tool kit and resources:

<https://www.aecf.org/work/evidence-based-practice/the-evidence2success-tool-kit>.



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