



# UNITED WAY GUIDES FOR DRIVING COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

## GUIDE 1: CATALYZING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

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## IN THIS GUIDE:

- Embracing new ways for United Ways to lead community change
- Sharing leadership of collective work and results with community partners
- Optimizing partnership functioning
- Addressing challenges to creating systemic change

## CATALYZING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

High-performing community partnerships are the stewards of what matters most to communities. As organizations and individuals come together to create these partnerships, they ask, “What is best for our community?” With community aspirations as their “North Star,” they balance organizational and individual agendas to create a win-win-win for all.

United Ways can play a key role in bringing diverse interests together to move in a common direction. In the collective impact literature, this is known as the “common agenda”: all participants have a shared vision for change, including agreed-upon shared outcomes, a common understanding of the issues standing in the way of achieving them, and a joint approach to addressing the issues through agreed-upon actions.

United Ways can lead and support community partnerships in ways that optimize achievement of shared community goals. They describe this approach to aligning diverse interests against these goals in different ways: adaptive leadership, distributed leadership, leading from behind, and servant leadership. Whatever terms they use, these United Ways embrace leadership that is community-focused and humble, reflecting their stewardship of community aspirations and resources. United Ways that are able to successfully support their communities in this way will be seen as vehicles for positive social change.







# CONNECT

## Core Capabilities of System Leaders

“Though they differ widely in personality and style, genuine system leaders have a remarkably similar impact. Over time, their profound commitment to the health of the whole radiates to nurture similar commitment in others. Their ability to see reality through the eyes of people very different from themselves encourages others to be more open as well. They build relationships based on deep listening, and networks of trust and collaboration start to flourish. They are so convinced that something can be done that they do not wait for a fully developed plan, thereby freeing others to step ahead and learn by doing. Indeed, one of their greatest contributions can come from the strength of their ignorance, which gives them permission to ask obvious questions and to embody an openness and commitment to their own ongoing learning and growth that eventually infuse larger change efforts.”

— Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, and John Kamia,  
“The Dawn of System Leadership”<sup>1</sup>





## In Focus: *Thriving Together*, Valley of the Sun United Way

In 2009, Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) began supporting individual schools within Phoenix's 12 Elementary School Districts and the Phoenix Union HS District as they established Early Warning and Response Systems. After some success in this area, VSUW began looking at the success of the Strive model in Cincinnati. Initially, VSUW received some pushback when looking at implementing this collective impact framework (Strive) countywide. Agreement was achieved when VSUW decided to implement it across a specific place in the urban core. Because VSUW had brought a powerful model of data-focused collaboration to the table, it did get support from local educational leaders.

VSUW Board and community leadership also had prior experience and success with a collective impact framework used to reduce homelessness. By 2012, building on an opportunity provided by Target and StriveTogether, VSUW launched a collective impact approach with a narrowed scope to a place-based effort focused on 13 urban core school districts.

This perseverance, exposing more and more of the community leadership to the potential for stronger academic outcomes,

led to the establishment of *Thriving Together*. "Leading from behind" became a central tenet of VSUW's work with the school districts, and VSUW needed to learn how to identify and work toward a community-defined, data-informed set of goals and objectives. "To do that with any kind of fidelity," say VSUW leaders, "you have to allow things to happen outside your command-and-control structures."

VSUW has been so successful in leading from behind that it doesn't need to promote United Way efforts explicitly. Instead, members of the consortium speak about the importance of VSUW's role. "When others say 'we couldn't have done this without United Way,'" says VSUW leadership, "it's easy for us to stand in the back."

"Our aspirations for our kids and our community" has become the buzz phrase for *Thriving Together*, moving the focus from United Way to the larger shared vision for change and an unprecedented common set of results across 13 school districts in the urban core, aligning efforts to drive outcomes for some of the most vulnerable students in the Phoenix area.





## In Focus: *MinneMinds*, Greater Twin Cities United Way

*MinneMinds* is a 100-member, statewide legislative coalition, chaired by Greater Twin Cities United Way's Senior Vice President of Systems Change and Innovation. One of the coalition's goals is to get state funding for 20,000 parent-directed scholarships to high-quality early childhood education programs.

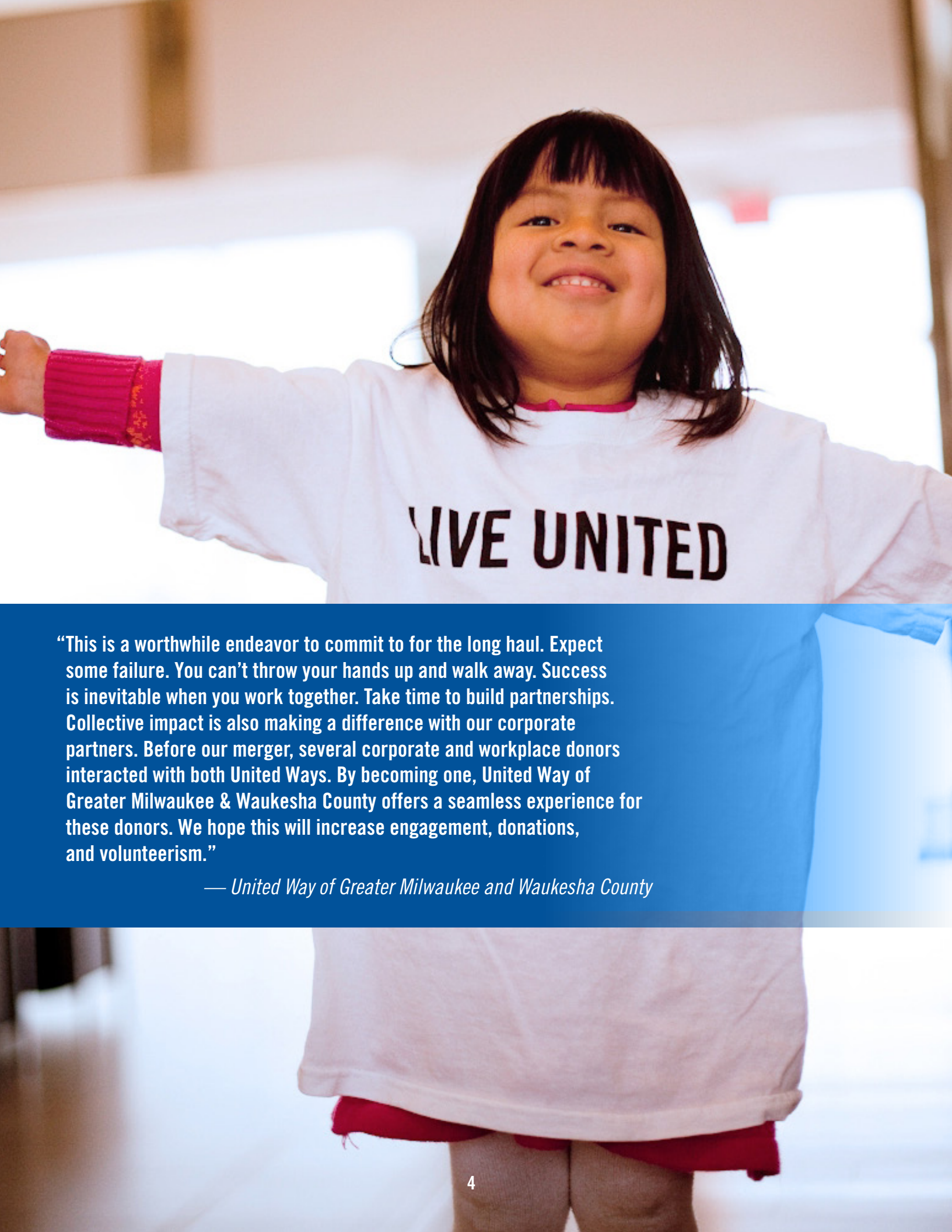
Recently, *MinneMinds* won a major victory in the Minnesota state legislature, which voted to provide \$100M for early learning scholarships. The legislative session was contentious, with the Democratic governor wanting universal preschool for all four-year-olds and the Republican legislature supporting the targeted scholarships for low income children. Ultimately, with broad support from the business community and with the active involvement of the *MinneMinds* coalition, the state legislature chose to move forward with funding for scholarships. As a result, approximately 7000+ three- and four-year-olds will receive an early learning scholarship for high-quality early learning every year.

Key to *MinneMinds*' success is the highly collaborative nature of the coalition. Although it is chaired by a United Way exec-

utive, *MinneMinds* is not branded as a United Way initiative. "Shared responsibility" and "shared credit" are the hallmarks of the coalition.

"Five years ago when we started," says the senior vice president, "a United Way leadership role could have been a non-starter in this work because of trust issues." Today, because United Way has stayed committed for five years, because the coalition has had results, and because of the trust that's been built, United Way gets a lot of affirmation from the coalition and the broader community. Importantly, United Way's board requires a two-thirds super majority vote every year to authorize United Way's advocacy and lobbying on a specific legislative issues. What keeps *MinneMinds* going is the tangible progress it is making, especially in the legislature. This keeps the 100 members at the table, working together for community change. In this way, Greater Twin Cities United Way uses the social capital of its board and the social capital of hundreds of interconnected relationships to advance collective change.





“This is a worthwhile endeavor to commit to for the long haul. Expect some failure. You can’t throw your hands up and walk away. Success is inevitable when you work together. Take time to build partnerships. Collective impact is also making a difference with our corporate partners. Before our merger, several corporate and workplace donors interacted with both United Ways. By becoming one, United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County offers a seamless experience for these donors. We hope this will increase engagement, donations, and volunteerism.”

— *United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County*





# UNDERSTANDING CORE PRINCIPLES

## CORE PRINCIPLE #1: EMBRACE CATALYTIC WAYS OF LEADING

United Ways that help to build and sustain community partnerships embrace new, catalytic ways of leading. One such opportunity for United Way to stoke positive social change is when United Way is nominated by its community partners to be the backbone for a community partnership. The backbone organization supports planning, management, and coordination of the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling of logistical and administrative details needed for the partnership to function smoothly. Alternatively, organizations in the partnership could share these “backbone functions” (a “blended backbone” approach). This approach can be less labor-intensive for the United Way but still offers opportunities to substantively support the success of community partnerships. (See tool: *Modified Backbone Toolkit*.)

As the name suggests, catalytic leadership focuses on accelerating change. Whether United Way is the backbone or not, it can still accelerate change by acting on these attributes of catalytic leadership:

- Recognize and serve the community.
- Step up and step back as needed.
- Practice adaptive leadership.
- Focus on systems change.
- Ask “Is this the right thing to do for the community? Are we acting ethically?”
- Leverage both the expertise in the United Way organization and expertise in other organizations and individuals.





## CORE PRINCIPLE #1: EMBRACE CATALYTIC WAYS OF LEADING

### Principle in Action: *Mission: Graduate*, United Way of Central New Mexico

“The term ‘servant leadership’ is well known in the Hispanic community – it’s a very powerful leadership style in communities of color. For many of us who have grown up in this community who are Hispanic or of color, we really embrace the idea of giving back to our community, being the leaders for our community, and being of service to our community. This is the kind of leader I want to be, the values I want to hold as I lead this work. As an executive director, I create the space where I

can lead from behind, help people find themselves in the work, make decisions that they themselves have come to. It’s not just an agenda we have imposed on them. United Way is not seen as this entity with all these corporate folks sitting on the board, coming in and telling them what to do. We are trying to lift up our community and help them become leaders in their own right in this work.”

— **Angelo Gonzalez**, Executive Director of *Mission: Graduate*

### Principle in Action: *Promise Partnership*, United Way of Salt Lake

“We encourage our staff and partners to practice ‘adaptive leadership’ [a concept developed by Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow]. Usually it is not leading from the front: it’s understanding context and figuring out how to move individuals, other leaders, and systems into a state of change. United Way of Salt Lake (UWSL) uses this leadership model in hiring backbone staff and builds training and professional development around these concepts, as well as the concepts of ‘servant leadership’ and ‘results-based leadership.’ Recognizing that we need to support and align this leadership in partners as well, we engage key backbone partners in com-

mon professional development and training opportunities with our staff. In terms of how this plays out in the work itself, the best example is the development of a regional leadership table comprised of sector and institutional leaders, where UWSL leads from behind and works to align and support the leadership efforts of others. In another instance, community school directors (UWSL staff members) build a powerful relationship with a school principal. The UWSL staff member is ‘leading from behind’ in partnership with the school principal and other leaders within the school.”





# PARTNERS IP

## Principle in Action: *Success By 6*, United Way of Northeast Florida

“Are we doing what is morally and ethically right by clients? The mantra of social work is always to think about the moral and ethical way to work with people and to help them better their circumstances. I evaluate initiatives based on what is moral, ethical, and fair. *Success By 6* has worked to create early education funding that is child-centered. In Florida, public school-readiness funding is tied to the working status of parents or other adults in the child’s home. If the adult loses her job, she loses the funding, and her child loses his place in the early learning center. At the same time, if the adult gets a promotion and her income goes above 150% of poverty level, she loses the funding, and her child loses his place.

*Success By 6* focuses on what is best for children in terms of continuity and quality. The adult must be employed to participate in the *Success By 6* initiative, but if she loses her job, her child does not lose his place in the high-quality early learning center. Once a child becomes a *Success By 6* student, he is part of the initiative until he starts kindergarten. Participating parents and other adults in the home are able to take raises, go back to school, and have a chance to better their financial stability. This approach has been universally embraced by our community: people recognize that we need child-centered programs. By implementing *Success By 6*, we are treating both parents and children morally, ethically, and fairly.”

## Principle in Action: *90% by 2020*, United Way of Anchorage

“In the role of change agent, we realize we can’t achieve the goals alone, nor do we want to be subject matter experts. We do want to be the experts on how to build community movements and coalitions with very specific ends in mind. We always need to have an eye to serving the coalition. We also want people to believe, understand, and know the critical role that United Way plays. ‘There but for United Way,’ say community organizations, ‘we might not be as far along as we are.’ That doesn’t mean United Way does it on its own — we do it while sharing credit with others. We facilitate the community coming together to tackle the issue. Here’s how it happened in Anchorage. About a decade ago, community leaders including the United Way CEO, the mayor, the school superintendent, and others observed that although there were many good

programs, lots of community activity, and resources being spent, outcome data showed that kids were not faring well in Anchorage. So United Way agreed to provide staff support to spearhead an initiative to work collectively to change graduation rates, youth substance use, and youth violence. United Way played the pivotal role to focus communication, data, and collaboration on the key problems. Since then, graduation rates have risen from 59% to 80%, youth alcohol use has dropped by half, and youth violence and gang activity are down. Now known as *90% by 2020*, this is a collective approach that includes multiple action plans across several priority areas, communication strategies, and advocacy opportunities.”





“United Way is truly in a unique position in every community, being in that nexus of business, government, nonprofit. We do have a respected name, and we do set a community table people want to come to. It’s high-impact, sustainable, and long-lasting work – they’ll enjoy doing it.”

— *United Way of Santa Cruz County*





## CORE PRINCIPLE #2: ENSURE SHARED LEADERSHIP AMONG PARTNERS

In an effective community partnership, everyone — from United Way leadership and staff to representatives of multiple community organizations — is fully present and active at the table. *Staff members* from multiple organizations are involved, and United Ways may add staff or redeploy existing staff in order to meet the changing work demands of driving collective impact through an outcomes-focused, multi-sector partnership. *Funders* (both public and private sector) align at least some of their investments toward common outcomes and understand how these outcomes drive change in the community. Coalition members, both *organizations and individuals*, feel a sense of engagement and ownership. Rather than an advisory group that rubber stamps decisions, the partnership is a team in which each member is accountable for taking particular actions. Everyone is a hands-on contributor, either contributing to partnership operations and decision making or to implementation of its on-the-ground strategies. In this way, there is equity among the partners.

Shared leadership is built on shared goals. As partners come together to achieve common goals, they give, take, and share credit for their collective work. See Guide 3 (“Using Data to Increase Partnership Impact”) for more on developing shared goals, and see Guide 4 (“Communicating for Community Change”) for more on how partners can share credit.

Shared leadership does not mean that everyone does everything. Instead, it means that partners have a reason to be at the table and that their organizational needs are being met. It means that everyone has roles to play in supporting partnership operations and/or in its strategies for improving lives. It means that all voices are heard and valued and are integrated into the partnership’s work. See Guide 3 (“Using Data to Increase Partnership Impact”) for more on clarifying roles. (See tool: Leadership can take action.)

### Principle in Action: *Go for Health, United Way of Santa Cruz County*

“United Ways need to make sure partners have a reason to be at the table, especially when there’s not money in it for them. That’s when the shared goals come in. You need to serve individual goals as well as the missions of partners at the table — shared goals that also serve others’ goals. Each of our committees is led by one of our partner organizations. So they really take the lead on the work and make it their own *and* have it align with their own missions and their partners. That’s how we make sure all the partners are all in. For example, we

have a steering committee made up of representatives from eight different organizations, each playing a role in making decisions about the direction of the collaborative effort. In addition, each of our committees is led by a chair from a different organization whose ‘day job’ is in alignment with the work of the committee. One is led by staff from our county’s Health Services Agency. Another is led by staff of the Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County and the Santa Cruz Medical Society.”





“Embrace your role as a leader for change. Constantly assess what’s going on around you, what’s ripe, what’s your next step. Get people galvanized around a goal, then work with them to find the right steps, quickly evaluate, and keep moving. Avoid getting fixated on analytical or theoretical discussions. Also, know that it’s not leadership as command and control. It’s not leadership as in an org chart. Our change agent leadership role is helping people figure out the best next step considering the context, then taking it, seeing where you are, and then taking the next one. It’s adaptive leadership, and every one of our people needs to be able to do it. It can be scary work! That’s why everyone is so hungry for models; people crave order in a chaotic world. As an adaptive leader serving in a change agent role, it’s inevitable that you’re occasionally going to step on something, so accept that and train your focus on how you deal with it when you do.” 10

— *United Way of Anchorage*



## Principle in Action: *Success By 6*, United Way of Northeast Florida

“When you start down this road, gather your partners and treat them like equals. Ask them what is needed, treat them with respect, and listen to their insights. If people don’t feel they have a voice and if people feel you are not listening, a gap begins to grow. Listen to what they have to say. Then put all your energies behind it. In the case of *Success By 6*, our community has local early learning coalitions that serve as the conduits for state money. Two of those coalitions are

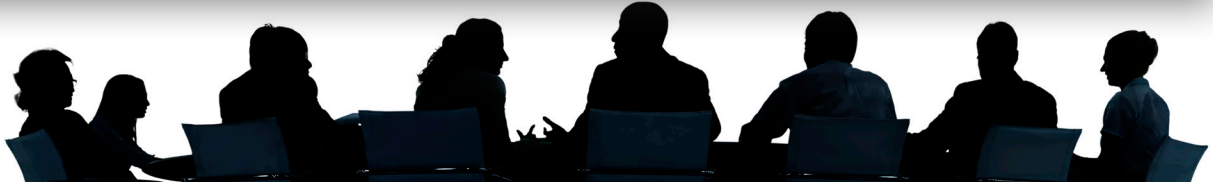
partners in *Success By 6*. They raised our awareness about funding limits in the state program. We listened to what these coalitions had to say and crafted the *Success By 6* initiative in such a way that we incorporated their expertise. It’s important not to go in with a predetermined plan and then ask your partners simply to rubber-stamp it. Instead, you need to make sure you are really listening and then building on what you learn.”

### THE SHIFT TO SHARED LEADERSHIP AND CREDIT

From	To
United Way creates its plans, then enlists others to help implement them	United Way and others co-create plans; all are committed to their success from the beginning
United Way is the leader, funder, manager and provider of logistical support	Roles are agreed among partners based on partner’s strengths and capabilities
United Way has the final say	The partnership has the final say, following decision-making policies set by the partners
The work is branded to United Way	The work is branded to the partnership or carries its own brand
United Way speaks for the work	Any partner can speak for the work
Communications describe United Way’s roles and successes	Communications describe the partnership’s successes credit and partners’ roles



# TACKLING CHALLENGES, FINDING SOLUTIONS



**Leading in new ways** — and sharing that leadership with community partners — can be difficult. Learn from other United Ways that have faced real challenges in doing this work — and found solutions to these challenges.

**CHALLENGE:** Identifying an organizational structure that will allow all partner organizations to share in the collective work.

**SOLUTION:** Identify models from other United Ways, partnerships, and experts, and choose those that make sense in your local situation. As United Way of Anchorage says, “Context, context, context — it’s all about context. There are many models and structures with good elements, but United Ways and partners need to pick and choose elements from the various models based on the context of their particular community.” As you choose what will work in your community, link your chosen models together thoughtfully and intentionally. (See below, *Mission Graduate*, *Partnership Structure* and tool: *Modified Accountability Structure Toolkit*.)

## **Solution Showcase:** *Promise Partnerships, United Way of Salt Lake*

“We needed a structure for collective impact to live in and operate in. At the smallest level, it’s a community school. That’s a model for which there are tons of resources, but sometimes it isn’t thought of in terms of applying rigorous collective impact. The same is true for the model of Promise Neighborhoods or other place-based initiatives such as Purpose-Built Communities. At the system level, the StriveTogether system-type infrastructure provides an overarching unifying collective impact framework. We borrowed from every existing structural, organizational model that was relevant and tried to link them all intentionally. Our view is that collective impact is a set of principles that can be operationalized in many different organizational structures. It makes sense to link those organizational structures intentionally to produce maximum alignment.”

**CHALLENGE:** Seeing the backbone organization (often the United Way) as taking credit for the partnership.

**SOLUTION:** Give, take, and share credit as agreed on by partners. It will be appropriate for some partners to get credit for individual efforts, but it is important to come to agreement with partners on how credit is shared, keeping the focus on the partnership's common goals and joint contributions rather than the contributions of any one organization, whenever possible. See Guide 4 for more on sharing credit.

**CHALLENGE:** Thinking of the community partnership as another “program” rather than as a beneficial “process” (and a completely new way of doing things).

**SOLUTION:** Find ways — specific, tangible tasks linked to larger systems change thinking — to support partners in thinking and acting according to this new process, which is always aimed at optimizing community results, i.e., the shared partnership goals.

### **Solution Showcase:** *The Partnership for Children, United Way of San Diego County*

“In our second community, because we went in with intentionality and because the community was ready and had done pre-work, the partnership was more *with* them, rather than *for* them or *to* them. Several times when members of that Leadership Table have made public comments, they have said things like, ‘The great thing about this partnership is that it’s everyone coming to the table not caring who gets the credit because we’re all committed to improving lives of kids in our community.’ Our intentionality around those first steps — of roles, responsibilities, structure, understanding the backbone role — all of that helped with giving credit and getting people to step up and do the work.”

### **Solution Showcase:** *90% by 2020, United Way of Anchorage*

“As the backbone entity whose role it is to mobilize others, we want our partners to think of themselves as transformative systems leaders, not singular community leaders or organizational leaders. System leader work is not about managing a program or a project or an organization, and it’s not top-down. It’s constantly asking oneself, ‘What am I and my organization doing now? What *could* I and my organization be doing that would create a better system to get us to these results we seek together?’ We’ve reframed our meeting agendas so that they look less programmatic and look more like conscious attempts to find alignment. When we focus on aligned choices and aligned investment, leaders at the table see that it’s about *them*. And when we see our leadership partners actually doing something that is starting to look aligned, more like connecting the dots, we make a big deal of it. We identify a list of needs, come up with specific requests. Then we track what they have done and give them a lot of kudos. We try to think about what a collective process requires and how we all could behave differently. As systems leaders, we ask, ‘what is possible?’ Then we walk the talk.”



**CHALLENGE:** Changing organizations (including United Ways) to meet the demands of this new type of leadership.

**SOLUTION:** Recognize that each partner organization has “its own culture” and “its own lens,” says United Way of Northeast Florida. “Honor that.” At the same time, United Ways can help partner organizations think intentionally about how to join the table in a fully integrated and committed way.

#### UNITED WAY SHIFTS IN INTERNAL FOCUS TO SUPPORT A COLLECTIVE IMPACT PARTNERSHIP

From	To
All staff time is dedicated to United Way's own work	Some staff time is allocated to the partnership work
Staff performance evaluations are linked to the success of the United Way's work	Appropriate aspects of staff performance evaluations are linked to the partnership's success
Staff lines of report are entirely internal	Some staff may be on a partnership work group directed by someone from a partner organization
Board members are champions for United Way's work	Board members also are champions for the partnership's work
United Way investments support direct services that change client's knowledge and skills	Investments also support partnership strategies to change policies, physical conditions, coordination, other environmental obstacles
Messaging describes United Way's roles and successes	Messaging describes the partnership's successes and credits roles of partners, including United Way
All fund-raising is for United Way	Some fund-raising is explicitly for the partnership

## **Solution Showcase: The Partnership for Children, United Way of San Diego County**

“We did some work with partners to help them understand that this is a whole organization effort and commitment. This isn’t just a table that the CEO sits at or a committee that the program manager participates in. There needs to be communication up and down in the partner organization. If we’re setting a vision at the Leadership Table and everyone buys into it and different people raise their hand and say

‘I can do that,’ that trickle down has to happen, and the personal on-the-ground participating has to trickle back up. That is when you see it fully integrated and see partners shifting and saying, ‘Oh, we’ve always done it that way. But we could do it this way. It still moves the metric we want to move, but we also see how it moves a bigger metric.’ We create opportunities for all partners to see how their individual pieces fit. This helps build cohesion and helps all partners see the big picture.”

## **Solution Showcase: *The Prosperity Center*, United Way of Forsyth County**

*The Prosperity Center*, led by United Way of Forsyth County (Winston-Salem, North Carolina), is an integrated financial stability initiative. It started with four core agencies with different working cultures, operating policies, and differing client service philosophies. Even though these agencies were all clear on the common goal of increasing family financial stability, their mode of working independently was not effective.

Within a very short timeframe, United Way of Forsyth County supported the organizations’ efforts to reorganize staff. This included branding all staff as *Prosperity Center* employees (with identification cards), establishing shared operating policies for all staff, even though they maintained ties to their “home” agency, and both developing common client protocols and cross-training each other in the specialties they all brought to the table.

This work led to increased trust and improved decision making. A year after this work, the agencies’ leadership as a group took an even bolder step and decided to reduce the physical presence of two of the agencies and to create greater efficiencies and responsiveness to its clients. The other agencies continue to provide collaborative services but from their home office locations. This reduced costs and enabled the *Prosperity Center* to better ensure the true integration of the services being delivered at the Center.

These agencies saw this approach as a good idea, and even a strong initial plan for implementing the concept was able to secure funding. They realized that achieving success required a continuous improvement approach in which, as practiced by the United Way of Forsyth County, adaptations based on learning are celebrated, encouraged, and rewarded. This is the seventh year of the *Prosperity Center*, which expects to serve in excess of 500 individuals – helping them improve their financial situation with job preparation and financial education.



**CHALLENGE:** Helping everyone at the table own their unique contribution and its relation to the partnership's larger goals and strategies.

**SOLUTION:** Partners can contribute to partnership operations or on-the-ground strategies. It is important to distinguish between these roles and, in either case, to help people feel a deeper sense of accountability. United Way of Anchorage's *90% by 2020* partnership highlights "Leaders in Action" to both positively reinforce system leadership behavior when it happens and to provide examples of what system alignment looks like for those in leadership positions. The partnership makes specific asks of leaders when there is a particular action that could be helpful. Leaders might be asked to serve as vocal champions in the community, take responsibility for implementing projects related to the partnership, or provide pro bono expertise in Six Sigma, facilitation, or project management.

**CHALLENGE:** Navigating the tension and building trust across partners when United Way is both backbone organization and funder.

**SOLUTION:** When United Way is the backbone, it can model how to be a new kind of funder: a collaborative leader that aligns its investments to support partnership goals, outcomes, and strategies. The most successful United Ways act as stewards of the community's agenda and thus build trust as conveners of and vehicles for community change. Joint decision making and actions by United Way and partners lay the foundation for a new community investment strategy aimed at driving success on shared partnership outcomes. For more on new approaches to investment, see Guide 5 and "Ecosystem Investing: Achieving Impact at Scale", Jeff Edmondson, Kate Mohan, & Stacey Stewart's article in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, in "Taking It Further," below.

### **Solution Showcase: *Excelerate Success*, Spokane County United Way**

"When we define what we want to work toward and use that as our guidepost, then funding decisions become easier and the idea of funder 'imposition' becomes a little bit different because there is an understanding of what each is bringing to the table. We're bringing dollars and some less tangible things. Then we all share in 'here's what's changed.' For example, Spokane County United Way (SCUW) was asked to co-facilitate with Spokane Public Schools (SPS) a group the school district called 'School Community Partnership.' Many of these partners were organizations SCUW funded, and many were not. All came together to

learn how the schools were using and collecting data, how that information could be shared, and how the organizations interacting with the schools could better align their efforts toward the shared outcome of improving student performance and graduation rates. This group was intended as a 'short-term project' (six to nine months) to inform and interact with the many players involved with improving student outcomes. Two years later, this group continues to work together and to find ways to connect and align efforts. This has led to other funding opportunities for SPS and some of the community partners. The investment strategies of SCUW, SPS, and other partners are now much more aligned against the partnership's shared outcomes."

**CHALLENGE:** Keeping a complex partnership moving forward and keeping partners engaged.

**SOLUTION:** Celebrate the small and early victories. For example, Greater Twin Cities United Way stays focused on the progress *MinneMinds* is making (see “In Focus” example above) — this keeps people at the table. Valley of the Sun United Way agrees: “Identify wins and communicate those.”

### **Solution Showcase: *Go for Health, United Way of Santa Cruz County***

“Everyone loves to come up with great plans. Everyone likes to think of the future. There’s no shortage of great ideas. But folks get back to their offices and things get in the way. You have volunteer and staff turnover and weariness after a while. You’re tired. You need to keep it going, keep it fresh, celebrate the small victories, and have some medium-term victories that you can hang your hat on. Progress is not fast. People get meeting fatigue. Shake it up. Move it out. Do things differently. People need to see momentum. To keep things moving, we host quarterly events that engage

a broader sector than just our steering committee or workgroups. This keeps the flow of information going and keeps people engaged in a broader conversation about how to move our goals forward. We recently re-energized our partners through a ‘relaunch’ where we announced our 2015-2020 strategic plan. As part of that relaunch, we hosted ‘provocative conversations’ about what was working and not working in the world of obesity prevention. It re-engaged some partners who hadn’t been to the table in a long time and brought brand new partners in. It also gave existing long-standing partners new information and energy for our collective work.”

**CHALLENGE:** Constituting the partnership so that it is most effective.

**SOLUTION:** Think broadly about the many partners who could join the initiative. Have clear criteria for which organizations and individuals are needed. As partners come on board, ask who they think is missing. Consider groups that may not seem obvious at first. Also keep in mind that having all stakeholders at the table can lead to inaction when there is not buy-in from a critical mass or when a small number of participants are not engaged. Each partner should have a clear role/contribution. Don’t be afraid to leave obstructionists behind. (See tools: *Building the Leadership Table, The Four Voices of Collective Impact, Identifying Critical Partnership Members, Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit*).



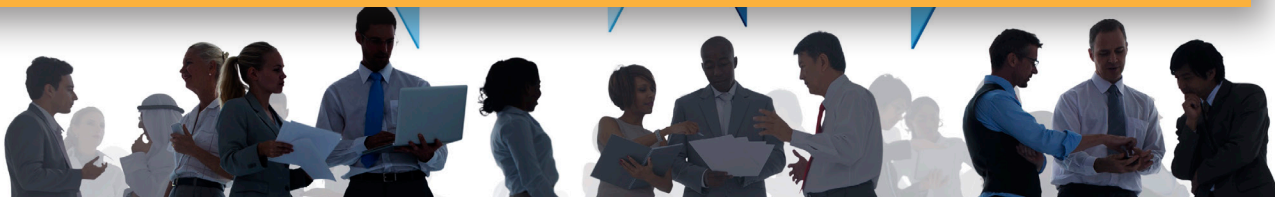
## Solution Showcase: United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut

“To create this public-private partnership, our United Way took a leadership role in bringing together as many thought leaders as we could in this area: local philanthropy, our regional workforce investment board, trade associations in various sectors, the community college system, and our regional Conference of Governments. As we reached out to potential partners, we also asked whom they would recom-

mend as additional organizations to bring to the table. We think of it as a pebble that you’re dropping into a body of water. You see concentric circles building out on the surface of the water. What you don’t see is a piece that goes deep underneath the surface – other relationships, other networks, other circles. We invited a few organizations. Once they came on board, we furthered the conversation in terms of our objectives and asked who else should be at this table. We intentionally made it as broad as we could.”



# MOVING YOUR STAFF FORWARD



**As United Ways move** into new ways of leading, United Way executives and leaders – both on the Board of Directors and on the staff – will need help understanding their new roles.

United Ways can support board members and staff in moving into new leadership roles. Board members can participate in the trainings, learnings, and discussions about collaborative, partnership-based work. CEOs and boards need to get disciplined about having new systems-level conversations. For example, Board meetings should always focus on the impact of partnerships in which United Way is engaged, the systems-level implications of these partnerships, and how United Way needs to shift and improve to catalyze collective impact. In addition, discussions of resource generation should be in service of impact, whenever possible focused on the shared outcomes of community partnerships. When the Board supports this direction, the whole United Way can move forward dynamically. Care should also be taken to bring existing staff into the new approach. Take advantage of existing staff talents, especially those who have competence in systems-level thinking and collaboration, and build staff capacity to take impact-focused solutions to scale.

In some cases, United Ways may need to add new staff to meet the increased work demands of high-performing, multi-sector community partnerships. This provides an opportunity to bring on staff members who are already well versed in collaborative leadership or data gathering and analysis or those who are open to learning new approaches.

As United Way of Salt Lake says, “When we recognized the need become a backbone organization, we did not have the staff to do this. We had to hire, train, coach for this new work. It is very different work than managing a grant process, and existing staff may or may not have the necessary skills. When we started, we had to hire for this skill set. It’s the essential thing.”

To inform human resource management practice so that it supports this focus of United Way work, use the competency models cited in resources below for recruitment, training, and performance appraisals.



# TAKING IT FURTHER

**Ready to learn more** about how your United Way can help lead a high-performing, multi-sector partnership? Here are a few resources that can help!

Cambridge Leadership Associates. “What Is Adaptive Leadership?” <http://cambridge-leadership.com/adaptive-leadership/>.

Edmondson, J., Mohan, K. and Stewart, S. “Ecosystem Investing: Achieving Impact at Scale.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. 2015. [http://ssir.org/articles/entry/ecosystem\\_investing\\_achieving\\_impact\\_at\\_scale](http://ssir.org/articles/entry/ecosystem_investing_achieving_impact_at_scale)

Heifetz, Ronald A., Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Boston, MA: Cambridge Leadership Associates, 2009.

Hill, Linda. “Leading from Behind.” *Harvard Business Review*. 2010. <https://hbr.org/2010/05/leading-from-behind/>.

Living Cities. “What Barriers? Insights from Solving Problems through Cross-Sector Partnerships.” September 11, 2013. <https://www.livingcities.org/resources/231-what-barriers-insights-from-solving-problems-through-cross-sector-partnerships>.

Mission Graduate, “Partnership Structure”. <http://missiongraduatenm.org/about/partnership-structure>

The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. “What Is Servant Leadership?” <https://greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>.

Senge, Peter, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania. “The Dawn of System Leadership.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. 2015. [http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the\\_dawn\\_of\\_system\\_leadership](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_dawn_of_system_leadership).

StriveTogether. “Theory of Action”, [http://www.strivetogogether.org/sites/default/files/images/StriveTogether%20Theory%20of%20Action\\_0.pdf](http://www.strivetogogether.org/sites/default/files/images/StriveTogether%20Theory%20of%20Action_0.pdf)

United Way of Salt Lake. “The Promise of Partnership; Aligning Action for Results”, <http://www.uw.org/our-work/reports-pdfs/united-way-promise-partnership-baseline-report-2014.pdf>

United Way of San Diego County. “Accountability Structure and Roles and Duties for City Heights Partnership for Children”. [URL](#)

United Way Worldwide. “United Way Competency Models: Community Impact and Resource Development.” January 2014. [https://online.unitedway.org/sites/default/files/resources/TM-0114%20CI%20%26%20RD%20Competency%20Models%20Comprehensive%20REVISED%2001.31\\_1.pdf](https://online.unitedway.org/sites/default/files/resources/TM-0114%20CI%20%26%20RD%20Competency%20Models%20Comprehensive%20REVISED%2001.31_1.pdf).

United Way Worldwide. “Attributes of a High-Performing Board and CEO Partnership.” April 15, 2014. <https://online.unitedway.org/groups/attributes-high-performing-board-and-ceo-partnership>.

Waters Foundation. “Systems Thinking.” <http://watersfoundation.org/systems-thinking/overview/>.

# TOOLS

## Hands-on tools and resources

Presidio Institute, “Course on Cross-Sector Collaborative Leadership”, (a pilot offered to the United Way network and to some other organizations).  
<http://institute.presidio.gov>.

Ready by 21. “Big Tent Stakeholders Wheel.”  
<http://forumfyi.org/files/Big%20Tent%20Stakeholders%20Wheel%2011.30%20Webinar.pdf>.

Ready by 21. “What ‘Moving Trains’ Could Be Harnessed?”  
<http://www.readyby21.org/sites/default/files/BP%20Training%20Section%202.2.pdf>.

Results-Based Accountability. “Implementation Guide.”  
<http://raguide.org/index-of-questions/>.  
See especially “How Do We Select Results for a Given Population?”  
<http://raguide.org/2-5-how-do-we-select-results-for-a-given-population/>.

StriveTogether. “Building the Leadership Table”,  
<https://online.unitedway.org/groups/guide-1-catalyzing-creative-impact>

StriveTogether. “Leadership can take action”,  
<https://online.unitedway.org/groups/guide-1-catalyzing-creative-impact>

StriveTogether. “Modified Accountability Structure Toolkit”,  
<https://online.unitedway.org/groups/guide-1-catalyzing-creative-impact>

StriveTogether. “Modified Backbone Toolkit”,  
<https://online.unitedway.org/groups/guide-1-catalyzing-creative-impact>

ThinkPlace and CoCreative Consulting. The Four Voices of Collective Impact.

<http://cocreativeconsulting.com/tool-the-four-voices-of-collective-impact/>

Based the work of Jim Scully and John Body at ThinkPlace, this tool helps ensure that we have the voices of Intent, Experience, Expertise, and Design in your partnership, and provides examples for how to bring those voices into your group.

United Way of Anchorage. “ANC 90% Aligned Investment Commitment”,  
<https://online.unitedway.org/groups/guide-1-catalyzing-creative-impact>

United Way Worldwide. “Identifying Critical Partnership Members.”  
<https://online.unitedway.org/groups/guide-1-catalyzing-creative-impact>

United Way Worldwide and Harvard Family Research Project. “The Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit.” See the sections on “Building a Community of Partners” (pp. 7-10 and pp. 82-84).

<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/the-family-engagement-for-high-school-success-toolkit-planning-and-implementing-an-initiative-to-support-the-pathway-to-graduation-for-at-risk-students>.



## Reference

<sup>1</sup>Senge, Peter, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania. “The Dawn of System Leadership.” Stanford Social Innovation Review. 2015. [http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the\\_dawn\\_of\\_system\\_leadership](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_dawn_of_system_leadership)

## Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the following individuals who contributed their ideas and experiences to the development of this guide:

- Greater Twin Cities United Way: Frank Forsberg
- Spokane County United Way: Tim Henkel
- United Way of Anchorage: Michele Brown, June Sobocinski
- United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut: Jennifer Gifford, Paula Gilberto, Kim Russo
- United Way of Central New Mexico: Angelo Gonzales, Ed Rivera
- United Way of Forsyth County: Eric Aft
- United Way of Northeast Florida: Jan Morse
- United Way of Salt Lake: Bill Crim, Danya Pastuszek
- United Way of San Diego County: Tia Anzellotti, Shaina Gross
- United Way of Santa Cruz County: Mary Lou Goeke and Megan Joseph
- Valley of the Sun United Way: Merl Waschler