

PLAYBOOK

Unlocking the Power of Collaboration

How to Develop a Successful Collaborative
Network in and around Higher Education

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Executive Summary

Recognizing that solutions to today's complex problems go beyond the boundaries of a single organization or institution, some postsecondary education leaders and training providers are turning to a more focused and deeper level of collaboration to drive both individual and broader systemic change with potential for far-reaching social impact. Building on the foundations and lessons from past efforts, these collaborations—which we refer to as *higher education-focused networks*—have become increasingly important in the 21st Century. Oriented around the cross-cutting problems of improving student success and social mobility, enacting structural and cultural change, and managing overlapping organizational responsibilities, these networks develop and strengthen enduring relationships that iteratively generate new ideas and processes to tackle the most pressing postsecondary problems of our times. This playbook discusses the conceptual grounding for these kinds of networks and offers a set of key action steps on how to start and develop a successful network with rich examples from the field.

When and why might organizational leaders choose to take a network approach to higher education challenges? We discuss three situations in which a network approach may be advisable, or even necessary, to achieve an impact: (1) when the focal problem is complex and important to the community from which the potential network will be drawn; (2) when the knowledge, expertise, access to target populations, and other components of potential solutions are distributed across different organizations; and (3) when the problem has no readily apparent solutions, requiring the iterative discovery and development of solutions. In such circumstances, a network approach allows stakeholder organizations to quickly mobilize diverse sets of resources and human talent to tackle both individual and broader systemic change, and develop enduring relationships that support a sustained flow of activities.

To achieve these benefits, networks require careful planning and management. Through our research, we identified four key action steps to starting and developing an effective network, described in the graphic below. It is important to note that establishing a highly functioning network—an important and perhaps necessary step—is not the same as achieving the broader practical goals with tangible social impact for which the network was created. While it may be more challenging than assessing the health of the network's relationships and processes, developing ways of assessing whether the network is furthering its underlying purpose is an important component of this more fundamental form of network success.

4 KEY ACTION STEPS

TO STARTING AND DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE NETWORK



#1 Organize people around a shared vision and purpose

- Mobilize visionary and committed leadership to engender a sense of urgency and enthusiasm around a problem
- Clearly define the purpose of the network
- Strategically recruit and assemble partners with the network's purpose in mind



#2 Design an organizational structure that will pave the road to success

- Establish an "embedded" backbone function for the network
- Engage and align cross-functional players to identify focus areas and develop project plans



#3 Cultivate a culture of engagement and shared responsibility

- Create regular opportunities for purposeful interaction among network members
- Focus on shared results, but also elevate individual achievements



#4 Continuously develop the network's capacity, capability, and purpose

- Continually engage in multiple forms of self-assessment and evaluation
- Regularly re-visit key network structures and processes with an eye toward its continued growth and sustainability

Introduction

As digitization, automation, and artificial intelligence reshape industries in just about every enterprise imaginable and transform people's lives in profound ways, leaders across public and private sectors are looking to tackle the new challenges of our times while learning to navigate an uncertain future.

In postsecondary education, in particular, the pressure to innovate in response to the changing times is high. The number of traditional-aged college students is declining across most of the country, and the new generation of students is more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status than any previous cohort of students.¹ At the same time, large and increasing numbers of working adults—many of whom tried and struggled in college previously—are seeking additional education and training to advance their careers and help them adapt to broader economic and technological trends.² These demographic shifts are exposing a dissonance between the core assumptions and features of many existing postsecondary education providers and the needs of modern students and our economy. Even as policymakers, employers, and the public expect higher education institutions to meet these evolving needs, and are looking to new providers to fill gaps, state and federal investment in postsecondary education and training is lagging behind other demands.³

In short, postsecondary education faces a daunting set of external challenges—as well as exciting opportunities. There is the potential to achieve a postsecondary education and training ecosystem that is more tightly aligned to student and economic needs, more equitable in offering opportunity to learners from lower-income and underrepresented minority backgrounds, and more efficient and affordable. To reach this potential, incumbent organizations must make fundamental changes to the way they operate—including how they interact with new players in the space—with few and sometimes declining resources to do so.

Recognizing that these challenges and the potential solutions go beyond the boundaries of their own institutions or organizations, some postsecondary education leaders and training providers are turning to a deeper level of collaboration. Building on the

¹ For example, see Nathan D. Grawe, "Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education," *Johns Hopkins University Press*, 2018.

² Jim Fong, Peter Janzow, and Kyle Peck, "Demographic Shifts in Educational Demand and the Rise of Alternative Credentials," *Pearson Education and UPCEA*, 2016, <https://upcea.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Demographic-Shifts-in-Educational-Demand-and-the-Rise-of-Alternative-Credentials.pdf>.

³ Ronald Brownstein, "American Higher Education Hits a Dangerous Milestone," *The Atlantic*, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/05/american-higher-education-hits-a-dangerous-milestone/559457/>.

foundation and lessons from past models to meet new challenges, these collaborations—which we refer to as *higher education-focused networks*—have become increasingly important in the 21st Century (see Sidebar 1 for examples of relevant past collaboration models). Oriented around complex, crosscutting problems of improving student success and social mobility, enacting structural and cultural change, and managing overlapping organizational responsibilities, these higher education-focused networks develop cross-organizational relationships that iteratively generate new ideas and processes within and across the participants to address those problems. The networks we focus on have the potential not only to change practice within their member organizations, but also to have an impact at scale on their ecosystem.

This playbook discusses the conceptual grounding for higher education-focused networks and offers a set of key action steps on how to start and develop a successful network. It is based on a review of previous relevant research on collaboration, interviews with more than twenty network leaders, policymakers, and higher education scholars, as well as insights gleaned from a convening we hosted on the topic in February 2019 (see Appendix B for more information on the authors of this report and their research process).⁴

The playbook is organized around four core questions:

- What is a higher education-focused network?
- Why and when might postsecondary leaders and their partners consider a network approach for addressing social challenges or developing solutions?
- What are the key features, processes, and considerations for starting and developing a successful network?
- What can we learn from some of the networks that have successfully employed these strategies?

⁴ We reviewed a wide range of collaboration literature in the business management (e.g. Ranjay Gulati, Franz Wohlgezogen, and Pavel Zhelyazkov, "The Two Facets of Collaboration: Cooperation and Coordination in Strategic Alliances," *Academy of Management Annals*, 2012.), higher education change management (e.g. Adrianna Kezar and Sean Gehrke, "Communities of transformation and their work scaling STEM reform," 2016.), collective impact (e.g. John Kania and Mark Kramer, "Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2011.), and community networks (e.g. Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, and John Cleveland. "Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact." Island Press, 2014) – spanning topics, such as inter-organizational alliances, communities of transformation, and generative social-impact networks.

Sidebar 1: The Founding Days of Early Forms of Higher Education-Focused Networks

The idea of college and universities cooperating with one another was largely an untested idea until the turn of the 20th century, and the growth of institutional and community-based networks is largely a recent phenomenon, as campuses navigate the financial and demographic forces bearing down on higher education. While most alliances in higher education were designed around geography or for transactional purposes, some alliances brought institutions together to address specific issues as a group.

The Association of American Universities (AAU) was founded in Chicago in 1900, with 14 of the nation's leading doctorate-granting institutions collaborating to consider "matters of common interest relating to graduate study."⁵ In the waning days of World War I, 14 higher-education associations formed an emergency council to ensure the United States had enough technically trained military personnel. First named the Emergency Council on Education, and later renamed the American Council on Education (ACE) it eventually became the umbrella group representing higher education institutions.⁶

As higher education started to grow in the years after World War II, thanks to the G.I. Bill, new alliances formed so that institutions could share resources and keep up with the ever-expanding needs of the library and their researchers. Two of the most well-known alliances in higher education came together in the 1950s. The Ivy League was created as an official athletic league during that time,⁷ and the presidents of the Big Ten athletic conference agreed to form the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, or the CIC, to strengthen their institutions against what they saw as a growing competitive threat for research dollars, students, and faculty from universities on the east and west coasts (the CIC was later renamed the Big Ten Academic Alliance).⁸

Defining a Higher Education-Focused Network

With the rise of social media sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, the word “network” is now a commonly used term. Our common understanding of a network refers to a system of interconnected people or things. When it comes to higher education-focused networks, such a system includes colleges and universities, K-12 schools and businesses, philanthropies, and governmental or community-based organizations.

One of the issues we struggled with early on in our research was answering this question: What makes a network a network rather than simply a group of people working

⁵ AAU History, <https://www.aau.edu/aau-history>.

⁶ ACE History, <https://www.acenet.edu/Pages/A-History-of-Leading-the-Way.aspx>.

⁷ Ivy League History, <https://ivyleague.com/sports/2017/7/28/history-timeline-index.aspx>.

⁸ For a detailed history and rationale for forming the CIC, see Herman B. Wells, "A Case Study on Interinstitutional Cooperation," *Educational Record*, 1967, https://www.btaa.org/docs/default-source/news-pub/historyofcic.pdf?sfvrsn=60f3c93a_0%5D.

together? We adopt Peter Plastrik and his colleagues' definition as a basis for framing and scoping our discussion of networks in this playbook.⁹ They define a network as a group of “individuals or organizations that aim to solve a difficult problem in the society by working together, adapting over time, and generating a sustained flow of activities, and impacts.”¹⁰ A network is “generative” because it serves as a platform for generating multiple ongoing activities with an aim to achieving change that results in social good. Its members are not merely connecting or sharing information, but forging “powerful, enduring personal relationships based on trust and reciprocity” and undertaking numerous activities that emerge over the years of working together.¹¹ A network stands in contrast to other forms of collaboration, such as an alliance or coalition that represent the temporary alignment of organizations that will disband once its specific objective has been met.¹² A network is also different from a member association, which doesn't necessarily require its members to develop highly entangled relationships and collaborations and is mainly intended to pool resources to provide various member-based services.¹³

Although the literature makes a clear distinction between these different forms of collaboration, we found it rather difficult to catalog some of the existing and emerging collaborative groups squarely into specific forms or types—their differences are not always clear-cut and they evolve rapidly in response to their changing needs and goals. For example, a group may form a temporary alliance to achieve a specific goal, but then *morph* into a longer-lived network with a broader set of purpose and goals over-time as it gains momentum and garners community support.¹⁴ Similarly, a group that was originally conceived as a network may become a non-profit organization to continue pursuing its mission with a more streamlined and sustainable funding model, even as it still maintains some of the core features of a network.

Given the complexity of the collaboration landscape in higher education, as well as the ever-evolving nature of many of these groups, we purposefully explore collaborative

⁹ Plastrik and colleagues developed a definition of network, drawing on their over decade of work studying, building, and helping others build networks around the world. See Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, and John Cleveland, “Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact,” *Island Press*, 2014.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.

¹⁴ Plastrik and his colleagues note this concept of “morphing” in their 2014 book. They explain that morphing occurs when the participants or funders of an alliance or coalition want to keep working together after its primary purpose has been fulfilled. Making this leap requires a transformation of the group's purpose, relationships, and processes (e.g. broadening its purpose, strengthening relationships among members and external partners, getting involved in a more extensive collaboration).

groups that embody the key features of a network, irrespective of what they call themselves or whether they take on different organizational forms and shapes. The key network features we focus on include: (1) tackling a prominent social problem or challenge in the field by working together with a group of individuals and organizations; (2) adapting the group’s approaches, strategies, structures, and goals over time in response to new learning and changes in the environment, and (3) generating a sustained flow of activities and impacts with the aim of achieving change that promotes the social good at some level of scale (e.g. local, regional, or national).

It is worth noting that even though networks are often contrasted to member-based associations in the literature, many of the established associations are creating, incubating, and/or housing networks as a means to align and support their members in advancing their shared missions and goals. One notable example is *Powered by Publics*, a recent initiative of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU). The initiative brings together a large group of “change-ready” APLU member institutions to work within smaller clusters to implement evidence-based strategies and incubate new solutions for student success.¹⁵ Another example is the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ (AASCU) *Re-imagining the First Year of College (RFY)* project—a set of 44 AASCU member institutions that have committed to working together over three years “to develop comprehensive, institutional transformation that redesigns the first year of college and creates sustainable change for student success.”¹⁶

While we researched numerous collaborative groups to inform this playbook, we selected seven networks that emerged in the 21st Century in the U.S. and have robust documentation of their efforts for more intensive profiles, to better illustrate the organizational structures and processes of networks (see Appendix A for full descriptions):

- *Achieving the Dream (ATD)*: a national network of community colleges that evolved into an independent non-profit organization, with a mission of closing achievement gaps and driving student success in the community college space using a continually evolving, field-informed framework to guide holistic curricular and institutional changes;
- *American Talent Initiative (ATI)*: a coalition of private and public four-year institutions that have pledged to expand opportunities for access and success for talented low- and moderate-income students;

¹⁵ APLU’s *Powered by Publics* Overview, <https://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/center-for-public-university-transformation/powered-by-publics/index.html>.

¹⁶ AASCU *Re-imagining the First Year of College*, <https://aascu.org/RFY/>.

- *Graduate RVA*: a regional partnership of higher education institutions in the greater Richmond, Virginia area, which spun off from a longer-standing cradle-to-career network to significantly increase regional postsecondary completion efforts as a means of reducing poverty and improving social mobility in the region;
- *The Long Beach College Promise (The Promise)*: a long-standing partnership between the major education institutions in the city of Long Beach, California, that has recently expanded its programming and partnership to further extend the promise of a quality college education to every student in the region;
- *The University Innovation Alliance (The UIA)*: an alliance of 11 public research universities across the nation aimed at significantly increasing the number of low-income students, first generation students, and students of color graduating with quality college degrees and catalyzing systemic changes in the entire higher education sector through active collaboration and information sharing;
- *Unizin*: a growing consortium of higher education institutions dedicated to co-developing and advancing a robust digital education and collaboration infrastructure to empower faculty and students through improved access to learning materials and rich data;
- *UpSkill Houston Initiative*: a regional partnership among a broad spectrum of players from business/industry, education, non-profit, and public sector seeking to increase awareness of high-growth career paths in the region and train individuals with the skills necessary for success, using curricula informed and developed around industry demand.

As visible from this small collection of featured networks, colleges and universities are not necessarily the only or even primary type of organization leading such efforts in the field of higher education. Some of the networks that we highlight, such as the *Long Beach College Promise*, include partners in the K-12 system, the local government, as well as local businesses. Others, such as the *UpSkill Houston Initiative*, feature workforce development organizations, industry leaders, and employers in primary roles, with colleges and universities serving in supporting roles.

Starting a Network: When and Why?

When is it a good idea to start a higher education-focused network? This depends heavily on the complexity and relevance of the problem at hand in the context of the larger higher education landscape of the time, how expertise and resources are distributed across the ecosystem, and the feasibility of starting a network that may involve various “readiness” factors on the part of key leadership and potential partners.

A network approach is suited to situations in which (1) the focal problem is complex and important to the community from which the potential network will be drawn; (2) the knowledge, expertise, access to target populations, and other components of potential solutions are distributed across different organizations; and (3) when the problem has no readily apparent solutions, requiring the iterative discovery and development of solutions.¹⁷ As evident from the problems being tackled by the seven featured networks we outlined above, many of the “thorny” problems in today’s postsecondary education ecosystem center on improving social mobility opportunities for diverse learner populations, especially those learners who have been historically excluded from or underserved by higher education.

Now, why might postsecondary leaders and partners want to consider taking a network approach to solving their difficult problems? There are numerous potential benefits of networks that cut across individual and collective domains; we describe three benefits most relevant to the present needs of postsecondary players:

- ***Quickly mobilize diverse sets of resources and human talent into novel combinations not otherwise available to single individuals or organizations.*** In order to navigate the intractable problems of our times (e.g. achievement gaps, skills gap, inequitable opportunities and outcomes), multi-faceted solutions that tap into expertise, knowledge, and connections of many individuals and organizations are needed. This requires a deliberate effort to facilitate better communication, information sharing, and problem solving between different individuals and entities that have traditionally operated in silos to see how their individual work fits in with those of others, align their resources and efforts, and together navigate the various forces that are shaping and re-shaping our economy and society. For example, employers and education providers can pool their expertise, resources, and talents to not only improve employer signaling of industry demands and education providers’ curriculum offerings to that end, but also devise new strategies and solutions not imaginable or practical for either party outside such a collaboration. By strategically assembling novel, flexible, and potentially higher-performing combinations of human talent and relevant resources, a network serves as a powerful tool for addressing thorny challenges in the field more effectively and nimbly.

¹⁷ Paul Vandeventer and Myrna Mandell, “Networks that Work: A Practitioner’s Guide to Managing Networked Action (2nd Edition),” *Community Partners* (2011), p. 80.

- ***Address both individual and broader systemic change by leveraging the power and influence of large numbers.*** Network participants are often distributed and large in terms of numbers, and the strength in numbers is not to be underestimated. This is readily evident for the many individuals and organizations already taking advantage of cooperative procurements to obtain quality goods and services at an affordable rate through large group contracts, for instance. Numbers exude power and imply significance, beyond group contracts. Several of our interviewees noted that it is much easier to build a case for broad and systemic change when a large group of individuals and organizations come together with a single voice around a focused goal.
- ***Develop and strengthen enduring relationships that support a sustained flow of far-reaching activities and impacts.*** The relationships built and developed through a network over time can potentially have a far-reaching impact that goes beyond the network itself. Successful networks can have “ripple effects” of continuing and spreading their learning to others in and around their social circles, allowing information, ideas, and resources to move more quickly and widely than they would in other forms of collaboration, influencing others’ work in profound ways.

It is important to note, however, that a network approach to solving problems of student opportunity in postsecondary education is not always advisable. There will be circumstances when the costs of a network approach outweigh its benefits, especially when the time and resource commitment for coordinating and collaborating is not justified by the anticipated impacts and benefits of the effort. There are also challenges in higher education where a change in government policy may be the only viable long-term solution. And some problems might be adequately addressed through simpler forms of inter-organizational cooperation instead of a network (e.g. shared services, or short-term partnerships).¹⁸

Even when a network approach makes sense on paper, certain conditions must be in place to make it feasible. These include the leaders’ willingness to allocate resources and political capital to support a network, as well as potential partners’ willingness to commit to a long-term relationship and invest time, money, energy, and other resources. We delve into these, and some of the other conditions that need to be met when forming and developing a successful higher education-focused network, in later sections.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 86.

Successful Network vs. Network Success

It is worthwhile at this point to note an important distinction: a *successful network* does not necessarily imply that the network has achieved substantive *network success*. We define a successful network as one that has effectively brought together diverse players who have pledged to collaboratively tackle a complex social problem, and has established a good infrastructure for member engagement and collaboration to that end. Network success, on the other hand, refers to the network meeting its stated goals or fulfilling its ambitious purpose (e.g., improving student success and social mobility). While establishing a successful network may well be one important aspect of network success—and perhaps a necessary one—the higher education-focused networks covered in this playbook have broader practical goals with tangible social impact. The recommendations we present next in the form of key action steps focus on starting and developing a successful network, rather than achieving network success, though the former may be an important step to achieving the latter.

The network managers and experts we interviewed shared the challenges and complexities of evaluating a network's impact and, by extension, its success. A network is a moving target that adapts rapidly to changes in its context, such that its intermediate goals and the best means by which to assess progress toward them are dynamic and fluid. Moreover, due to the numerous players that move in and out of a network throughout different phases of its life cycle, as well as its intersecting and overlapping activities, the network may have a chain of impacts that are not readily visible, trackable, or even anticipated. Finally, because it often takes a long time to build a successful network that can yield any positive impact, premature assessments of network success run the risk of stymieing progress and viability. With that said, as we describe in more detail throughout the playbook, developing an appropriate definition of substantive success for a particular network, as well as a strategy for assessing it in some way, are important checks to ensure the network remains focused on its underlying purpose and that the very act of maintaining the network itself does not become its main purpose.

Key Action Steps to Starting and Developing a Successful Network

One of the goals of collaborative networks is to bring about transformative change in their community, field, and/or sector. Change is fundamentally a people process, and in order to achieve and sustain a change, it must be deeply embedded in people's mindsets, practices, and behaviors at every level. Building a network involves making appropriate decisions and actions based on an understanding of the evolving situation. The success

of a network does not rest on one successful initial negotiation to build membership and technical capacity; it also relies on constant negotiation with the changing nature of the organizations and individuals involved.

Below we present key people-centered processes of successful higher education-focused networks, organized by four high-level action steps, from the starting of the network itself to its path towards continued growth and sustainability. We present these steps in a loosely chronological sequence because they build on each other, with the earlier steps often helping to lay the foundation for the next steps. Conversely, shortcomings in a given step can impact the success of subsequent steps and the network's overall success. We recognize, however, that in reality, a network's developmental path will be more dynamic and nonlinear than what we portray here. To contextualize these action steps and their main components, we feature specific examples from the networks we studied. We encourage readers to think about the interdependent as well as evolving nature of these steps and processes, and link them back to their own collaborative efforts, and to the implications they may have for fully realizing the network's collective potential.



Action Step 1: Organize People Around a Shared Vision and Purpose

Some networks arise organically, rooted in deep historical and interpersonal connections that are rarely visible to the public eye. These roots engender a sense of vision and purpose that define what the network's members are committing to do together. For other networks, that shared vision is cultivated intentionally among a group of people or organizations that lack the same historical relationships, but are nevertheless bound by a common goal, region, or set of constituents. In either case, simply having those relationships or common purpose is insufficient to start a successful network. That initial connection must be nurtured and transformed into a network structure through a process carefully designed and executed by a team of highly committed and enthusiastic leaders.

Mobilize visionary and committed leadership to engender a sense of urgency and enthusiasm around a problem in the field

Every successful postsecondary network that we have observed has a multi-person team of champions that plays a pivotal role in its birth and early development. These champions are individuals with active roles in various capacities in and around postsecondary education, such as college and university presidents, chancellors, and administrators, as well as industry leaders, philanthropy officers, policy makers,

researchers, advisors, and community thought leaders. They have a deep understanding of the lay of the land and can leverage their interpersonal connections and effectively use research and data to create urgency and enthusiasm among stakeholders and the public around a particular problem and advocate for change that requires a concerted effort of diverse players. There are at least two types of champions whose presences are critical in the formation phase of a network: *ideation champions* and *staff champions*.

Ideation champions are individuals often at the CEO, presidential, or other senior executive level, who champion ideas or concepts that lead to the creation of a new network or significant expansion, revamping, or restructuring of an existing one. Highly integrated, visible, and respected in their respective community or field, these champions have the ability to create legitimacy and authenticity to motivate others to support their vision and share the experience. They also play a critical role by doing a lot of the heavy lifting, including capitalizing on the urgency and enthusiasm they help create to mobilize seed funding to support the successful formation and launch of a network.

How do ideation champions find each other and successfully bring others on board? Typically, they find each other through the plethora of local, regional, and national venues and professional and social networks, which are fertile ground in which to plant the seeds of a collaborative network. The examples below illustrate how existing connections in the higher education community fostered the initial championing of two such networks.

- Through their respective institutions' affiliation with the Big Ten Academic Alliance, where collaboration is the norm,¹⁹ Brad Wheeler of Indiana University and James Hilton of the University of Michigan started conversations that led to their co-founding of *Unizin* - a network formed in response to the rapid growth of higher education technologies. The pair had over a decade of experience working together and with many other institutions in building collaborative digital models and services,²⁰ and had been particularly vocal about urging research universities to move away from perpetual silos and toward "intentional interdependence" to find more effective solutions to complex problems in higher education.²¹

¹⁹ The Big Ten Academic Alliance is a consortium of 14 institutions which was first established in 1958. The group's collaborative efforts span across many areas including, but not limited to, cooperative purchasing and licensing, course sharing, professional development programs, library resources, information technology, and faculty networking.

²⁰ Select examples of cross-institutional digital collaboration projects include [Kuali](#), [Sakai](#), and [OmniSOC](#).

²¹ Bradley Wheeler and James L. Hilton, "The Marketecture of Community," *EDUCAUSE*, 2012. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2012/11/the-marketecture-of-community>.

Together they organized a series of conversations among their circle of colleagues and friends, many of whom were in charge of the information technology strategy and systems in their respective institutions, to come together around the *Unizin* vision—to enable universities to collaboratively develop, advance, and maintain a shared digital education infrastructure rather than rely on proprietary educational products and services with adverse impacts on educational quality.

- President Michael Crow of Arizona State University invited a small group of presidents and chancellors to engage in a discussion about collaboration and scale on the heels of the Next Generation University project published by New America.²² After the publication of the report, he organized several meetings to bring together university presidents, chancellors, and other campus leaders to discuss its findings and implications, building a sense of urgency for action. These conversations ultimately ignited motivation and support from the field to form the *UIA* with a goal of increasing graduation rates among low-income students by identifying and scaling successful student success interventions in a group of large public research universities in the U.S.

Moreover, it is important to note the value of **staff champions**, who champion the substantive work of a network, including shepherding its formation, development, and ongoing development. Some staff champions may work closely with ideation champions in the early stages of a network to assist with its formation and launch, working “behind the scenes” to continue building a sense of urgency for the proposed problem and garnering enthusiasm and support from the field. One of their key roles is building, and then strengthening, the network’s connective tissue by managing relationships with and among partners and members, regularly reinforcing the shared values and goals, building consensus, and driving the focus of participants’ efforts toward the network’s collective goals. We will further discuss the role of staff champions in later action steps.

Clearly define the purpose of the network

One of the first tasks of network champions is to establish and communicate a clearly defined purpose for the network—its *raison d’être*. This purpose will guide and inform how the network is designed and built, including the key processes of selecting network partners and developing the network’s strategic design. Establishing a network purpose can be especially challenging when there is no clarity on the kinds of activities

²² Jeff Selingo, Kevin Carey, Hilary Pennington, Rachel Fishman, and Iris Palmer, “The Next Generation University,” *Education Policy Program, New America Foundation*, 2013, https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/New-America-Foundation_The-Next-Generation-University.pdf.

participants will be engaged in and the kinds of outcomes they will be producing.²³ It is therefore important to develop a purpose that is broadly applicable, but focused in terms of the problem it aims to tackle, with the recognition that it may need to be adjusted as the network matures and evolves over time. For some networks, agreeing on a set of shared performance measures can further help aligning members around the shared purpose as well as a sense of direction while providing a system of accountability.

While the purpose of a network can take different forms and shapes depending on the local context, specific problem at hand, and target beneficiaries of its activities, the underlying principle must be inclusive and collaborative in nature. In other words, the purpose of the network must be defined in such a way that it necessitates the alignment and contributions of involved parties to drive an intended impact, as shown in the following examples.

- *The American Talent Initiative (ATI)*, a collaboration between the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, Ithaka S+R, and a growing alliance of colleges and universities, was founded with a single purpose in mind: expand high-quality postsecondary opportunity and access to talented low- and moderate-income students across the nation. To that end, the network champions set an early and ambitious national 2025 goal of attracting, enrolling, and graduating an additional 50,000 lower- and moderate-income students at over 300 high-performing four-year colleges and universities in the country.²⁴ The purpose of forming *ATI*, as well as its shared performance measure, are collaborative in nature by design, as they require the partners and member institutions to work together to bring about a scale of national change that no single institution can do alone.
- *The Long Beach College Promise (The Promise)* is one of the signature initiatives of the Long Beach Education Partnership,²⁵ which was first established in 1994 as part of the larger community-wide effort to tackle economic and demographic challenges facing the city at the time. Born in 2008 out of the successes and strong foundation of the existing partnership, the *Promise* focused on expanding opportunity for all Long Beach Unified School District students by eliminating

²³ Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, and John Cleveland, "Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact," Island Press, 2014, p. 44.

²⁴ In the context of ATI, high-performing institutions are those that consistently graduate at least 70% of their students within six years.

²⁵ Natalie Nielsen and Kirstin McCarthy, "Improving education through collaboration: a case study of the Long Beach Seamless Education Partnership," *Business-Higher Education Forum*, 2009, http://www.bhef.com/sites/default/files/BHEF_2009_improving_education_through_collaboration.pdf.

barriers to student success in every step of their education pathways from pre-K to college and later on to career and life. By design, the *Promise's* purpose requires rigorous alignment of mission, curriculum, standards, and practices across the district's three education systems—its public school district, community college, and state university.

Strategically recruit and assemble partners with the network's purpose in mind

Another critical task of the champions in the early stages of a network, which must be approached with a high degree of intentionality, is recruiting the “right” partners who can increase the network's value and, ultimately, its chances of success. Network partners include the institutions, schools, and organizations, and relevant individuals within them, who will carry out the network's actual activities (e.g. institutions that educate or train students), as well as those that directly support them to that end (e.g. a governmental office, an organization serving a core supporting function to the network, or an actively engaged funder). There are at least three qualitative criteria against which network builders can assess a potential partner's fit: *partner compatibility*, *complementarity*, and *capacity*.²⁶ While all three elements are important to successful partner selection, the degree to which they should be emphasized varies depending on the purpose and structure of the network, the context in which the network resides, as well as its maturity in the field.

As will be exemplified in the upcoming sections, different networks have different needs based on their purposes and context, such that a source of compatibility for one network may be a source of incompatibility for another (see Sidebar 2 for how the three elements of partner selection criteria played out in the formation of the *University Innovation Alliance*). It is important to note that even when these three criteria are met, strong competition among potential network partner organizations at a high level may have direct implications for their own viability and sustainability as independent entities in today's competitive environment. The interests of the individual partner organizations may undermine effective collaboration and the interests of the network. With that said, as we discuss later, there are strategies to promote “healthy competition” among network partners and their members that can be beneficial to those involved and to the network as a whole.

²⁶ We drew on business management literature on strategic alliance (i.e. Reshma H. Shah and Vanitha Swaminathan, “Factors Influencing Partner Selection in Strategic Alliances: The Moderating Role of Alliance Context,” *Strategic Management Journal* 29, no. 5 (2008): 471-494.) as well as insights gleaned from our interviews to come up with these three partner selection criteria.

Partner compatibility refers to the similarity and close alignment among partners' core vision, level of commitment and trust, organizational culture, values, norms, and working styles, which can make it easier for partners to readily build rapport with each other and more effectively cross their institutional boundaries to collaborate.

Compatibility is especially important when a high level of entanglement among partners is needed—when the work requires partners to rely on each other, share risks, and “co-labor” to accelerate their goals. Some of our interviewees noted that one important area for compatibility is the pace at which higher education institutions are leading or lagging each other in campus innovation or transformation. If a “readiness” for institutional change is central to carrying out the network's purpose, differential paces among partners may create a significant hurdle to robust collaboration. Recognizing this, *Unizin*, for instance, chose to form with a limited set of highly compatible institutions—four public research universities that were willing and able to take similar risks on a similar timeframe and make a significant financial investment at the outset to help build the initial infrastructure and process for *Unizin's* ecosystem of digital education systems and collaborations.²⁷

Partner complementarity refers to the degree to which partners can contribute a non-overlapping set of expertise, skills, knowledge, contexts, and/or resources to support the network's efforts. The complementary nature of partners' contributions can further validate the importance of their collaborative relationship, and if leveraged and integrated well, can yield powerful synergistic outcomes. Since scale is a key characteristic of higher education-focused networks, some level of complementarity will need to be built into partner composition to expand the network's reach and impact. How and when complementarity should be achieved varies greatly across networks. By way of example, *Graduate RVA* by design needed to include four-year and two-year institutions due to its focus in part on credit transfer success.²⁸ As the network evolved to focus more directly on reducing racial equity gaps in attainment, it needed to further prioritize complementarity by inviting partners with a strong record in enrolling and supporting underserved students, in this case African American students. To that end, the network sought a regional HBCU partner for complementarity in that regard, while also maintaining compatibility by selecting a public institution with a demonstrated interest in promoting transfer success and aligning practices across the region's public institutions.

²⁷ The founding members each invested \$1 million over three years to help launch Unizin.

²⁸ Graduate RVA is a spinoff of a broader regional cradle-to-career partnership in Richmond, Virginia, formerly known as Bridging Richmond. Read more about Graduate RVA and its history in Appendix A.

Finally, **partner capacity** in the narrow sense refers to partners' ability to dedicate appropriate and timely resources (e.g. expertise, skills, or knowledge) to successfully carry out their collaborative projects. Partner capacity may be easier to gauge and plan for in shorter-term projects focused on a discrete set of activities (e.g. data sharing among a small group of institutions for a certain duration of time), but more difficult in highly mission-driven projects with ambitious goals that require sustained partner engagement for a long period of time. In the latter case, the definition of capacity is broadened to include a partner's leadership commitment to the shared vision, community buy-in and engagement, and adequate institutional infrastructures, policies, and practices to support the network's particular goals—all of which are important prerequisites for taking a comprehensive and sustainable approach to improving student success at scale.²⁹

Sidebar 2: Balancing partner compatibility, complementarity, and capacity in the formation of the University Innovation Alliance (UIA)

The background research that catalyzed discussions that would later lead to formation of the UIA identified six high-performing public research universities that were expanding enrollment while improving student graduation rates in cost-effective ways. Of those, four institutions joined forces with a group of other campuses to form the UIA. These institutions were *compatible* on a number of criteria, including: a history of national service and an egalitarian commitment to social mobility for students; previous experience in scaling innovations from small pilots to university-wide programs; and a shared commitment to developing scaling methods for higher education; as well as their willingness to partner and share information.³⁰

In terms of *complementarity*, the 11 institutions collectively represent major regions of the U.S., with each having demonstrated expertise serving different student populations. Each institution is situated within a distinct state context, with differences in state funding, local demographics, governance arrangements, and more. According to the UIA's prospectus, these differences make its member institutions particularly well-suited for developing scaling methods for higher education "in part because [they] represent the demographic, geographic, and economic diversity of the country."

Finally, the willingness of the partner institutions' presidents and chancellors to commit to a number of steps has contributed to their collective *capacity* to iterate and scale campus innovations together: Each institution has agreed to match funds raised for the UIA's activities, appoint designated senior administrators to shepherd projects related to the network's goals, and hire full-time paid fellows dedicated exclusively to its activities.

²⁹ For the list of seven essential capacities that must be in place for colleges to take a comprehensive approach to improve student outcomes, developed by Achieving the Dream (ATD), see https://www.achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/basic_page/atd_icat_assessment_tool.pdf.

³⁰ The University Innovation Alliance Vision and Prospectus, <http://www.theuia.org/sites/default/files/UIA-Vision-Prospectus.pdf>.

It is important to keep in mind that the partner fit assessment criteria we outline above could be used in ways—whether intended or not—to exclude certain groups or individuals from participating in these collaborative activities, especially those from minority and underserved backgrounds with limited resources, thereby reinforcing and exacerbating the gaps that exist between haves and have-nots in higher education and throughout the nation.³¹ One of the key benefits of network participation includes access to knowledge and relationships (e.g. social capital) that are important elements of upward social mobility for both individuals and communities.³² Network builders and community leaders must think critically about these issues in their partner selection and assembly processes.



Action Step 2: Design an Organizational Structure that will Pave the Road to Success

Networks require an organizational structure that will infuse the shared vision and coordinate activity at the partner institutions and organizations, so they can collectively own and lead the network's efforts. This structure must account for the deep collaboration and sustainability needed to maintain the network, even when it faces unanticipated challenges (e.g. leadership turnover). A large part of this process involves the strategic engagement and alignment of cross-functional players at multiple levels both within individual organizations and across the network through a strong central coordination mechanism, including empowering individuals outside of traditional leadership roles to contribute their expertise and knowledge to lead different parts of the change process. As we have alluded to in the previous action step, the role of staff champions is essential in this stage to help pave the road for successful organization of a network.

³¹ For a discussion of inequities facing students and institutions in higher education, see Barrett J. Taylor & Brendan Cantwell, "Unequal Higher Education: Wealth, Status and Student Opportunity," *Rutgers University Press*, 2019.

³² Adrianna Kezar and Sean Gehrke in their study on communities of practice found that participating in such communities provide significant benefits for women faculty and for faculty of color. Some of these benefits include networking, being afforded the opportunity to pursue new projects and grants, gaining credibility for their approach to professional work, and gaining skills to move up in their career. See Adrianna Kezar and Sean Gehrke, "Communities of Transformation and Their Work Scaling STEM Reform."

Establish an “embedded” backbone function for the network

Every well-run network we studied has some form of backbone function that engages, aligns, and integrates its members into a coherent whole.³³ While there does not appear to be one best model for designing and instituting a backbone function for a higher education-focused network, it is clear that having such a function is *necessary* to hold the group together, keep it on mission, and support its growth over time.³⁴ A backbone function can ease the administrative burden of running the network and allow the group to get up-and-running faster and move further toward its goals. The role of a backbone function will vary depending on the context, scope, and maturity of a network. Also, its hosting entity, format, or even focus may shift over time as the purpose and goal of the network evolve through different phases of its life cycle. As such, a backbone should not be viewed as a simple plug-in solution, but rather as a function that is ideally generated and adapted based on the network’s unique context and evolving needs.³⁵ There are at least two approaches through which a backbone function can be integrated into higher education-focused networks to maximize their success:

- ***An internal and embedded approach*** utilizes full-time leadership staff and a mix of other in-house staff or consultants to provide core functions to the network. It is *internal* because the staff serving the backbone function are directly affiliated with the organizations or institutions that are key network members, and also *embedded* because their main job is dedicated to carrying out the work of the network. This approach seems to be a go-to strategy for many higher education-focused networks, particularly those involving a somewhat controlled number of participants, who often have a shared history of missions, institutional or organizational type, and regional focus. It is also a relatively

³³ This term originates from the Collective Impact work, pioneered by John Kania and Mark Kramer (See their influential 2011 paper on collective impact published in Stanford Social Innovation Review, <https://www.everychildcqi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Collective-Impact-Stanford-Social-Innovation-Review-2011.pdf>). Note that we are using this term slightly differently than how Kania and Kramer have framed it. We learned through our research that it’s important to have this kind of function to support a network’s continued growth and development, but the entities serving this function don’t necessarily have to be independent external organizations. It is possible to build this function internally at the partner institutions or outsource some or all of that work externally. What seems to matter is the degree of embeddedness of a backbone within the community in which the network aims to make an impact, and its ability to provide central coordination support to accommodate the network’s workload and manage its various internal and external relationships.

³⁴ The role of coordination has received relatively little attention in the scholarship of collaboration. Ranjay Gulati and his colleagues, in their 2012 article, demonstrates how coordination can add conceptual richness to our understanding of different phases of alliance’s life cycle. See Ranjay Gulati, Franz Wohlgezogen, and Pavel Zhelyazkov, “The Two Facets of Collaboration: Cooperation and Coordination in Strategic Alliances,” *Academy of Management Annals* 6 (2012): 531–583, https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/10996795/gulati_wohlgezogen_zhelyazkov_the-two-facets_20120430.pdf?sequence=1.

³⁵ For example, Graduate RVA (formerly Bridging Richmond) initially took an external backbone approach, with a small team of central staff at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) serving as an external convener to a network of partners across the greater Richmond area. As the purpose of the network evolved to focus on postsecondary education attainment goals, and the members and their particular roles changed accordingly, it adopted an internally embedded approach, which we describe in more detail below.

inexpensive way to quickly get a network off the ground with a generally light team of central administrative staff (e.g. *Graduate RVA*, *The University Innovation Alliance* and *The Long Beach College Promise*).

- ***An external, but embedded, approach*** utilizes a third-party organization to provide the key expertise to the network and act as a monitor to evaluate its success. It is *external* because the staff of the backbone function are not directly affiliated with the institutions or organizations that are key members of the network, but still *embedded* since these third-party organizations often have deep professional and interpersonal ties to the network. This approach seems to be preferred when the size of the network (e.g. number of participants) and/or diversity of its members (e.g. participants from different organizational types, communities, sectors, fields) are very large, or when the network itself lacks sufficient resources (e.g. skills, expertise, staff time) to develop an internal backbone function. In some cases, this role might be filled by an existing non-profit organization that already has the administrative infrastructure, connections, and expertise necessary to support a network (e.g. the Greater Houston Partnership serves as the backbone for the *UpSkill Houston Initiative*; the Aspen Institute and Ithaka S+R serve as the backbone for the *American Talent Initiative*). In other cases, this may involve an entirely separate full-scale organization created specifically for this function (e.g. *Achieving the Dream*, *Unizin*). Funders may also fill this gap by providing resources and assisting to align partners and guide their activities (e.g. *Lumina Talent Hubs Initiative*).³⁶

Leadership exercised by the backbone function can play an important role when it comes to making progress toward achieving a network's end goal. The key characteristics of effective backbone leadership include being exceptional collaborators and relationship builders.³⁷ Their communication strategies are aimed at helping members remain focused on the end goal, and continue to think about their work in the interest of the collective, not just in the interest of an individual member. Throughout the lifecycle of a

³⁶ In 2017, Lumina Foundation, in partnership with the Kresge Foundation, shifted one of its grant programs to a "designation model," as a core component to its long-term goal to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality postsecondary credentials to 60% by 2025. Through Lumina Talent Hubs Initiative, communities throughout the nation that employ systems-change strategies to increase post-secondary attainment are spotlighted and receive modest financial support, technical assistance on partnership health, equity and attainment strategies, as well as a network of peer communities across the nation. This is Lumina's strategy to engage directly with their grantees, without using an external intermediary, to experience growth and challenges as they occur on the ground. See Kim Glassman, "The Power of Designation: What We're Learning About the Talent Hubs Model," *Equal Measure's Impact Blog*, July 11, 2018, <http://www.equalmeasure.org/ideas/impactblog/power-designation-learning-talent-hubs-model/>.

³⁷ These characteristics have already been identified in previous literature. See Shiloh Turner, Kathy Merchant, John Kania, & Ellen Martin, "Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact: Part 4," July, 20, 2012, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organizations_in_collective_impact_4#.

network, the backbone function plays a variety of different roles, including but not limited to:

- An *accelerator* to shorten the time to the goal.
- An *arbiter* to provide neutral expertise and guidance.
- A *bridge builder* to connect cultures that would normally not work together.
- A *convener* to connect groups of people to collaborate, form relationships, or develop new partnerships.
- An *evaluator* to establish shared metrics and evaluation processes.
- A *funder* to set a high-level vision and provide the resources necessary to mobilize efforts.
- A *fund raiser* to help mobilize funding for the network.
- A *guide* to help analyze capacities and needs of partners and/or members.
- A *project manager* to assist with coordination and completion of projects on time within agreed-upon budget and scope.
- A *quality and accountability expert* to fill where the main participants don't have the capacity.

Regardless of the backbone approach taken—whether internally built or externally sourced—it is critical that the backbone function remains lean and mission-aware. This allows it to (1) avoid replicating the legacy and bureaucratic structures of individual partners; (2) continue to invest in the development and capacity of individual network members, and perhaps most importantly, (3) not overshadow the network partners by becoming the public-facing, de facto stand-in for the overall network.

Engage and align cross-functional players to identify focus areas and develop project plans

At the individual member organizations, leadership involvement at the top is undoubtedly important, but it alone is not sufficient for creating deep and sustained change. People across departments and at multiple levels of an organization's hierarchy, with or without formal leadership titles, must be aligned around a shared vision and work together to move the networks' agenda forward. Without this kind of alignment and cohesiveness, the initial sparks of enthusiasm that often accompany the beginning of a network will likely remain small and ephemeral.

In their recent paper on the topic, Adrianna Kezar and Elizabeth Holcombe argue that today's higher education leadership challenges necessitate new forms of leadership—ones that move away from the leader-follower binary type to recognize the importance of many leader types across the organization that are not necessarily limited to those in

positions of authority.³⁸ Research has found that this type of shared leadership allows organizations to quickly learn, innovate, perform, and adapt to various challenges in today's complex environments. Engaging and aligning key cross-functional players at multiple levels enable institutions to garner broader community buy-in, and create the conditions that are conducive for active member engagement, including peer mentoring and enforcement. This kind of "authentic engagement" is ideal for developing many important decisions and plans, particularly those whose success highly depend on collaboration among many stakeholders.³⁹ By bringing together multiple points of view to inform decisions, such broad-based engagement fosters a sense of legitimacy and shared responsibility among the key stakeholders in the change process early on and throughout, creating broader awareness of the network's goals and activities and stronger momentum for change.⁴⁰

- In the *Long Beach College Promise*, the superintendent of the Long Beach Unified School District and the presidents of the Long Beach Community College and California State University, Long Beach, together lead and govern the partnership. In addition, a leadership council, comprised of a convener and a steering committee made up of two senior representatives from each institution, serves as the link between the partners and shepherds different projects that directly contribute to the partnership's goals. The leadership council capitalizes on the shared leadership of staff, faculty, and administrators across the institutions to design and devise project plans. For example, when forming working groups to create curricular pathways for students across the institutions (e.g. engineering, liberal arts, or health pathways), each working group would include faculty, academic advisors, counselors, and administrators with expertise with specific disciplines to lead various project efforts to fully understand students' experiences along the academic pipeline.⁴¹ This approach allows faculty members to contribute their classroom and curricular expertise, advisors and counselors to contribute their institutional policies expertise, and administrators to provide a macro-level perspective and appropriate support to individual working groups. This shared leadership approach, coupled with intersegmental

³⁸ Adrianna J. Kezar and Elizabeth M. Holcombe. "Shared Leadership in Higher Education: Important Lessons from Research and Practice," *American Council on Education*, 2017, <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Shared-Leadership-in-Higher-Education.pdf>.

³⁹ Will Friedman, "Strengthening Achieving the Dream Planning through Stakeholder Engagement: A Guide for Community College Leadership Teams," *Achieving the Dream*, 2007, https://www.achievingthedream.org/system/files_force/resources/ATD_StakeholderEngagementManual_2007.pdf?download=1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴¹ Long Beach College Promise Newsletter, Issue 1, Vol 1, 2016, http://www.longbeachcollegepromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/LBCP-Governors-Innovation-Award_Newsletter_September-2016-r1-.pdf.

and inter-institutional communication and collaboration, allows teams to collectively own the work and come up with solutions that best meet the needs of students across the three institutions.



Action Step 3: Cultivate a Culture of Engagement and Shared Responsibility

In addition to a strong organizational structure, networks require a highly aligned structure or process in place to further cultivate a culture of engagement and shared responsibility. This structure must be carefully designed and continually modified to foster trust among network members, enable them to co-create a shared narrative and group identity, and reinforce their motivation for participating in the network. As we noted in the first action step, the very purpose of bringing together different players through a network approach is to tackle a problem or challenge that no one organization can solve alone. As such, there must be ample opportunities for people to interact and collaborate to advance and move the network's agenda forward. To maximize the group's collaborative potential, these interactions must be purposeful, meaningful, and motivational—both at the professional and interpersonal levels.

Create regular opportunities for purposeful interaction among network members

Learning is a major incentive for collaboration, as individuals and organizations are always seeking new or different ways to improve their practices. Regular opportunities for interaction among different individuals or groups of individuals that engage in the network's activities are key channels through which such learning can happen. Contextualized for the network's vision and goals, such opportunities allow people to share ideas, as well as concerns and challenges, and support each other while also problem-solving together. These processes engender not only collegiality and a sense of belonging to the network, but also a sense of purpose—that they are part of something much bigger—and reinforce a shared responsibility for the network's vision and goals. Individuals tend to crave these interactions, but they are difficult to create without strong leadership and coordination support—and backbone functions can play a crucial role around these efforts.

The meetings can be designed to enable both deep and broad learning, tailored for different groups of individuals, alternating between group and individual work, and encouraging collaboration and creative thinking. It is important for meeting organizers to keep in mind that time is a valuable resource for any kind of collaborative work, and therefore, must be tapped into strategically. Attention must be paid to both the

frequency and quality of these meetings, and that the interactions they will generate are purposeful and useful from the perspectives of the individuals, subgroups, or the network as a whole.

- *Unizin* members are provided with ample opportunities to connect with one another in the digital spaces (e.g. blogs and webcasts) as well as in-person through both regular and ad-hoc meetings. As the group matures and its connectivity strengthens, members are developing new groups and subgroups to help drive their vision and work together to build out plans for *Unizin*. The biggest group is the Teaching and Learning (T&L) group which was formed by members passionate about and dedicated to student success and affordability measures. The group also has numerous subgroups around focused topics, including faculty development, accessibility, learning analytics, and more. The T&L group hosts bi-annual meetings that bring together learning technologists, librarians, and higher education leaders from the member campuses to form connections and help inform important developments and decisions for the broader *Unizin* community. Moreover, annual summits are hosted to provide a platform for members to share their research, workshop ideas, and see how their individual goals fit into the larger goals of the group.

Focus on shared results, but also elevate individual achievements

It is critical for a network to bring its members together around discussions of the group's shared results. This process further cultivates shared responsibility across the group, and reinforces the mission and goal of the collaboration itself and collaborative process. Furthermore, sharing these results with a broader audience beyond the network can empower its members, strengthen their shared interests and connective ties, and attract more attention and support from the public. At the same time however, a narrow focus on the interests of the whole network can leave individual members feeling disconnected from the network and the value it provides them.⁴² Elevating individual achievements at different levels—individual, team, specific collaboration within the network, or whole institution—is an effective strategy to promote and maintain member motivation, satisfaction, and performance. Networks greatly benefit from striking a healthy balance between recognizing and highlighting both the collective and individual

⁴² Peter Plastrik and Madeleine Taylor, "Net Gains: A Handbook for Network Builders Seeking Social Change," *Innovation Network for Communities*, 2006, p. 81. <http://networkimpact.org/downloads/NetGainsHandbookVersion1.pdf>.

successes of its members, and the backbone function can play a key role in facilitating this balance.⁴³

- The *American Talent Initiative (ATI)* aims to enable collaboration among its member institutions that can yield the greatest benefits through a set of core strategies: reinforcing a sense of collective responsibility through a shared goal and regular progress reporting; using a cross-institutional perspective and research to surface and understand network-wide effective practices; elevating strong examples of progress at individual institutions through internal and public communications (e.g., research publications, media outreach, and internal presentations and newsletters); and facilitating communities of practice that coalesce members around focused goals and tailored strategies. The goal of these processes is to create conditions that inspire the network's over 120 private and public four-year institutions to serve more talented low- and moderate-income students throughout the nation. According to a chancellor of an ATI member university, being in the network creates a "friendly competition" that incentivizes institutions to share their best practices and together accelerate their shared goals around student access and success.



Action Step 4: Continuously Develop the Network's Capacity, Capability, and Purpose

Bringing about transformative change in a community, field, or sector is an iterative self-reflexive process that requires ongoing refining, tuning, and restructuring. Many healthy networks embed self-assessment and evaluation in their work to capture lessons, make course corrections, develop and test new approaches and models, and make continuous improvements. Ongoing assessment and regular self-evaluation enable networks to respond nimbly to shifts in their environment and to strategically pivot, as needed, to remain relevant and impactful in the field.

Continually engage in multiple forms of self-assessment and evaluation

Continual self-assessment enables a network to systematically track its development to manage its evolution, understand what it is achieving for its members and field as a whole, and identify areas for improvement and growth. When developing

⁴³ Striking a healthy balance of recognizing individual and collective achievements is a major management challenge in any kind of people organization. See Amy Bucher, "Organizational Dynamics: Balancing Individual Achievement with Team Success," *Amy Bucher, Ph.D.* (personal webpage), June 16, 2016, <http://www.amybucherphd.com/organizational-dynamics-balancing-individual-achievement-with-team-success/>.

assessment plans and tools, it is important that networks avoid rigid and limited frameworks that focus too narrowly on the particular outcomes of specific processes or efforts, at the expense of capturing various aspects of the network's developmental process for a more holistic picture of its performance. Network self-assessment is most effective when it considers indicators of impact at multiple levels, and is collaboratively designed with an eye toward developing a system-wide view of what different members are attempting and achieving. Broadly speaking, the two main areas of assessment include: (1) the overall health of the network and (2) its various measurable outputs.⁴⁴

The overall health of a network can be assessed qualitatively by looking at whether it is evolving as intended. For instance, do its value propositions resonate with its members? How large and diverse is its membership? To what degree are members engaged and how is leadership shared and distributed across the network? What is its funding capacity? How capable is the network in engaging in continuous learning and adapting based on their new knowledge? How connected is the network to external partners who can directly support it, as well as its reputation and relevance in the field? Such information can be gathered through general observation, as well as direct communication with members and partners through formal or informal meetings, phone conversations, social media, surveys, site visits, and self-reflection. This type of "feedback" help networks evolve and address emerging challenges, and foster their continued growth and sustainability.⁴⁵

- In July 2015, more than a decade after the inception of *Achieving the Dream (ATD)*, then new president Karen Stout and her leadership team paused to assess *ATD's* role and contributions to the field.⁴⁶ They concluded that it had stagnated; losing ground and relevance due to its long-standing model that was no longer

⁴⁴ We drew on our interviews and the following papers to come up with the two assessment areas: Peter Plastrik and Madeleine Taylor, "Net Gains: A Handbook for Network Builders Seeking Social Change," *Innovation Network for Communities*, 2006, p. 87-96, <http://networkimpact.org/downloads/NetGainsHandbookVersion1.pdf>;

"How do we know if our network is effective?" *Grantmakers for Effective Organizations*, May 29, 2014. <https://www.geofunders.org/resources/how-do-we-know-if-our-network-is-effective-659>. Also see the two-part network evaluation guide developed by Network Impact and Center for Evaluation Innovation. <http://www.networkimpact.org/network-evaluation-guide/>.

⁴⁵ Adrianna Kezar and Sean Gehrke in their research on communities of practice in STEM reform found that establishing formal mechanisms for feedback and advice through multiple venues, such as advisor boards, steering committees, surveys, and other assessments to get feedback from members, enable communities to reflect on how they are operating and where they are headed, thereby fostering their longer-term sustainability. See Adrianna Kezar and Sean Gehrke. "Communities of Transformation and Their Work Scaling STEM Reform," 2016, p. 71-72, <https://pullias.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/communities-of-trans.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Prior to assuming her leadership role at ATD, Karen Stout was the president of Montgomery County Community College - a member of the ATD network since 2006. Karen had a long exposure to ATD before moving into her role in 2015, and therefore was well aware of how ATD developed over the years and how the field within which it operates was progressing.

novel or adequate for its goals in the present context.⁴⁷ As such, Stout led *ATD* through a strategy reset process, which involved engaging with community college presidents, program staff, founding funders and partners, and new *ATD* members, as well as revisiting reports and qualitative feedback from the past. This process pointed to “systems change” as key to helping community colleges achieve their ambitious student success agendas. This led to *ATD* shifting its focus from supporting colleges on discrete interventions to guiding them, through robust tools and services, in assessing and developing seven key institutional capacity areas to advance their whole-college transformation efforts to improve student success at scale.⁴⁸

The measurable outputs of a network include quantifiable achievements and results. Such information can be gathered by developing specific metrics that measure various intended outcomes of the network as a whole, and/or specific members, teams, or projects. This includes, but is not limited to, the number of activities undertaken and completed as a group, the amount of funds raised and matched, as well as specific impact measures from intervention projects. As an example, the *American Talent Initiative (ATI)* annually collects quantitative student enrollment data to monitor its members’ collective progress towards meeting the 2025 goal of attracting, enrolling, and graduating an additional 50,000 lower- and moderate-income students. The *ATI* team also collects a set of qualitative data from its member institutions, including information on their impact frameworks and plans, to assess their success in engaging and aligning partners to the network’s goals, as well as inform on-going activities (e.g. informational webinars, workshop sessions, and member convenings), designed to further support their progress towards meeting *ATI*’s individual and collective goals.

Continuous self-assessment helps and encourages networks to continuously evaluate and adjust accordingly as needed. It is important for networks to formalize this process such that information from its self-assessments are used purposefully and strategically to guide the future of the network. By pausing and taking a breath, so to speak, networks ensure they do not run the risk of embodying some of the problems they are actually fighting —e.g., inertia, risk-aversion, and narrowly focusing inwards. Network anniversaries, milestone completions, leadership changes, and momentous shifts in the field are common triggers for self-evaluations, whereby networks revisit their purpose,

⁴⁷ The guiding hypothesis for *ATD* at its inception was on the frontend of student success movement for community colleges – specifically, that developmental education was causing the leaks and blockage to reaching college completion rates for many students. As a result, a lot of the early *ATD* work focused on developmental education enrollment, completion, and improving coherence of the curriculum and outcomes, with less attention to systems and structures at the institutional level that are the biggest barriers. (Based on a recent phone interview with *ATD*’s president and CEO, Karen Stout).

⁴⁸ Read more about *ATD*’s approach and Institutional Change Assessment Tool (ICAT), <https://www.achievingthedream.org/our-network/our-approach>.

structure, strategies, and overall impact or necessity. Through this process, networks may adapt or refine their purpose, develop a new strategy, bring in new partners, or even restructure their approach altogether. It is important to note that measurable network results can take a long time to bring to fruition, and may even shift over time from the original intent as the network evolves. Networks are dynamic and always evolving, so keeping an open mind toward multiple forms of ongoing and learning-oriented assessment are critical.

Regularly re-visit key network structures and processes with an eye toward continued growth and sustainability

As a network matures over time, and sees the need for its continued growth and expansion toward broader purpose and goals, its managers need to think more deliberately about the network's operational model and strategies, with an eye toward sustainability. The sustainability model developed by Adrianna Kezar and Sean Gehrke provides a useful conceptual framework for considering a set of intersecting features to foster sustainability, which we adapt and describe further below, with examples and insights gleaned from our research:⁴⁹

- ***Leadership onboarding, development, and succession planning.*** Leadership turnover is one of the key barriers to change initiatives in higher education,⁵⁰ and in order to sustain a network's efforts even in times of leadership changes, it is important to have a formal process in place to onboard new leaders into the network and also to delegate authority to others in the organization, along with the necessary support and mentoring to continually develop their leadership capacities. For example, during her interview at California State University, Long Beach, President Jane C. Conoley met with leaders from the three education institutions and the city, including the former mayor, who asked a series of questions to gauge her interest and commitment to continuing and advancing the work of the *Long Beach College Promise* to ensure continuity of the effort. In addition to onboarding new leaders, it is important to have a process in place to bring in new generations of talented professionals who can add fresh ideas and a renewed sense of enthusiasm to help continue and expand the network's work, and over-time fill the leadership roles necessary to provide a sense of stability and coherence for the network.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 69-73.

⁵⁰ Adrianna Kezar, "Change in Higher Education: Not Enough, or Too Much?" *Change The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 41(6): 18-23, 2015.

- ***A diversified and streamlined funding model.*** Stable funding is a necessary condition for a network to continue its efforts and have an impact in their communities. Many networks began with seed funding from philanthropies or other entities to support their formation, launch, and initial development, and then relied on additional grants of varying sizes to support a multitude of projects aligned with their missions and goals. However, relying exclusively on grant funding is not a sustainable model in the long run, since the grant application process itself is labor intensive and time consuming and doesn't allow for more stable longer-term planning. Philanthropic foundations also tend not to support core operations of grantee organizations over an indefinite period of time. There are a variety of ways through which a network's funding model can be diversified beyond grant funding. Some of these approaches include: (1) charging fees for services, including selling materials and resources, (2) having members "match" the funds raised to contribute to the resource pool,⁵¹ and (3) developing other partnerships to create additional revenue opportunities. For example, *Achieving the Dream (ATD)* initially relied exclusively on philanthropic funding to support itself, but after becoming an independent non-profit organization in 2011 and re-strategizing its focus to providing coaching services to guide holistic institutional change at community colleges, 60 percent of its overall revenue now comes from fees for service and member institutions.⁵² These changes in the funding model have enabled *ATD* to have a more stable business model, and hire a mix of full-time and part-time staff to support and expand its efforts.
- ***Human resources.*** Managing a network is not easy, and in order to foster its sustainability, sufficient human resources must be allocated, including formally designated staff time and other temporary arrangements with consultants, advisors, coaches, etc., to successfully undertake the required workload. Such human resources can help ensure that the goals are met and also capitalize on funding opportunities to keep a network financially viable. While a central, designated team of staff (i.e. backbone function) is an important feature of a sustainable network, a network can greatly benefit from bringing in other flexible combinations of talent at different phases of its life cycle to fill specific gaps and needs (e.g. skill, knowledge, connection, administrative function, technical support) to support its continual growth. For example, the *University Innovation Alliance* initially began with the commitment and endorsement of partner

⁵¹ This approach allows network members to have "skin in the game" – in other words, by way of contributing their own resources – monetary and others – members have vested interest in making the network's effort successful. We heard from our convening participants and individual interviews that network members that contribute their own resources often are more motivated and committed to the work.

⁵² As noted by Karen Stout, the president and CEO of Achieving the Dream, in a recent phone interview.

institutions' presidents and chancellors, a group of designated senior administrators as campus liaisons, and an executive director. After its official launch, a fellows program was established to recruit and embed early-to-mid career professionals at each campus to coordinate activities and communication within and across the network's institutions. The central UIA administrative team also hires external evaluators, consultants, and advisors as needed to support specific projects or activities.

- **Formal process for gathering feedback and advice.** It is important to have a formal mechanism in place for receiving feedback and advice from partners and members, as well as others in the field, to continuously improve the network's capacities. Such feedback and advice can be gathered through multiple venues. Some of the common mechanisms that we have seen include advisory boards, steering committees, and working groups with experts and key stakeholders who can provide strategic guidance both globally for the network and also specifically focus on particular projects. For example, the *UpSkill Houston Initiative* facilitates employer-led, sector-specific leadership councils (i.e. construction council, petrochemical council) to gather advice and information from employers to help guide and align curriculum programming at regional education providers. Comprised of leaders across industries, education, non-profit, and public sector, these sector-focused leadership councils ensure that projects are designed to address the demand and skill challenges in each sector.
- **Assessment and research.** The formal process of assessment and research is important to keep monitoring the network's impacts over-time and also to demonstrate its value in connection to its mission, goals, and members to bring in additional funds to sustain/expand its efforts. Successful networks over time generate a lot of activities and projects, and managers of networks may use both internal and external researchers to conduct formal evaluation of their specific projects and/or interventions. Network managers or other core network participants can be a resource for researchers in both the design and interpretation phases of an assessment and help enrich the focus and scope, based on their more informal assessments through multiple forms of feedback from its members and partners. In the case of the *American Talent Initiative (ATTI)*, annual data collection on enrollment and graduation across the member institutions allows the group to continually monitor their collective progress to date, and use that information to also guide ATTI's operational strategy and activities.

- ***A clearly articulated, co-developed, and continually evolving network strategy.*** Finally, it is important to have a clearly articulated strategy for a network that is co-developed by its key members with advice and support from other partners and experts in the field. The strategy must not be overly designed or stringent, to allow the group to stay nimble and flexible to changing demands and needs. Unlike classical organizational settings, which have a single authority structure and clear set of management tasks and activities, network settings take on a divided authority structure as well as a more complex set of actors, resources, and influencing conditions, many of which are difficult to anticipate and plan for well in advance.⁵³ Using strategic planning tools that are simple and easy to revisit helps the network more efficiently involve and engage a broader community in its work with a sharper focus.⁵⁴ For example, thanks to their nimble strategy, *Graduate RVA* was able to shift their approach from regional to state to effectively tackle a particular problem. Technology software and resource capacity issues had caused reverse transfer numbers in the greater Richmond to stall. To address this they shifted to a statewide approach, and engaged the Virginia Community College System Office (VCCS) and State Council for Higher Education (SCHEV) to develop a strategy for statewide implementation instead.⁵⁵ As more schools became involved in the reverse transfer work throughout the state, it then became easier to implement that process in the greater Richmond region.

Discussion

The challenges currently facing postsecondary education—e.g., shifts in learner demographics, perceived disconnect between education and work, and persistent achievement gaps between different subgroups of learners—call for more focused and deeper collaborations across multiple stakeholders and sectors to break existing silos and strategically align their efforts with a shared goal of improving success and social mobility of all learners.

⁵³ See Paul Vandeventer and Myrna Mandell, “Networks that Work (2nd edition),” p. 52.

⁵⁴ According to Paul Vandeventer, typical organizational strategic planning approaches (e.g. Vision, Mission, Goals, Strategies, Tactics, Work Plans, Accountability, Evaluation Methods, and Budget) can create conflict and complexity when applied in network settings, which benefit from planning approaches that are simple, fluid and easy to revisit (e.g. Purpose, Urgent Priorities, Tasks and Activities, Work Groups, Mutual Accountability, Written Agreement).

⁵⁵ Reverse transfer (RT) is a process by which credits earned by a student at a four-year institution that meet and complete the academic requirements of an associate degree at a previously attended two-year college are transferred to award the student with an associate degree.

As we have demonstrated through the key action steps presented above, developing a successful network requires patience and willingness to embrace emerging—and sometimes unexpected—outcomes. Because networks, by nature, have many moving parts and are ever changing and non-linear in their developmental trajectories, a high degree of commitment and buy-in at all levels of an organization and across the network are needed in order to ensure their operational success. A network cannot be simply viewed as a “side project”—in order to do it well, network leaders and participants must be very intentional and strategic about their ongoing management strategies across the board, including their internal and external relationships, various projects, staffing, and funding and revenue models. Also, a robust system must be put in place to capture and document learning that is happening at distributed sites to continually build on the collective understanding of the network’s evolving work and to develop participants’ capacities to further advance their goals.

Our general observation of the current landscape of higher education-focused networks is that there is a surge of networks or network-like activities emerging across the field and across sectors with a focus on specific problems of regional or national significance. Some of these are emerging within existing groups with well-established relationships and shared histories among members that can be leveraged for more focused collaborations, while others are coming together in more novel ways, involving diverse partner types and configurations. This trend may be in part due to the broader recognition that today’s complex problems require multi-pronged and multi-faceted solutions, and that a network approach has the potential to achieve a change that is more impactful and sustainable in the long run. It is also seen as a promising way to circumvent some of the key shortcomings of previous collaborative efforts, which tended to be more localized and ephemeral in nature.⁵⁶

This surge in networks may be also in part due to funders’ high interest in supporting such networks by creating incentives for organizations to join forces and tackle some of the tough-to-solve social problems. For example, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is currently seeking partner organizations to serve as strong “intermediaries” (similar to the “backbone function” we discussed earlier) in supporting diverse higher education institutions through the process of comprehensive change.⁵⁷ Some of the foundation’s

⁵⁶ For a discussion of limitations of previous efforts around cross-sector collaborations, see: Jeffrey R. Henig, Carolyn J. Riehl, David M. Houston, Michael A. Rebell, and Jessica R. Wolff. “Collective Impact and the New Generation of Cross-Sector Collaborations for Education: A Nationwide Scan,” *Teachers College, Columbia University*, 2016, <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Collective-Impact-and-the-New-Generation-of-Cross-Sector-Collaboration-for-Education.pdf>.

⁵⁷ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Call for Intermediaries for Scale, <https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/areas-of-focus/transformation/institutional-partnerships/intermediaries-for-scale-rfp/>.

recent investments have focused on creating networks aimed at increasing equity in higher education through different avenues. These include integrating advanced technology into classrooms to improve student learning outcomes (e.g., *Every Learner Everywhere*),⁵⁸ redesigning developmental education courses (e.g., *Strong Start to Finish*),⁵⁹ and experimenting with various student success interventions to identify and scale promising practices across a large group of higher education institutions (e.g., *the Frontier Set*).⁶⁰ Similarly, Lumina Foundation has incentivized and supported networks for over a decade, with *Achieving the Dream* as one of its earlier national initiatives with a focus on community colleges. More recently, its *Lumina Talent Hubs Initiative* designates, awards, and supports a diverse set of established collaborative communities across the nation that promise to increase the numbers of residents with quality postsecondary credentials (see footnote 36). How emerging networks and related initiatives evolve over time and the kinds of activities, relationships, and impacts they generate will offer valuable lessons on collaboration in higher education in the near future.

In many ways, this growing number of networks and network-like activities in and around higher education creates exciting opportunities for pooling and sharing additional resources, lessons, practices, and expertise, as well as for scaling of best practices. At the same time, as this landscape becomes increasingly more complex and crowded, with organizations and institutions participating in multiple networks, the risk of network competition, fatigue, and duplication or inefficiency increases, potentially diluting some of the resources and impacts of individual networks.⁶¹ Network leaders, as well as funders, will have to be conscientious in their efforts to minimize such risk. In fact, some of the networks discussed in this playbook are actively engaging in cross-network communication and collaboration, in some cases plugging into one another's advisory groups to share ideas and strategically align their work.

⁵⁸ Every Learner Everywhere is a network of 12 digital education organization working collaboratively to provide advice, training, and community-vetted resources to support the adoption and implementation of adaptive courseware at higher education institutions. The network's work is specifically focused on helping institutions use adaptive learning technology to improve teaching and learning with a focus on increasing success of students of color as well as those of first-generation and lower income backgrounds. Learn more at <http://everylearnereverywhere.org>.

⁵⁹ Strong Start to Finish is a network of individuals and organizations from the policy, research, and practice spaces who have committed to bring equity to higher education by supporting change at scale in policy and practice across the nation. Their current focus areas include increasing success of students placed in developmental math and English courses. Learn more at <http://strongstart.org/>.

⁶⁰ The Frontier Set is a group of high-performing, high-potential colleges and universities, state systems, and other supporting organizations that are all committed to increasing student success and narrowing achievement gaps by transforming how they operate. The supporting organizations together provide coaching, evaluation, and coordination support. Learn more at <http://frontierset.org/>.

⁶¹ For example, the Arizona State University and Georgia State University are both members of the University Innovation Alliance and the Frontier Set, among other networks. Similarly, the University of Texas at Austin, and University of Iowa are members of the American Talent Initiative, Powered by Publics (an APLU initiative), and the University Innovation Alliance, among other networks.

To that end, we believe a common space for higher education-focused networks that involve the same organizations or are working on similar issues to share strategies and resources and to track membership and activities could greatly benefit the ecosystem. On a basic level, this will allow networks to avoid mixed messages to shared members and avoid working at cross-purposes. Beyond that, it will facilitate the dissemination of good practices, in both network management and substantive areas of focus. Finally, it may enable a better understanding of which networks are truly delivering value to their communities, and how.

This playbook is an initial effort to describe and synthesize some of the promising higher education-focused networks in the field and offer some guidance to those considering or at the early stages of a network approach. While such an approach is not the solution to every problem, there are many challenges in the higher education space that may not be as readily addressed in any other way.

Appendix A. Descriptions of Featured Networks

1. Achieving the Dream (2004)

- **Website:** <https://wssww.achievingthedream.org>
- **Purpose:** To lead and support a network of community colleges to achieve sustainable institutional transformation through sharing knowledge, innovative solutions and effective practices and policies leading to improved outcomes for all students.
- **Key partners & members:** The network currently includes over 270 institutions of higher education, 100 coaches and advisors, and numerous investors and partners throughout 44 states in the U.S. ATD's work as an intermediary currently touches more than 400 colleges which also include non-member institutions that are working with ATD in grant funded activities or through fee-for-service work.
- **Brief history:** Achieving the Dream (ATD) was initially conceived as a national initiative in 2004 by Lumina Foundation and eight founding partner organizations.⁶² It was born to close achievement gaps and accelerate student success nationwide by guiding evidence-based change in community colleges, influence public policy, generate knowledge, and engage the public. After demonstrating that innovative, evidence-based programs and interventions can produce and sustain improved student success at community colleges, with the help of the founding investor and partners, ATD became an independent non-profit organization in 2011 to further its vision and mission. Drawing on over a decade of work with community colleges, ATD introduced an institutional capacity framework in 2016,⁶³ intended to integrate and align essential capacities at the institutions to support a student-centered culture that promotes student success.⁶⁴
- **Leadership structure:** As an independent non-profit, ATD is governed by the Board of Directors, who have fiduciary responsibility for the organization. The President and CEO of ATD and staff members manage the day-to-day operation of the organization.⁶⁵

⁶² Along with the Lumina Foundation, the eight founding partner organizations of ATD were: American Association of Community Colleges, Community College Leadership Program, Community College Research Center, Institute for Higher Education, Jobs for the Future, MDC, MDRC, and Public Agenda.

⁶³ Achieving the Dream's approach to "Whole-College Transformation," <https://www.achievingthedream.org/our-network/our-approach>.

⁶⁴ Achieving the Dream Celebrating 15 Years. https://www.achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/resources/achieving_the_dream_15_years.pdf.

⁶⁵ Profiles of Achieving the Dream's Board, President/CEO, staff, coaches, investors, and partners. <https://www.achievingthedream.org/about-us/who-we-are>.

- **Funding model & strategies for sustainability:** ATD’s funding model has evolved over the years; initially, it relied exclusively on philanthropic funding to support its work, but now 60 percent of its revenue comes from fees paid by member colleges and other service providers in exchange for ATD’s direct services. The current model allows member institutions to have “skin in the game,” by putting in their own resources and capacity to advance their student success agendas.⁶⁶
- **Reach & sample achievements:** Drawing on major lessons of their first decade of work—that in order to improve student success on a substantial scale, community colleges need to engage in bold, holistic institutional change that goes beyond boutique interventions—ATD introduced a new institutional capacity framework in 2016 to help colleges understand their strengths and needs, and begin laying their groundwork for holistic change on their campuses.⁶⁷ Over the years, ATD has worked closely with their partners and member colleges to help nurture visionary leadership, align academic supports, bolster teaching and learning, and ensure that campus improvements are integrated and sustained over-time. Select projects led by ATD and their partners include Open Educational Resource (OER) Degree initiative,⁶⁸ Engaging Adjunct Faculty in Student Success Movement,⁶⁹ and Aspen Presidential Fellowship Program.⁷⁰ ATD has demonstrated cost savings for students through their OER initiative.⁷¹ In a recent Gallup report titled “Measuring What Matters,” they surveyed more than 5,700 community college graduates from 17 ATD colleges from five states and found that those at ATD institutions were outpacing other two-year colleges when it came to the review of alumni on how the institutions helped them get better jobs and have better financial, social and community well-being.⁷²
- **Greatest challenges ahead:** As ATD expands its reach through membership and services offered, it’s becoming imperative to seek continual alignment with a broad range of organizations and other various efforts and partnerships. Although this process takes a lot of time, ATD aims to help the field feel more aligned by crafting that coherence.

⁶⁶ According to our recent interview with Karen Stout, the President and CEO of Achieving the Dream.

⁶⁷ Achieving the Dream’s 2016 Annual Report, https://www.achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/basic_page/atd_2016_annualreport.pdf.

⁶⁸ Achieving the Dream’s Open Educational Resources (OER) Initiative, <https://www.achievingthedream.org/resources/initiatives/open-educational-resources-oer-degree-initiative>.

⁶⁹ Achieving the Dream’s Engaging Adjunct Faculty in the Student Success Movement, <https://www.achievingthedream.org/resources/initiatives/engaging-adjunct-faculty-in-the-student-success-movement>.

⁷⁰ The Aspen Presidential Fellowship for Community College Excellence, <https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-presidential-fellowship-community-college-excellence/>.

⁷¹ Lederman, Doug. “Clear-Eyed Analysis of OER Impact,” *Inside Higher Ed*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2018/08/29/clear-eyed-review-impact-initiative-create-oer-degrees>.

⁷² “Measuring What Matters: Examining the Success of Achieving the Dream Network College Graduates in Work and Life,” *Gallup Report*, 2018, <http://www.stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Measuring-What-Matters-Report.pdf>.

2. American Talent Initiative (2016)

- **Website:** <https://americantalentinitiative.org/>
- **Purpose:** Expand opportunity for access to top colleges and universities for high-achieving, low- and moderate-income students. By 2025, the American Talent Initiative (ATI) aims to attract, enroll, and graduate an additional 50,000 low- and moderate-income students at high-performing colleges and universities (i.e. private and public four-year institutions that are graduating at least 70 percent of their students within six years).
- **Key partners & members:** With support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program and Ithaka S+R are co-managing the initiative. The ATI member institutions include a subset of 319 colleges and universities that are consistently doing well in terms of graduating their undergraduate students successfully in a timely manner. The initiative began with a relatively small membership of 30 institutions in 2016, but its membership has grown over the years to include more than 120 institutions who have pledged to expanding opportunity for low- and moderate-income students on their campuses.
- **Brief history:** Inspired by decades of work by individual colleges and universities to expand college opportunity, as well as research showing that a large number of high-achieving, low- and moderate-income students are unable to gain access to top colleges and universities, Bloomberg Philanthropies convened college presidents and higher education thought leaders to brainstorm strategies to address these critical challenges. ATI was born as a direct outgrowth of these conversations.
- **Leadership structure:** ATI is led by a steering committee comprised of presidents from select institutions and directors at the Aspen Institute and Ithaka S+R. While there is no formal process of governance for the network, the steering committee members play a critical role of continually building and maintaining the legitimacy of the group, actively participating in the member recruitment process, conveying participation norms and expectations for presidents of member institutions, providing ongoing strategic guidance to the project team, and helping to set high-level priorities for the group as well as increasing the chances of getting attention and support from their constituents through various communication channels.
- **Funding model & strategies for sustainability:** The funding provided by Bloomberg Philanthropies doesn't go directly to colleges and universities, but is used to fund research and other related activities of the network. The member institutions are guided to set their own goals that are aligned with the ATI's 2025 goal, share data with ATI to track individual and collective progress, and work with other members to co-develop and/or share strategies for expanding opportunities for students. The ultimate goal is to create opportunities for these already high-performing institutions to develop their capacities to serve more talented low- and moderate-income students while taking advantage of the connections, information, and technical support they receive through the

network. The model seeks to inspire all all US four-year institutions to expand access for low- and moderate-income students. The group uses a variety of publicities coupled with peer pressure to motivate institutions to join the network and strive to learn together.

- **Reach & sample achievements:** The first progress report released in December 2018 showed some preliminary evidence that the network’s approach can have a meaningful impact.⁷³ ATI institutions collectively have increased the enrollment of students who receive Federal Pell grants by 7,291 since the 2015-16 school year, on track to meet their 50,000 goal by 2025. Of the 96 members who have been part of ATI long enough to submit multiple years of data, 68 increased their Pell enrollment between 2015-16 and 2017-18. The five highlighted strategies that ATI members are employing to expand opportunities on their campuses include institutionalizing commitment to socioeconomic diversity through presidential leadership and broad engagement; increasing the size of the student body or maintaining long-held commitments to access; forging new pipelines for nontraditional students; prioritizing need-based financial aid; and reducing gaps in retention and graduation rates.
- **Greatest challenges ahead:** The diversity within its membership, including different levels of institutional commitment and capacity to contribute to ATI, poses challenges. The team is creating communities of practice to strategically fragment the group into smaller subgroups to promote deeper collaborations focused around a specific set of impactful strategies.

3. Graduate RVA (2018)

- **Website:** <http://bridgingrichmond.com/talent-hub/> (site under construction)
- **Purpose:** Significantly increase regional post-secondary completion efforts as a means of reducing poverty, improving social mobility, and ensuring that the greater Richmond region is economically competitive.
- **Brief history:** Originally established by Bridging Richmond—a cradle-to-career collaborative partnership anchored by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) aiming to ensure that every person in the Richmond region will have the education and talent necessary to be successful—Graduate RVA has recently replaced Bridging Richmond to zero in on postsecondary attainment goals by cultivating collaborations among local higher education institutions. The main impetus for this renewed focus was the recent change in legislation regarding credit transfer and interest from the Virginia Department of Education’s in postsecondary education outcomes.⁷⁴ The state is trying to address equity gaps by

⁷³ Elizabeth D. Pisacreta, Emily Schwartz, and Martin Kurzweil. "A 2018 Report on the Progress of the American Talent Initiative in its First Two Years," *Ithaka S+R*, Last Modified 17 December 2018, <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.310775>.

⁷⁴ Kathleen Lee, "Why Associate Degree Completion on Matters for Virginia," *Kathleen (Katybeth) Lee Column*, May 26, 2019, https://www.richmond.com/opinion/their-opinion/kathleen-katybeth-lee-column-why-associate-degree-completion-matters-for/article_fd78d33e-0e70-5509-8f05-fc96a5ae597d.html.

race and ethnicity, and building that into their larger state goals, which motivated Bridging Richmond to step in to build that momentum. The Lumina Talent Hubs designation which was awarded to Richmond in September 2017, helped facilitate existing local relationships to join forces around issues of equity and student success for their community.⁷⁵

- **Key partners:** VCU, and two regional community colleges —John Tyler Community College (JTCC) and Reynolds Community Colleges (RCC) —came together and agreed to share information and take a collective approach to improving postsecondary attainment for low-income adults with some college but no degree, with a focus on African American and Latinx populations. More recently, Virginia State University and the Community College Workforce Alliance also became the key partners.
- **Leadership structure:** A team comprised of the senior VP of each institution and Graduate RVA staff as the convener, and ad-hoc committees around specific issues or topics currently lead the network. They meet once a month for two hours, but have multiple touch points with the support of the Graduate RVA staff.
- **Funding model & strategies for sustainability:** Being a relatively new network, this is still an emerging topic for Graduate RVA. They are securing small local grants and submitting proposals for institutions to jointly support the network's efforts. The partners are also having conversations with other regional networks for possibly joining their efforts. Although VCU currently has an interest being an anchor and home base for the network, it will eventually depend on how the network evolves in the next few years and what would make the most sense for those in the network.
- **Reach & sample accomplishments:**⁷⁶ One of the key accomplishments of Graduate RVA in its relatively short history has been bringing together historically competing regional postsecondary institutions around a common vision. The three partners were able to see the value of collaboration not just for their own institutions but also for the region and solidified their commitment toward attainment goals by actively contributing to problem identification, solution design, and strategic implementation. Through their data sharing agreements beginning in 2018, the three partner institutions (VCU, JTCC, and RCC) were able to identify and award 372 associate's degrees to students who had previously met the degree requirements across their cumulative coursework but never claimed their degrees. They were also able to identify 175 students at VCU who are eligible for an associate's degree through reverse transfer, and reach out to help them have their degrees conferred. To date, about 10 of those students have earned their credentials. They also made institutional process

⁷⁵ Lumina Talent Hubs, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/talent-hubs>.

⁷⁶ Based on the interview with Stephanie Odera, Associate Director of the Partnership, and an internal memo shared on June 4, 2019.

improvements (e.g., changes to transfer application) to streamline the process for students.

Greatest challenges ahead: In addition to figuring out some of the key transition questions related to the issues of sustainability and backbone function, tackling the equity gap in attainment which disproportionately impacts African American and Latinx males in Virginia is the greatest challenges facing this relatively new and growing network.

4. Long Beach College Promise (2008)

- **Website:** <https://www.longbeachcollegepromise.org/>
- **Purpose:** Extend the promise of a college education to every student in the Long Beach Unified School District by providing continuous support along every step of the student's experience, from pre-K through college and onto career and life.
- **Key partners:** The Long Beach Unified School District, Long Beach City College (LBCC), California State University at Long Beach (CSULB), the City of Long Beach, as well as the Port of Long Beach⁷⁷ are the key partners of this collaborative network.
- **Brief history:** The Long Beach College Promise (the Promise) was announced and signed in 2008. It grew out of a longer-standing partnership in the community, the Seamless Education Partnership, which was first established in the 1990s as part of a larger community-wide effort to tackle economic and demographic challenges facing the city at the time. The original *Call to Action* urged for improvements in local businesses, but also called for transformation in the education sector as a prerequisite to stimulating the region's economic growth. The partnership included the mayor of Long Beach, the leaders of the Long Beach Unified School District, LBCC, and CSULB, and initially focused on improving communication across their systems and involved a few focused projects. Encouraged by some early successes, the group shifted their focus to rigorous alignment of curriculum and standards across the three education systems in an effort to create a truly seamless education system.
- **Leadership structure:** The leaders of the Long Beach Unified School District, LBCC, and CSULB (Executive Committee) both lead and govern the partnership. Additionally, a Leadership Council, which consists of a designated convener and a Steering Committee of two senior representatives from each education institution, serves as the link between the partners and lead different projects that directly contribute to the Promise's vision and goals.⁷⁸
- **Funding model & strategies for sustainability:** The bulk of the Promise work is self-supported by the institutional partners, with some support and

⁷⁷ The Promise welcomed the Port of Long Beach as the first industry partner in order to further expand their efforts in creating quality educational and career pathways for students.

⁷⁸ See slide 23 for the Promise leadership structure and layout:
https://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/portals/6/docs/LB_College_Promise_4.pdf.

subsidies from foundations, the city and state in recognition of their positive impact on the region and state. Examples of support include a Governor's Innovation Grant and an award from the Irvine Foundation. Rather than adding layers of new work on top of the existing systems, the partners seek to strategically align their systems to create seamless education and career pathways without requiring a significant amount of additional resources.

- **Reach & sample achievements:** In 2018, the Promise reported that it has made big strides in improving student achievement since its inception.⁷⁹ The enrollment of the partner school district at CSULB increased by 71 percent, and enrollment of LBCC students at CSULB also increased significantly, as did that of the first-generation college-going students. District high school students were also taking more advanced college-level exams (46 percent in 2017-18, up from 34 percent in 2013-14), and more students were meeting the entrance requirements for admission into the UC and CSU systems. Moreover, student persistence and graduation rates also increased, with 84 percent of LBCC transfer students graduating from CSULB in four years. To carry the momentum forward, the leaders announced the launch of Promise 2.0 in September 2018,⁸⁰ which includes substantial enhancements aimed at creating more affordable and seamless access and transfer to CSULB for LBCC students. Promise 2.0 offers high school graduates two years of free tuition at LBCC, a multitude of services that promote efficient transfer to CSULB (e.g. dual advising services and access to CSULB events, library services, and student clubs), as well as new college-to-careers programs that lead LBCC students directly to high-demand jobs.
- **Greatest challenges ahead:** The challenges facing The Promise are the struggles continued to be experienced by their students. While students' academic readiness keeps improving, many of them suffer from food and housing insecurity, problems in accessing transportation and behavioral health issues. Advising students about how to excel in their academic responsibilities while effectively managing other life experiences is an important aspect to be continually addressing going forward.

5. The University Innovation Alliance (2014)

- **Website:** <http://www.theuia.org/>
- **Purpose:** To significantly increase the number of low-income students graduating with quality college degrees and catalyze systemic changes in the entire higher education sector. The University Innovation Alliance (UIA) aims to achieve this by piloting new student success interventions, sharing insights about their relative costs and effectiveness, and scaling promising interventions across

⁷⁹ The Long Beach College Promise 10-Year Anniversary Report, <http://www.longbeachcollegepromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Promise-10-Year-Anniversary-Report.pdf>.

⁸⁰ The Long Beach College Promise 2.0., <https://www.lbcc.edu/promise-20>.

its eleven partner institutions.⁸¹ They aim to graduate an additional 68,000 students across the 11 partner institutions by 2025, and develop scaling strategies for implementing high-impact student success interventions in various institutional contexts.

- **Key partners:** The UIA is made up of 11 partner institutions—Oregon State University, University of California Riverside, Arizona State University, University of Texas at Austin, University of Kansas, Iowa State University, Purdue University, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, Georgia State University, and the University of Central Florida. Together, these institutions represent major regions of the country and are individually experienced at scaling innovations from small pilots to university-wide programs to better serve large and diverse student populations. While the institutions vary greatly with regard to their characteristics and local circumstances, they share a commitment to improving outcomes for low-income students.⁸²
- **Brief history:** Arizona State University President Michael Crow invited a small group of presidents and chancellors to engage in a discussion about collaboration and scale on the heels of the Next Generation University project published by New America.⁸³ Several meetings were organized to bring together university presidents, chancellors, and select campus leaders to identify a path forward to the eventual creation of an alliance. These conversations were formalized with the signing of the UIA prospectus on March 28, 2014 at the White House Eisenhower Executive Office Building, and the eventual public launch of the UIA in September 2014.
- **Leadership structure:** The UIA was designed and organized by the partner institutions' presidents and chancellors, who continue to serve as active sponsors of the network. The UIA's Executive Director and UIA central team facilitate the initiative on a day-to-day basis while supporting activities on all campuses. Each campus designates a liaison for the project—a senior administrator who is in charge of student success on their campus—who can serve as the primary contact for the initiative, along with faculty and staff who can manage particular projects and organize working groups as needed. Additionally, the UIA fellowship program recruits emerging and early career professionals to support relevant projects and assist with communications and the dissemination of ideas within

⁸¹ The UIA's collaboration model is built around relationships in which universities that are experienced in developing and implementing innovative practices to increase low-income students' success support others that would like to adopt similar practices at their own campuses. For additional details about this mode, see this blog post: <http://www.theuia.org/blog/post/innovating-together-collaboration-driving-force-improve-student-success>. For additional information on how this model played out for their collaborative project on predictive analytics, see http://www.theuia.org/sites/default/files/UIA_predictive_onepaggers.pdf.

⁸² The University Innovation Alliance Vision and Prospectus, <http://www.theuia.org/sites/default/files/UIA-Vision-Prospectus.pdf>.

⁸³ Jeff Selingo et al., "The next generation university."

- and across the campuses.⁸⁴ This program allows the alliance to build a pipeline of university leadership trained in developing and sustaining higher education innovations that are aligned with its vision.
- **Funding model & strategies for sustainability:** The UIA initially received large seed funding from six national organizations to launch and begin its efforts to test and disseminate proven innovations in higher education, with the presidents of the partner institutions committing to match all philanthropic funds raised.⁸⁵ The UIA engages in active, fundraising to support ongoing projects that strategically leverage member institutions' expertise and experience, and are directly aligned with the network's vision and goal.⁸⁶ To date, the UIA has raised over \$28 million for this effort.
 - **Reach & sample achievements:** Since the UIA's launch, its campuses are graduating 30 percent more low-income students with bachelor's degrees per year and 16 percent more students overall, which translates to nearly 13,000 additional graduates annually. The network is currently on target to exceed its goal of 68,000 additional low-income graduates by 2025.
 - **Greatest challenges ahead:** Some of the key challenges facing the UIA now and/or in the foreseeable future include: (1) helping campuses to think on behalf of the collective amidst a higher education ecosystem that incentivizes institutions to advocate for their individual interests; (2) capturing, documenting, and diffusing various kinds of learning and scale that are happening both between and on each of the campuses; (3) growing demand of other institutions to join the UIA, and thinking about how to expand while also maintaining the integrity of the initial commitment, goals, and relationships; and (4) exploring potential avenues for a more diversified revenue stream and business model.

6. Unizin (2014)

- **Website:** <https://unizin.org/>
- **Purpose:** To create an evolving ecosystem of digitally enabled educational systems and collaborations that can support differing missions and strategies of

⁸⁴ The UIA Fellowship Program Overview, <http://www.theuia.org/job/university-innovation-alliance-fellowship-program>.

⁸⁵ These organizations are the USA Funds, Ford Foundation, Gates Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and Markle Foundation. See the press release, <https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2014/Q3/unprecedented-national-alliance-formed-to-improve-college-completion-for-low-income-and-first-generation-college-students-raises-5.7-million.html>. The UIA's Executive Director, Bridget Burns, told us in a phone interview that having multiple funders to support the UIA's work has been a cornerstone of its strategy for stability and sustainability. Having only one funder can put a collaborative network at risk for being subject to the funder's goal or interest. Collaboration among funders is as important as that of network partners. "Collaborative philanthropy" is increasingly being recognized as a promising trend in philanthropy. See Kasia Moreno et al. "The Top Five Most Promising Trends in Philanthropy." *Forbes*, March 2, 2015. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesinsights/2015/03/02/the-top-five-most-promising-trends-in-philanthropy/#30dbb5277979>.

⁸⁶ The UIA blog provides updates on their new and ongoing projects: <http://www.theuia.org/blog>. More recently, they received a grant from the Strada Education Network to collaborate with career readiness teams from seven participating UIA campuses and assemble a national Employer Working Group (EWG) as part of their Bridging the Gap from Education to Employment (BGEE) initiative, which seeks to develop quality college-to-career pathways.

- universities and empower faculty and students through improved access to rich data and learning materials at a lower cost.
- **Key partners & members:** The current members include University of Florida, University of Michigan, Colorado State University, Indiana University, Oregon State University, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania State University, Ohio State University, University of Iowa, University of Nebraska, Rutgers University, and Miami University.
 - **Brief history:** Unizin was founded in 2014 as a consortium of four founding universities,⁸⁷ with a goal to develop and maintain a suite of services that would enable institutions to share course content and learning analytics in order to improve teaching and learning.⁸⁸ The discussions around the concept of Unizin began about a year before its launch, and resulted in a charter that was signed by the founding members who committed \$1 million over three years to develop an infrastructure for the shareable cloud-based services. Unizin initially operated as an unincorporated association at Internet2, and later became an independent non-profit in May 2016. Based on their college experiences and commitment to IMS global open standards,⁸⁹ the partners selected Canvas by Instructure as the common learning management (LMS) for use by Unizin’s member institutions.⁹⁰ They have continued to contract for, develop, integrate, and offer members additional content and software services, including the Unizin Data Platform
 - **Leadership structure:** Unizin is governed by a Board of Directors that is comprised of the CEO of Unizin and two representatives from each of the member institutions. Board members meet regularly throughout the year to discuss the strategic direction of the network, including purchases, acquisitions, staff hires, policies, and processes. Since Unizin aims to continually grow its membership by adding as many as three to five new members annually, its members are considering transitioning into a small elected board with an increasing network of committees and subcommittees to handle its growing body and diversity.⁹¹
 - **Funding model & strategies for sustainability:** The direct investments made by member institutions provides the capital for Unizin’s integration and operation services. Unizin’s members commit to a three-year agreement, with yearly fees ranging from \$210K to \$410K based on their enrollment level. Unizin’s approach is focused on establishing common standards to enable

⁸⁷ Colorado State University, the University of Florida, Indiana University, and the University of Michigan are the founding members of Unizin.

⁸⁸ Internet2’s announcement of Unizin, <https://www.internet2.edu/news/detail/6549/>.

⁸⁹ IMS Global Learning Consortium’s Interoperability Standards, <https://www.imsglobal.org/specifications.html>.

⁹⁰ Joshua Kim. “5 Questions About Unizin for Instructure,” *Inside Higher Ed*, October, 15, 2014, <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/technology-and-learning/5-questions-about-unizin-instructure>.

⁹¹ Alexander C. Kfka, “Colleges Are Banding Together Digitally to Help Students Succeed. Here’s How,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 31, 2019, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Are-Banding-Together/246002>.

- collaboration within the higher education community and a means for institutions to cost-effectively control robust digital learning infrastructure.
- **Reach & sample Achievements:** Despite its steep price for joining the network and seemingly slow early progress,⁹² Unizin has grown its membership to now include 13 member institutions. The group developed the Unizin Common Data Model (UCDM) to standardize data from across the teaching and learning ecosystem,⁹³ and launched the Unizin Data Platform—a comprehensive platform for collecting and sharing common data across multiple institutions that has generated a very large and rich collection of learner data including student information and learning interaction data.⁹⁴
 - **Greatest challenges ahead:** Unizin has proven its ability to reduce the cost of content and software services through integrating a rich collection of multi-institutional learner data. The next challenges are engaging institutional researchers to use the data to find insights that can improve teaching and learning, and student success. These efforts are now commencing as the Unizin Data Platform grows in its capabilities.

7. UpSkill Houston Initiative (2014)

- **Website:** <https://www.houston.org/upskillhouston>
- **Purpose:** The purpose of the initiative is threefold: (1) attract unemployed and underemployed Houston residents and youth to middle-skill positions across the region—in part by raising awareness of and changing perceptions about these careers;⁹⁵ (2) train individuals in the technical and employability skills necessary for success—using curricula built around industry demand and aligned across the sector for portability; and (3) place and retain these workers in middle-skill jobs on career paths that reward those who continue to upgrade their skills, and mentor those who need support.⁹⁶
- **Current members:** A broad spectrum of players from business/industry, education, nonprofit, and public-sector spaces in Houston.
- **Brief History:** The UpSkill Houston initiative was launched in 2014 to raise awareness regarding middle-skill opportunities, increase access to relevant

⁹² Carl Straumsheim, “Consortium Under Construction,” *Inside Higher Ed*, August 12, 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/08/12/unizin-members-reflect-first-year-consortium>.

⁹³ The Unizin Common Data Model, <https://unizin.org/2017/09/13/solving-the-learning-data-puzzle-the-unizin-common-data-model/#more-6137>.

⁹⁴ Doug Lederman, “Unizin Chooses New Leaders, Launches Data Platform,” *Inside Higher Ed*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/insights/2018/09/05/unizin-chooses-new-leaders-launches-data-platform>.

⁹⁵ Middle-skill jobs are those that require education and skills beyond a high school diploma and less than a four-year bachelor’s degree. Currently, in the U.S., these jobs are in fields such as healthcare, technology, construction, and manufacturing. According to JP Morgan Chase, these jobs pay family-sustaining wages and can serve as entry point for career pathways in growing economic sectors.

⁹⁶ What is UpSkill Houston? <http://upskillhouston.org/global-pages/upskill-houston-partners/>.

education and training, and improve coordination among stakeholders in the greater Houston region.⁹⁷ The motivation for this work was fueled by the New Skills Work Program, launched in 2013 by JPMorgan Chase to provide select cities and countries with strategic information and data for addressing skill gaps and training workers for good jobs. The program provided the city of Houston with \$5 million to support workforce training in their region, and the Houston Skills Gap Report,⁹⁸ which highlighted the expected growth in Houston's economy and surge of middle-skill jobs, particularly in the petrochemical and commercial/industrial construction industries, and the challenge to filling those jobs due to a lack of qualified workers. In an effort to address these challenges, the Greater Houston Partnership created a task force that for the first time brought together key stakeholders from across Houston's education and business sectors to identify shared obstacles and collaborative solutions.⁹⁹ Together these forces led to the formation of UpSkill Houston.

- **Leadership structure:** A governing executive committee of 32 members brings together a broad spectrum of players from the business/industry, education, nonprofit, and public sectors. The initiative also includes employer-led industry sector councils that aim to address the skills challenges in each of their respective sectors (i.e. construction and petrochemical). A three-person staff team from the Greater Houston Partnership provides foundational support for the initiative, including communications, administration, and impact measurement.
- **Funding model & strategies for sustainability:** The UpSkill Houston initiative leverages the existing collaborative partnerships in the greater Houston area, as well as funding and support provided by JPMorgan Chase's New Skills at Work program and United Way of Greater Houston. By providing resources, structure, and convening opportunities to foster region- and sector-wide collaboration among employers and educational institutions, as well as training and service providers (i.e. community-based organizations and government agencies), the initiative aims to encourage different groups addressing the same problem to establish a common goal, align their efforts, share results, reinforce existing efforts, and spark new coalitions.
- **Reach & sample achievements:**¹⁰⁰ Since it was first launched in June 2014, the initiative has laid a strong foundation by building the necessary infrastructure

⁹⁷ New Skills at Work by JPMorgan Chase & Co. "2014: Year in Review," <https://www.jpmorganchase.com/corporate/Corporate-Responsibility/document/54876-new-skillsara2014-aw7-final.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Houston Skills Gap Report by JPMorgan Chase, <https://www.jpmorganchase.com/corporate/Corporate-Responsibility/nsaw-houston-skills-gap-report.htm>.

⁹⁹ The Greater Houston Partnership (the "Partnership") is an economic development organization serving the Greater Houston area. The Partnership was established in 1989, when the Houston Chamber of Commerce, the Houston Economic Development Council, and the Houston World Trade Association merged. Its mission is to be the primary voice of Houston's business community and build regional economic prosperity.

¹⁰⁰ What is UpSkill Houston? Key Accomplishments to Date, <http://upskillhouston.org/global-pages/upskill-houston-partners>.

for collaboration, and begun to see early results in closing the middle-skills gap in Houston's regional economy. For example, a highly active employer-led petrochemical sector council has helped significantly increase enrollment in petrochemical courses at community colleges, and raise completion rates and degrees and credit and non-credit certificates for technical programs. Also, a growing construction sector council has developed competency maps for key craft professions and implemented several successful prototypes for identifying, screening, training, and pacing workers in middle-skill positions in industrial and commercial construction. The initiative also launched its own website,¹⁰¹ which includes information on numerous middle-skill jobs, training and educational requirements, salary ranges, and career pathways tailored for different audiences—a career seeker, an educator, and a partner. Based on focus group research with students and parents, UpSkill Houston launched its “My Life As” video series that highlights workers in middle-skill careers and provide information about their roles and career pathways.¹⁰² The initiative is also continuing to receive national recognition for its work, including the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management initiative, and US Department of Commerce and the Aspen Institute's Communities That Work Partnership.

- **Greatest challenges ahead:** Over the last five years, UpSkill Houston has built a broad, cross-sector collective table with leaders committed to strengthening Greater Houston's talent pipeline, fostered partnerships among critical stakeholders, and demonstrated an early ability to influence action and create impact. The next challenges are accelerating the scale and impact of its efforts to further strengthen Houston's talent pipeline. Building on the strategy refresh work from earlier this year, UpSkill Houston is continuing to work towards improving economic mobility and inclusion throughout the greater Houston area.

¹⁰¹ UpSkill Houston, <http://upskillhouston.org>.

¹⁰² My Life As video series, <https://upskillmylife.org>.

Appendix B. Research Process and Author Profiles Research Process

Building on research that journalist and author Jeffrey J. Selingo published in 2017 on the idea of the Networked University,¹⁰³ this project sought to fill the knowledge gap of what it takes to build new networks by studying existing and emerging networks in and around higher education. In 2018, Selingo partnered with Ithaka S+R to secure funding from Lumina Foundation to develop this playbook. The team consisting of Jeff Selingo, Martin Kurzweil, Jenna Joo, and Rayane Alamuddin embarked on their research in the summer of 2018.

The team began with two simple questions:

- 1) What are the key features of networks (e.g. organization structure, processes, people/relationships, culture/value) that facilitate or hinder the process of collaboration in (and around) higher education?
- 2) What are the best practice recommendations that can be drawn from some of the successful networks that can be replicated in other contexts?

The first phase of the research occurred from August to December 2018. It was largely exploratory in nature and drew on a number of activities including a review of existing research and phone interviews with eleven experts and key stakeholders from a subset of networks. The goal of this initial work was to develop a definition of a network, generate a list of networks that met the definition, create a taxonomy to organize various types of networks, and develop a framework to illustrate key operational features and processes that are known to yield positive outcomes both in theory and practice.

In February 2019, we convened a group of 30 people in Washington, D.C., including higher education experts, leaders of networks, university presidents, policymakers, and business leaders. At the convening, we shared our initial research and collected feedback on our preliminary findings for this playbook. Over the following months, between March and June 2019, we conducted additional desk research, held follow-up interviews with managers of select networks, and began drafting the playbook. The interviews were conducted either by phone or in-person, and asked questions that were tailored for individual networks to gather insights that were relevant for developing actionable recommendations in the playbook.

¹⁰³ Jeff Selingo, "The networked university: Building alliances for innovation in higher education." *Open Ideas at Pearson*, 2017, https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/global/Files/about-pearson/innovation/the-networked-university/Pearson_The_Networked_University_v22-1_WEB.pdf.

Over the summer of 2019, three expert reviewers with many years of experience studying, spearheading, and/or overseeing the formation and development of numerous collaborative groups and activities spanning across various contexts, did a thorough read of a playbook draft and offered detailed feedback which have been incorporated into the final version of the playbook.

Author Profiles

Jenna Joo is a senior analyst at Ithaca S+R where her work focuses on providing research and evaluation support for a portfolio of projects that aim to promote institutional effectiveness and student success in post-secondary educational settings. Her recent projects involved implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of innovative instructional approaches—that leverage inter-institutional faculty communication and collaboration—in improving student learning outcomes in a range of undergraduate courses, including statistics and other humanities subjects. Jenna holds a MA and PhD in education from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Jeffrey J. Selingo has written about higher education for two decades. He is the author of three books, a contributing writer at The Atlantic, and a professor of practice and special advisor at Arizona State University, where he leads the Academy for Innovative Higher Education Leadership, a partnership between ASU and Georgetown University. Jeff is also a visiting scholar at Georgia Tech’s Center for 21st Century Universities and co-hosts the podcast, FUTURE U. He is currently working on his next book about a year in the life of college admissions—who gets in and why—to be published by Simon & Schuster in 2020. He is a member of the board of trustees at Ithaca College.

Rayane Alamuddin is the associate director for research and evaluation at Ithaca S+R, where she researches higher education initiatives and innovations as part of the Educational Transformation Program team. She is a mixed-methods researcher with a diverse portfolio that includes a large-scale multi-institutional randomized control trial in collaboration with the University Innovation Alliance, implementation research and support, survey and case studies, and the development of tools and processes to support administrators engaged in student success initiatives. Her projects span various areas including proactive advisement and advising redesign, community college leadership and practice, and technological innovations to support student success. She holds a PhD in human development and social policy from Northwestern University, and a MA and BA in psychology from the American University of Beirut.