Building Community Partnerships

in Support of a Postsecondary Completion Agenda

Final Evaluation Report

January 2014

OMG CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

About the OMG Center

Headquartered in Philadelphia, PA, the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning (OMG) provides evaluation and philanthropic services to social sector organizations. Our areas of focus include "cradle-to-career" education, asset development, community health, diversity leadership, and arts and culture, among other fields. For 30 years, our clients have been major private and community foundations, government organizations, and national and regional nonprofits. Within the field of postsecondary access and success, OMG has worked on an array of major national and regional initiatives for organizations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, the Citi Foundation, the Strive Network, Achieving the Dream, Campus Compact, and the California Career Advancement Academies.

For more information about the OMG Center, please contact Seth Klukoff, Senior Manager for Communications, at seth@omgcenter.org.

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning
1528 Walnut Street, Suite 805
Philadelphia, PA 19102
www.omgcenter.org
215-732-2200

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Amarillo, TX	Jacksonville, FL	Phoenix, AZ
Boston, MA	Louisville, KY	Portland, OR
Brownsville, TX	Mesa, AZ	Raleigh, NC
Charlotte, NC	New York, NY	Riverside, CA
Dayton, OH	Philadelphia, PA	San Francisco, CA

The individuals and organizations that forged partnerships in each of these communities are singularly committed to establishing a legacy of college success, and we celebrate them for those efforts. We are also grateful for their contributions as thought partners, and their insights have helped the OMG Center shape and refine what we learned over the course of the initiative.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this Final Evaluation Report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Introduction

Nationally, 52% of 2011 U.S. high school graduates and GED earners from low-income families enrolled immediately in a two- or four-year college, compared to 82% and 66% of their high- and middle-income counterparts, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education*, 2013). Once they enroll in college, low-income youth face a number of academic and non-academic obstacles, making it more difficult to succeed. Given the increasing demand for a workforce with postsecondary credentials and the rising costs of a college education, low-income youth in the U.S. are faced with significant challenges in their pursuit of living wage employment. Postsecondary completion continues to evolve as a hot bed issue nationally, at the state level, and in individual communities.

As philanthropies and nonprofits have acknowledged the scope of these challenges, so too have they recognized that simply creating new programs, while important, will not solve the problem. Larger system and structural barriers need to be addressed if more students are going to earn postsecondary credentials and degrees.

Philanthropies and social investors are recognizing that "place matters," and see the potential of place-based strategies for catalyzing system changes. Local communities offer a scale at which cross-sector, systemic challenges can be addressed, and provide opportunities to affect significant numbers of students. In fact, at the time of writing this Report, we can account for more than 20 national initiatives supported by federal government and national philanthropies that focus on "place-based" strategies.

This Final Evaluation Report presents a summary assessment and lessons from our three-year evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Community Partnerships portfolio. This Report is a companion to a series of Issue Briefs that illustrate *how* communities can implement multi-sector strategies to shift local systems and improve student postsecondary completion.

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Community Partnerships Portfolio

With a 2025 goal of doubling the number of low-income students who earn a postsecondary degree or credential with genuine value in the workplace by age 26, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invested more than 20 million dollars in the Community Partnerships portfolio. The objective was to understand what it takes for cross-sector partnerships to advance a community-wide postsecondary completion agenda that instigates system-level changes (described in the following section) and ultimately improves postsecondary completion outcomes for students.

OMG's Evaluation

The goal of our developmental evaluation was to gain a clearer picture of how communities build partnerships; engage stakeholders; use data; and create, align, and shift policies and practices to increase postsecondary success. Our methodology did not entail judging the effectiveness of communities' approaches against a set of predetermined measures. For an overview of our methodology, see Appendix A.

From 2009-2013, seven communities received Community Partnerships funding through two sister initiatives – Communities Learning in Partnership (CLIP) and Partners for Postsecondary

Success (PPS) – to develop and implement a multi-sector strategy that included community and four-year colleges, K-12 school districts, municipal leaders, local businesses, community-based organizations, parents and students, and others. CLIP sites received funding for three years and nine months and PPS sites received funding for two years and four months. Communities also received support from an intermediary partner who provided technical assistance and coaching support throughout the grant period: the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families worked with CLIP cities and MDC worked with PPS cities. An additional eight communities were involved in the portfolio as affiliate cities, participating in regular convenings, phone calls, and webinars with the seven implementation sites.

Community Partnerships Portfolio Communities

CLIP	CLIP Affiliate Sites	PPS
Mesa, AZ	Boston, MA	Amarillo, TX
New York, NY	Dayton, OH	Brownsville, TX
Riverside, CA	Jacksonville, FL	Raleigh, NC
San Francisco, CA	Louisville, KY	
	Philadelphia, PA	**PPS Affiliate Site**
	Phoenix, AZ	Charlotte, NC
	Portland, OR	

As learning investments, CLIP and PPS had some important design differences summarized in the table below and further discussed in Appendix B. These differences resulted in a wide range of approaches that sites pursued and provided a variety of contexts in which to test the Community Partnerships Theory of Change. The resulting lessons from the investment are likely to appeal to a broad range of communities and contexts.

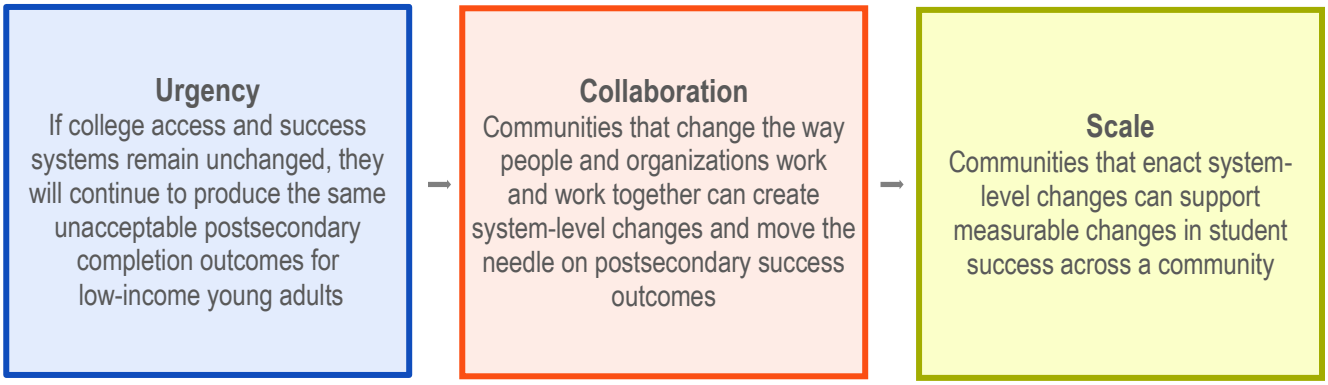
Overview of CLIP and PPS Initiatives

	CLIP	PPS
Investment per site for planning/implementation	$250K/$3 million	$1.3 million, with required local match of $240,000
Duration of planning phase	Nine months, starting in November 2009	Seven months, starting in October 2010
Duration of implementation phase	Three years August 2010 to June 2013	One year and nine months September 2011 to June 2013
Number of planning sites	Seven	Four
Number of implementation sites	Four of Seven	Three of Four
Implementation sites	• Mesa, AZ • New York, NY • Riverside, CA • San Francisco, CA	• Amarillo, TX • Brownsville, TX • Raleigh, NC
Intermediary	National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education, and Families	MDC Inc.
Intermediary point of view	Strong focus on role of municipal government in education reform alongside community college and school district leadership	• Southern focus, with national experience in system-level change to advance equity and opportunity • Reflective planning and coaching • Engaging traditional and non-traditional leaders at all levels

About the Community Partnerships Theory of Change

The community partnerships used a loosely defined Theory of Change (TOC) to help set some parameters to plan and implement their respective postsecondary success strategies.

Three basic premises drove the Community Partnerships investment:



The TOC stipulated that multi-stakeholder *partnerships* would *use data* and leverage key stakeholder *commitment* to shift *policies and practices* to promote postsecondary success. In other words, evidence of systems change would emerge across four mutually reinforcing areas, illustrated in Figure 1. *If* we saw evidence of change across these four areas, *then* we would know that the "system" had in fact shifted.

Figure 1: Community Partnerships Theory of Change

With the Theory of Change setting some broad parameters, selected sites, equipped with local knowledge and expertise, translated the Theory of Change into practice in tandem with their coaching and technical assistance providers.

About this Report

This Final Evaluation Report is divided into four parts. Part One provides a brief assessment of implementation sites' progress over the course of the investment. While we have removed sites' names from this section, individual communities are categorized as emergent, developing, and mature based on a set of outcomes and indicators (referenced in Part 1 of this report). We delineate the resources that we used to develop the outcomes and indicators in Appendix C. **It is important to note that these categories strictly represent characteristics of the sites during the period of the Community Partnerships investment. Each site is committed to continue its work beyond this initiative, realizing that much work still needs to occur in order to achieve sustainable system-level increases in postsecondary success.**

Part Two presents lessons that we have learned from this investment, organized by the following evaluation questions:

- **Building Commitment:** How do sites build and use public awareness and commitment to support a local postsecondary completion agenda?
- **Using Data:** How are data used to advance the postsecondary strategy and goals in each community?
- **Building and Sustaining Partnerships:** What does it take to build and sustain an effective cross-sector partnership that has the capacity and resources to increase postsecondary completion?
- **Aligning Policies and Practices:** How do sites engage in policy and practice change?
- **Enhancing Sustainability:** Which approaches (under what conditions) are most likely to be sustained?

Parts Three and Four offer summary observations about the original Theory of Change and concluding thoughts about how the Community Partnerships investment fits within the community change literature.

Part 1: Assessment of Site Progress

System Outcome Area: Building Commitment

Evaluation Framework

Emergent sites demonstrate…	Developing sites demonstrate…	Mature sites demonstrate…
• Increased understanding of the target stakeholders and audiences necessary to achieve local policy and practice goals and sustain the postsecondary success agenda	• Increased support for the Community Partnerships agenda and goals among stakeholders internal and external to partner organizations	• Evidence that increased commitment supports the achievement of student outcomes
• Increased understanding of the commitment building strategies necessary to achieve local policy and practice goals and sustain the postsecondary success agenda	• Increased alignment of commitment building strategies with partnership structures and data use	• Evidence that increased commitment supports the sustainability of Community Partnerships goals and strategies

In an emergent site, organizations and individuals within the partnership demonstrate their own commitment to the work. They can also articulate whom, beyond their core group, to engage and how they intend to build their commitment. In a developing site, a community can point to enhanced commitment from these targeted stakeholders and cite specific actions that these organizations or individuals have taken as a result of Community Partnerships. A mature site can begin to show evidence that commitment building activities are linked to action, *as well as* to outcomes in their community, specifically sustainability of cross-system efforts and/or student-level outcomes.

Evaluation Findings

Over the course of the Community Partnerships investment, five of the seven implementation sites significantly increased, deepened, diversified, and sustained stakeholder commitment to a completion agenda. Four of the most mature sites expanded and diversified the types of stakeholders supporting their completion efforts. They created deep commitment to the completion agenda *within* partner organizations, engaging individuals from the highest levels of leadership to front-line staff.

The most mature sites established processes and structures to build stakeholder commitment, and to maintain and grow support as necessary. Partners regularly revisited the list of critical stakeholders and pursued formal and informal outreach tactics to engage these individuals and organizations.

While most sites launched some form of public communications campaign, three of the four mature sites made the biggest leaps in building public awareness and positioning the work of the partnership within the broader community. In addition to building strong brand recognition, the three sites embedded their completion agenda within community efforts to facilitate stakeholder buy-in and increase the likelihood of sustained attention to the work.

Two sites began and ended the work with relatively strong commitment from a discrete core of stakeholders. Neither community expanded its engagement efforts during the grant period, but instead focused on deepening commitment among these core educational partners.

System Outcome Area: Using Data

Evaluation Framework

Emergent sites demonstrate…	Developing sites demonstrate…	Mature sites demonstrate…
• Increased knowledge of data resources and awareness of partners' capacity for data work	• Partnership practices, systems, and structures, that increasingly support a habit of data-based inquiry	• Evidence that increased data use supports the achievement of student outcomes
• Increased capacity to use data in a systematic way	• Increased use of data to drive strategy development and implementation	• Evidence that increased data use supports the sustainability of Community Partnerships goals and strategies
• Increased clarity around setting and using public data goals	• Partnership practices, systems, and structures that increasingly support accountability	

In an emergent site, Community Partnerships have begun to establish data systems and processes for linking, sharing, and reviewing data regularly and in a systematic fashion. In a developing site, a community can point to specific examples of how they have used those data to generate conversations across partners that support learning, decision-making, and/or accountability. A mature site can begin to show evidence that data activities are linked to action, *as well as* to outcomes in their community – for instance, sustainability of cross-system efforts and/or student-level outcomes.

Evaluation Findings

Through establishing a public completion goal and using data to set partnership direction, each community has a deeper knowledge about partners' data resources, stronger shared capacity to use data for agenda setting, and a more thorough understanding of college completion. Despite these accomplishments, using data to set and assess strategy has been one of the slower areas of progress for sites, in some cases because of individual partner capacity to collect and use data, but more often because of a limited precedent of *cross-partner* data sharing and use. The two

more emergent sites continue to rely primarily on publicly available data to understand the state of completion in their cities; each of these sites is working to build trust and capacity among partners to share proprietary, institutional data.

The four developing sites have relied on informal structures and processes to share proprietary, institutional data across partners. Yet, partnership processes to support routine data-based inquiry remain nascent. Despite the successes noted above in setting public completion goals, continued sharing and use of institutional data are not yet systematic. Sites remain dependent on individuals – particularly institutional data team members – and on data agreements that are informal or relatively limited in scope. Furthermore, six of the seven sites have not developed regular processes and structures to routinely examine data findings, fine-tune partnership strategy, and reassess additional data needs.

One site moved well beyond sharing data to developing a joint data warehouse. Two partners use the data warehouse for self- and cross-partner agenda setting and accountability. Building off several years of data-related conversations, the two educational partners – the community college and K-12 system – focused most of their efforts on developing "push button" data sharing and analysis processes. As a result, both organizations have access to cross-institutional data that they use to set institutional and partnership priorities and to measure progress.

System Outcome Area: Building and Sustaining Partnerships

Evaluation Framework

Emergent sites demonstrate…	Developing sites demonstrate…	Mature sites demonstrate…
• Increased clarity and consensus about the Community Partnerships vision	• Increased engagement of expanded partnership base	• Evidence that increased data use supports the achievement of student outcomes
• Increased clarity about who needs to be involved in the partnership	• Increased willingness and capacity of partners to embed Community Partnerships-related activities within their organizations	• Evidence that increased data use supports the sustainability of Community Partnerships goals and strategies
• Appropriate processes and management structures	• Increased self-accountability across the partnership	
• Increased individual partner capacity to take on the Community Partnerships systems change agenda	• Decreased dependence on specific individuals to sustain the work	

In an emergent site, partners demonstrate clarity about the vision, the players involved (current and future), and the process for managing cross-sector conversations and activities. A developing

site demonstrates evidence that the partnership is expanding, deepening, and is less reliant on specific individuals. New partners – individuals or organizations – are brought into the partnership and have specific roles. In addition, core partners increasingly embed the content and cross-sector approach of Community Partnerships into their organizations and institutions. In a mature site, structures are in place for the cross-sector approach of Community Partnerships to continue, evolve, and even expand beyond the term of the grant.

Evaluation Findings

Over the course of the investment, each community built a strong partnership structure with a clear vision, defined membership, appropriate roles and responsibilities, and management processes. In the most mature sites, these partnership structures and processes are well defined, although the structure and membership differs in each community.

In the three mature sites, partners committed financial and in-kind resources to continue their work. These sites identified staff who will continue to facilitate and convene partners, and in some cases have changed job descriptions to absorb some partnership responsibilities into existing positions. In addition to the commitment of executive leaders, mid-level and operational leaders are embedding the work of the partnership into their organizational roles, increasing the likelihood of sustaining their efforts beyond the grant period.

The four developing sites, despite having structures in place, are less clear about whether and how their partnerships will continue to identify, implement, and scale new areas of work. The commitment from core partners is strong in each of these communities. However, these sites do not know if their partnership structures will hold, and if so, whether they will continue implementing the changes begun during the Community Partnerships investment. These sites also are uncertain whether they will identify and tackle new policy and practice change initiatives.

System Outcome Area: Aligning Policies and Practices

Evaluation Framework

Emergent sites demonstrate…	Developing sites demonstrate…	Mature sites demonstrate…
• Increased partner knowledge about policy barriers and opportunities that affect the postsecondary experience of low-income young adults	• Increased partner ability to articulate and carry out the policy and practice work	• Increased capacity to articulate and implement aligned policy and practice changes across institutions
• Increased systemization of decision-making about which policy and practice strategies to target in order to increase postsecondary success rates among the target population	• Increased partner ability to continually implement, refine, and monitor internal policy and practice strategies	• Increased evidence that enacted policy and practices support the achievement of student outcomes • Policy and practice changes that support student success are sustained system-wide

In an emergent site, partners understand the policy barriers and opportunities, and have a growing sense of specific policy and practice changes to target. In a developing site, partners can articulate specific policy and practice changes they are pursuing. They can also describe how those changes fit into a larger policy agenda, even when pursued by a single institution. Furthermore, developing sites have structures to monitor policy and practice changes taking place across the partnership. A mature site makes the transition to thinking about joint policy changes – those that require coordinated efforts or simultaneous aligned changes. Mature sites can point to student-level changes that result from specific policy or practice changes, as well as plans for sustaining those changes.

Evaluation Findings

Only two sites executed policy and practice changes that required coordinated implementation among *both* the school district and higher education partners. This cross-sector implementation, which often included non-educational partners, resulted in a direct and sizeable impact on students. Changes such as priority enrollment, alternative placement policies, and redesigned courses and counseling had policy and implementation implications for the K-12 and postsecondary partners, as well as for partners external to the two institutions. Helping students take advantage of the new priority enrollment and alternative placement options required unprecedented coordination, information sharing, and student case management from high school and community college counselors. In one site, broad support from the community-based organization and youth serving public agencies helped an additional 500 students (during the pilot year) complete the community college matriculation process, increasing students' access to core courses. In addition, student persistence rates improved at the end of the first semester to 98

percent and to 87 percent at the end of Year One. As a result, the pilot was extended to all 2011 district graduates. Early registration has benefited all students, and has further increased African American and Hispanic student access, helping make progress toward a core value of equity for the local partnership. From 2010 to 2012, access to English Credit Courses for district students increased by 39 percent. Similarly, of those participating in the test re-take policy, 57 percent of district students placed higher in English, and 40 percent placed higher in math. African American and Latino students benefited from this policy, although slightly less often (55 percent placed higher in English and 32 percent placed higher in math).[1]

In the four developing sites, individual partners enacted a wide range of policies and practices to support postsecondary access and success that have the potential for further impact, though few required cross-partner coordination. Partners in these sites can clearly articulate a shared community agenda and understand how their institutional and organizational efforts build on those of other partners. Yet, most policy decisions and practice changes are contained within individual organizations, requiring little to no coordination with other partners.

Part 2: Lessons Learned

How do sites build and use public awareness and commitment to support a local postsecondary completion agenda?

Building lasting commitment to the completion agenda requires engaging a broad, diverse group of community stakeholders, and deepening the engagement of individuals *within* targeted organizations. Communities that developed a broad base of commitment had access to top-level leaders, and also leveraged the expertise and involvement of mid-level leaders and front-line practitioners. This included reaching out to stakeholders within institutions, as well as to outside community partners. Furthermore, they built this commitment by emphasizing the importance of institutional and personal engagement. Brownsville's All In campaign exemplifies this approach by communicating to the public as well as to the professional community, and asking individuals to make personal commitments to this work. Simultaneously, Brownsville built an organizational base that was broad – including business and student interests – as well as deep – reaching out to key institutional leaders and practitioners within the district and local postsecondary partners.

The ability of the lead/convening partner to help members identify "what's-in-it-for-them," and balance this with partnership needs, was a critical driver in successful efforts to build commitment. Successful lead organizations and organizers understood and managed the interests of partners, working to ensure that the partnership brought value to them, *and vice-versa*. This often meant that conveners would put aside their own interests for the sake of the group, recognizing that stakeholders (e.g., school districts, community colleges, students, businesses, and community-based organizations) have unique reasons to be at the table and distinct assets to offer the group.

[1] From AACC presentation, *Sustaining Dynamic High School-Community College Partnerships: A Tale of Two Cities,* April 2013, San Francisco, CA.

For instance, the Amarillo Area Foundation (AAF) harnessed the support and interest of multiple stakeholders, and navigated a crowded field of community efforts. Recognizing the pre-existing focus on poverty and wealth building, AAF connected a postsecondary completion focus to these issues. In Mesa, municipal leaders became much more engaged after the economic benefits of Mesa Counts on College became clearer, and the city could see how the initiative complemented its focus on economic development.

The development of strong public brands and media campaigns built visibility for each site, but proved critical in communities with limited pre-existing attention to college completion. Community Partnership dollars enabled several communities to design sophisticated communications strategies that included brands, taglines, media outreach, and media buys. While the impact and durability of these brands is a question for the future, many credit these activities with making the initiative known to a wider range of stakeholders. Riverside's Completion Counts created broad awareness of the completion "issue" through the news media, partnering with local newspapers to highlight the need for improved postsecondary success. After laying the groundwork for a public campaign, the partnership launched a public report card, followed by a series of media events featuring the city's mayor. The events were held in high schools and in community venues. The Completion Counts campaign helped raise awareness of the postsecondary agenda across the community, and key support from the mayor and other community leaders helped spread the message within and across the city's institutions.

The most successful events that created broader awareness included: (1) solutions-oriented messaging, (2) high visibility through media and/or invited speakers and guests, and (3) significant behind-the-scenes preparation with key leaders to ensure public buy-in. Splashy, well-covered events helped bring attention to the local postsecondary success agenda. To execute a successful event, partnerships secured heavy engagement of the community, conveyed actions seen as contributing to solving the problem, and ensured that key institutional leaders were visibly supportive and recognized for their support. San Francisco's Frisco Day, Brownsville's State of Education Forum, and the Texas education convening held in Amarillo, *Connecting the Dots for Education Success*, each brought energy to the completion agenda, engaged new individuals and organizations, and recognized existing stakeholders for their work in a celebratory setting.

How are data used to advance the postsecondary strategy and goals in each community?

The process of establishing a public goal was an important exercise in building partnership and commitment, rather than solely a means to demonstrate accountability. For some communities, this was the first attempt to establish public success metrics, and those conversations often could be difficult. In Riverside, discussions to establish public metrics lasted almost a year, as partners sought to agree on indicators and definitions that each was comfortable making public. The process itself, while frustrating and challenging at times, ultimately enabled better, more consistent, and trusting communication across partners.

While using publicly available data helped draw attention to completion issues, partners that shared proprietary, more nuanced institutional data were better positioned to use data for strategy setting and monitoring. In situations where merging and sharing data across systems was

challenging – because of capacity and/or willingness to "go public" with data – partners used public data sources to enrich a community conversation about postsecondary success. However, sites that developed analyses based on shared data were more likely to use those data to inform partnership activities. In Mesa, the Research & Evaluation team at Mesa Public Schools made the annual senior survey identifiable (rather than anonymous), creating the ability to merge student-level data with other sources, including FAFSA completion data. Guidance counselors at one high school piloted the use of senior survey data to follow up with students who expressed interest in postsecondary attainment, but had not taken actions to fulfill those plans.

Communities that generated the most strategic value from their data established partnership structures and processes for regular data exploration, discussion, and data-informed decision-making. Capacity to analyze data was a primary consideration in initial data-sharing conversations, especially when engaging individuals who worked in data positions within institutions or external partners. However, communities that made the most progress in using data leveraged additional data capacities within their institutions and/or through other partners to *interpret* the data analyses. Data crunching *and* data inquiry were both critical for successful data use. In San Francisco, the team from the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, as well as a second partner, Harder and Company, worked with Bridge to Success to collect and analyze data, as well as to support partners in discussing the implications of quantitative and qualitative data. As a result of these facilitated conversations, partners used these data to inform policy and practice initiatives.

In Raleigh, processes were established for using data to manage the partnership's internal operations. Each of the partnership's eight action teams established goals for their work, and then shared and reviewed quarterly reports to assess progress against each goal. This approach served as an accountability mechanism for the partnership. Establishing success benchmarks (e.g., attendance at meetings, revenue raised, development of action plans, and achievement of short-term goals) can help partners understand what's "working well" and where the partnership needs to focus its efforts.

Shared data systems are most likely to develop and continue in communities where partners value the information for cross-partner conversations *and* individual institutional decision-making. Limited early evidence suggests that when partners depend on shared data for their own institutional decision-making and processes, motivations for maintaining data sharing systems and agreements are strengthened. In New York, both the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and the City University of New York (CUNY) depend on shared data to implement specific policies within their organizations. DOE has institutionalized the dissemination of Where Are They Now reports, which are provided to each high school in the city about their graduates. These reports include data about specific postsecondary indicators, such as college enrollment, developmental education placement, and persistence at CUNY colleges. Furthermore, college-level outcomes are a segment of a school's report card. At CUNY, the data team uses shared data to develop regression-adjusted performance metrics for individual CUNY colleges, offering more advanced metrics for holding colleges accountable for persistence and completion rates.

What does it take to build and sustain an effective cross-sector partnership that has the capacity and resources to improve postsecondary completion?

An "ideal" partnership structure cannot guarantee sustainability. However, there is a relationship between the *breadth of the membership* and the *scope of the agenda*. While partnerships between educational organizations may lead to more immediate change, the implementation of comprehensive community change depends on a broad range of stakeholders. The focus of partnerships on advancing a postsecondary completion agenda held constant across the PPS and CLIP sites. Yet, partnership structures emerged differently across the seven communities. Some included a broad array of partners, while others incorporated a select few. How the partnership was structured influenced the scope of postsecondary efforts. Where there was greater diversity of partners, the completion agenda represented a larger community strategy.

- In **Mesa**, CLIP's inclusion of municipal leadership was initially viewed by core partners as an unclear and undefined relationship between the city and the public school system and the community college. As partners successfully identified what the city manager's office could bring to this work, the partnership agenda broadened to include economic and workforce development, as well as social responsibility; at the same time, increased college completion became one of the city's imperatives to achieve regional economic competitiveness and community engagement.
- In **Amarillo**, a diverse partnership that included local education partners, social service agencies, and the faith and philanthropic communities resulted in a postsecondary success agenda embedded in a poverty alleviation strategy that included addressing students' non-academic needs.
- In **New York**, a partnership between CUNY and the DOE led to a stronger relationship between the two entities, including new data sharing agreements and structures, various MOUs, and better communication. However, partners agreed that the local effort did not represent a community-wide postsecondary agenda, but rather focused on postsecondary completion as an imperative of the educational partners.

Based on the experiences of the Community Partnerships sites, the scope of partnerships (narrow or broad) can affect how quickly a site can attain progress on policy and practice changes. The scope also can determine to what extent these policy and practice changes make progress toward goals of systemic change. When educational stakeholders address the completion agenda as its own goal, the results can lead to quicker and more discrete policy and practice changes, as was the case with priority registration policy changes in San Francisco and Riverside. In Riverside, while the policy change itself was quick, the successful *implementation* of the shift required the engagement of a variety of partners – including representatives from the city's two school districts and the community college's student affairs and academic departments. Through involving a wide range of organizations in the implementation, the priority registration policy became the cornerstone of a larger educational success strategy – one that depended on many partners and considered priority enrollment in the context of comprehensive success strategies for students.

Successful partnerships evolved, and had the flexibility to bring on new partners and adapt to individual, organizational, and contextual changes. Partnerships with more narrowly defined membership were less apt to add partners and tackle new directions. Over the course of the investment, many communities faced big changes in their postsecondary environments. As communities move forward with their work, big shifts in the postsecondary landscape will continue to occur on the local and national levels. Partnerships that can adjust to these changes, bring in new partners, and evolve to meet new demands will most likely last through adversity. Brownsville offers a unique example. Over the course of the grant, the community faced major upheavals in the postsecondary landscape. The local community college, Texas Southmost College, and four-year college, University of Texas Brownsville, which had existed as one campus, split apart. The four-year college subsequently forged a merger with another four-year institution. Through these transitions, partner roles changed, new partners emerged, and the partnership strengthened significantly.

Early evidence suggests that partnerships with a more narrow membership, or deep engagement among fewer sectors, may not have the same agility in responding to changes in the landscape. These structures offer less flexibility and fewer levers for taking advantage of changes and new partners. Partnerships with a deep focus on higher education interventions, for example, had a more difficult time engaging other sectors, such as the business and nonprofit communities, in their work. As a result, responding and adapting to the political or economic climates proved more difficult because of a lack of partners who could help navigate those challenges.

"Quick wins" were critical for internal and external partner confidence. Early progress demonstrated that partnerships were capable of moving from process to action. Many stakeholders considered it important to demonstrate that the partnership could "get things done," and function as more than a conversation space. This led partners to identify projects that they could initiate quickly. San Francisco led the way in this approach, establishing events like Frisco Day and identifying changes in priority enrollment at the local community college, Community College of San Francisco. While these changes required more time and critical leadership to implement effectively, the identification of specific projects rapidly brought attention to San Francisco's Bridge to Success initiative and enhanced the partners' willingness to engage in future activities.

How do sites engage in policy and practice change?

Sites that identified institutional policies that: (1) required cross-partner implementation, and (2) affected students directly, were best positioned to demonstrate systems change and student-level postsecondary outcomes within the grant period. The best examples of this lesson are the priority enrollment and alternative placement policies in San Francisco and Riverside, offering students from partner school districts earlier access to community college courses and alternative ways to receive credit for their high school work in math and English. These sites undertook policy changes that had an immediate impact on students, but also required practice changes from a variety of partners to ensure successful implementation. These practice changes included marketing and communicating the new policy and offering new supports to help students and families take advantage of the policy. The experience of Community Partnerships sites reveals an important decision point: If the goal of the work is to implement quick, discrete, and likely

shorter-term changes, then a smaller, education-focused partnership is the appropriate option. Quick wins have proven important to meaningfully engage partners and gain stakeholder commitment. But if the goal of the work is to change how systems function, and integrate college completion into a broader, longer-term community agenda (e.g., regional competitiveness or addressing the opportunity gap), then a more expansive and diverse partnership is critical. While this partnership structure may have more complex and drawn out processes, especially to *implement* and *maintain* policy and practice changes, the results are systemic and longer-term.

Changes in institutional processes (e.g., in data use or counselor and faculty practices) have longer-term potential to affect students' postsecondary outcomes. While some institutional policy changes offer a seamless line to student impact, others shift central functions or seek to influence the role of practitioners in the system. These shifts offer opportunities for ambitious changes, but require a longer timeframe to influence the student experience. New York's data changes, highlighted above, provide a good example of this lesson. The development of shared data systems offered new opportunities for central office staff to use data, and has begun to make its way into accountability and learning metrics for individual high schools and colleges. Yet, the impact of these data in changing practice with students in the classroom is a longer way off. Access to these data, however, offer opportunities for new conversations across New York high schools and college staff, and can shift practice on a broad scale as the data become more available and integrated into the processes of both institutions.

In Mesa, for example, Mesa Community College (MCC) and Mesa Public Schools (MPS) aligned and documented the term sequences for MCC's Career and Technical certificates and degrees online, which MPS linked to its student advisory system. MCC will maintain and update the new system, allowing MPS (and MCC) students to see course requirements – by academic term – as they relate to career interests. The accessibility of this information has the potential to enhance students' postsecondary planning and ultimately support stronger outcomes.

Aligned policy and practice changes occurring in more than one institution – responsively or concurrently – offered some of the biggest and most-likely-to-be-sustained shifts. Some of the most promising policy and practice changes occurred when two different institutions, usually the school district and community college system, moved policies and practices in tandem. In San Francisco, the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) refined its placement testing practice to allow students to retake placement exams within two weeks of their first attempt. CCSF also piloted "bump up" placement practices that used multiple measures, such as attendance, standardized test performance, and GPA to assess student readiness for higher level placements in math and English. While these practices required a policy change from CCSF, the successful implementation of these efforts required unprecedented coordination between CCSF and the San Francisco Unified School District, specifically system-to-system coordination among stakeholders from a variety of levels and departments, including counseling, instruction, executive cabinet, and student programs and supports. Similarly, Raleigh benefited from strong partnerships among its six higher education institutions and the City. They worked together to create a "Raleigh College Center" – a resource housed within a city recreation center where community members could learn about colleges and receive college-going supports (e.g., assistance with financial aid) from representatives of each college. The significant changes to the

way these institutions work, and work together, show promise for the sustainability of these policy and practice changes.

Smaller partnership-led programs offered visible "quick wins," and in many sites the potential to demonstrate and spread new and promising practices. Some partners took on smaller pilot programs that tackled particular challenges. These programs included new positions and initiatives dedicated to supporting the non-academic needs of students in Amarillo, new hubs of college access and success information in Raleigh and New York (e.g., NYC College Line), and the development of new pathways into and through postsecondary options in Mesa (e.g., GED to MCC) and Riverside. While many of these efforts started small, in the best cases they demonstrated, or will demonstrate, the value of a specific approach to scale up through policy or program expansion. Brownsville's Student Ambassador program provides an example of this approach. The effort started as a result of the partnership engaging three student leaders to develop and implement a new program that would bring college students back to their high school alma maters to share their experiences in college. After a year of implementation, the Brownsville Independent School District institutionalized the work of the All In Student Ambassadors by integrating the Student Ambassador curriculum into the Career & Technical Education curriculum. Now, Student Ambassadors are allowed to present to juniors and seniors for one hour a week, for five weeks, during a Career & Technical Education course. This change ensures that the greatest amount of juniors and seniors receive information about going to college as part of their course.

Which approaches (under what conditions) are most likely to be sustained?

Community partnership sustainability is most likely in the places where:

- **Building commitment to a postsecondary success agenda is a community issue, not just an institutional issue:** Across the initiative, there are many examples of how communities, as well as individual institutions, are placing *postsecondary success* as a central focus of their work. In our assessment, the greatest potential for impact will come from sites with a community-wide focus on postsecondary completion – in school districts, among municipal leaders, and in strategic plans – rather than through a narrowly owned agenda among a small group of individual partners. Where leaders, institutions, and practitioners begin to *truly prioritize* postsecondary success, momentum is likely to continue.

- **Formal (MOUs, financial commitments) and informal (personal relationships) commitments solidify partnership:** Partners across CLIP and PPS sites made a variety of in-kind and financial commitments to further this work beyond the term of the grant – a critical step to ensuring that partnerships will continue. However, while formal commitments are important, the quality of relationships among those involved in the partnership, and specifically across organizations, also serve as an indicator of future partnership strength and success. Financial resources to do this work in these communities will continue to come and go, but having a *backbone of relationships* can help maintain momentum, even in lean times.

- **Individual institutions use and depend on shared data to make decisions, in addition to the partnership:** As the Community Partnerships work ends, data sharing and use likely face the greatest sustainability challenges. While conversations about data helped to strengthen partnerships, most communities have not set up sustainable data sharing systems. The early assumption in the Theory of Change, and among many communities, that a public release of data would become the starting point for generating a joint commitment to shared data, and that those data would drive partnership decisions, did not play out. New York, however, created a viable joint system of shared data. The decision between CUNY and the DOE to share data arose, in part, from the value that the individual institutions placed in having access to these data. The commitment to shared data also benefits the partnership, but it is the institutional interests that fueled ongoing data agreements.

- **Enacted policy and practice changes are poised to expand, iterate, and/or evolve:** Sites are pursuing a wide variety of policy and practice changes – from pilot programs to institution-level policy changes. While the nature of these policy and practice changes may be different, the approach communities take to engage in policy and practice change should be the same. Communities that continue to: (1) explore how existing policy or practice changes can continue to develop (e.g., tweaking approaches and scaling efforts that are working) and (2) identify new opportunities for policy and practice change, will have sustained Community Partnerships efforts. Communities that enact a policy change or program, and learn from and respond to the ongoing success and challenges of implementation, are most likely to maximize the impact of current policy and practice changes.

Part 3: Reflections on the Theory of Change

One of the biggest "ahas" that emerged from our reflections with PPS and CLIP partners after the first year of implementation was about the interaction of the four system outcome areas. While the outcome areas are appropriate for guiding the work overall, no *prescribed* sequence exists for how communities tackle development in these areas. We learned that changing communities' commitment to college completion, improving how they use data, building sustainable partnerships, and strengthening how they work together to align policies and practices is systemic change, in and of themselves. These changes lay the groundwork to improve enrollment, persistence, and completion rates in a community. The process is not linear, and differs according to the unique context and opportunities in each community. What *is* consistent is the need to toggle back and forth across these outcome areas, and to balance short-term activities that target immediate change with longer-term activities that have the potential to transform the system.

Overall, we found a great deal of *interaction between system outcome areas* – where activities with one emphasis (e.g., "using data") often affect other outcome areas. And, success in one area provides a pathway for success in another. For example:

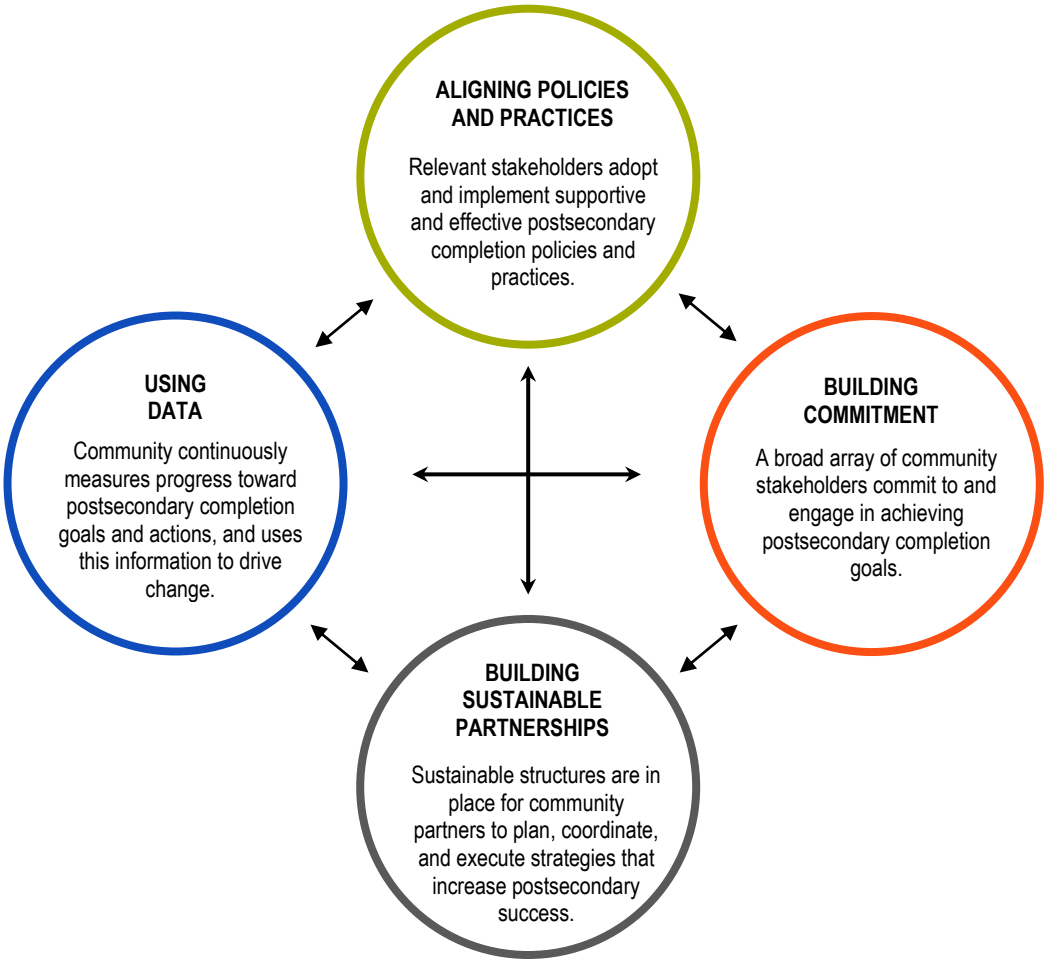
- **Using Data → Building and Sustaining Partnerships:** Riverside's challenging conversations about data and public metrics, while consuming time and effort, ultimately built better communication and trust across partners, and strengthened partnership processes.

- **Aligning Policies and Practices → Building Commitment:** San Francisco's visible win in establishing new course registration demonstrated the commitment of top educational leaders. This in turn led to broader commitment within and across institutions and organizations that helped propel additional policy wins, such as a new developmental education retesting policy.

- **Building and Sustaining Partnerships → Aligning Policies and Practices:** Brownsville's focus on building relationships within the school district opened up new opportunities for expanding its Student Ambassador program in ways that would not otherwise have been possible.

As a result of these lessons, a new model emerged for thinking about the Community Partnerships Theory of Change:

Figure 2: Community Partnerships Areas for Systems Change



As sites deepened their work in Years 2 and 3, our understanding of this model continued to evolve, and while the basic premise of the Theory of Change and the corresponding outcomes and indicators have not shifted, we worked closely with our intermediary and site partners to develop a more nuanced understanding of the work on the ground. Learning from the Community Partnerships initiative, there are additional areas that we recommend including in a place-based evaluation:

System Outcome Area	Additional Areas of Investigation
Building Commitment	• The diversity, breadth, and depth of stakeholder engagement during different points in time. • The level of individual commitment to the postsecondary agenda *and* to collaboration and joint action.
Using Data	• The critical establishment of trust and respect for data use among partners. • The development of data sharing structures and processes for use internally with partners and with external stakeholders.
Building and Sustaining Partnerships	• The strength of the lead partner or convener to identify and respond to the different interests, assets, and challenges of multiple partners. • The emphasis on building and maintaining organizational and individual relationships. • The flexibility of the partnership to respond to new organizations, new partners, and broader contextual factors that may affect the collective work. • The cumulative capacity, skill set, resources, and authority of partners to operationalize the completion agenda and identified strategies.
Aligning Policies and Practices	• Improving partners' ability to regularly use data to identify policy and practice areas and monitor the implementation of various changes. • Ensuring that policy and practice changes within partner institutions are informed by and align with partnership priorities, and that institutional and organizational policy and practice changes align across partners.

One theme across system outcome areas is the balance of the individual institution and the collective partnership. Mature sites have strong joint systems and structures for identifying and supporting collective work. At the same time, they carefully take advantage of individual interest and capacity to guide these joint priorities. In other words, in a successful Community Partnerships effort, the lead partners and/or convener identified where interests aligned, and how multiple partners could be more effective through coordinated or joint actions than through individual actions.

Part 4: Adding to the Literature on Community Change

The lessons from the Community Partnerships portfolio lie at the intersection of decades of research from community change initiatives and a newer body of literature focused on the "collective impact" model. The Community Partnerships portfolio aligns well with historical community change initiatives that emphasize changing "systems" and measuring the influence of coordinated action, contextual influences, and organizational dynamics on large scale place-based challenges. (See Appendix D for a short list of seminal pieces of literature that have informed our understanding and evaluation of the Community Partnerships portfolio).

More recently, the collective impact model has reinvigorated a conversation about how to bring a particular kind of rigor to community change efforts – a set of procedures and ways of doing things that ensures key elements like good group process, strong use of data, and getting to action are intentional in this work. Collective impact underscores how a structure of common goals and outcomes, usually quantitative, supported through a backbone organization, can help focus partners toward the same end. Unlike much of the community change literature, the collective impact model places a great deal of emphasis on process and structure, but makes few assumptions about the contextual and organizational forces that facilitate or impede how partners work together to influence one another's policies and practice.

Put more simply, the emphasis of more traditional community change efforts has often been on a collaborative approach. Collective impact's approach sets common goals and structures for getting to those goals, but leaves a lot of room for individual actions and solutions. Community Partnerships have forged a pathway in between; while setting out with a collective emphasis, the role of individual interest and action also emerged as a powerful asset for partnerships.

The changes in San Francisco and Riverside, in particular, are a testament to the potential for mixing collective/individual action. Identifying policy or practice changes which require *coordinated and deliberate implementation and action by a variety of partners* turned out to be the sweet spot of Community Partnerships. While an individual institution may have decision-making authority over a particular policy decision, the successful implementation and enactment of a policy change often depends on and/or benefits from action across a wide range of partners.

This work is not linear – the interdependence of the system outcomes is just one indication of the zigging and zagging that Community Partnerships advertently and inadvertently take. While action across partners required messy solutions at times, the Community Partnerships portfolio seeks to prevent this messiness from serving as an excuse for stasis. A set of structures and activities – partnership, public metrics, shared data, public events, pilot projects, and quick wins – helped support a level of accountability and brought greater purpose to the work.

As this work continues in CLIP and PPS communities, as well as in affiliate communities and other locations across the country, success in straddling the line between loose structure and being highly prescriptive, and individual interest and coordinated action, will likely be the difference between initiatives that move their communities forward and those that do not. We

hope that this Final Evaluation Report, and our public Issue Briefs, help communities and their stakeholders balance these tensions effectively.

Appendix A: Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The OMG Center conducted an evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Community Partnerships (CP) portfolio to assess and learn from CLIP and PPS, the portfolio's two initiatives.

To support the Gates Foundation's learning objectives for this portfolio, and in recognition of the innovative and complex nature of the Community Partnerships work, OMG took a developmental approach to this evaluation. We built regular feedback and communication with sites, intermediaries, and the Gates Foundation into our evaluation activities to inform partners and stay abreast of what partners were learning in their work. The following table provides an overview of some of these key touch points.

Sites	Intermediaries	Foundation
• Annual site visits and pre-site visit interviews • Site snapshot debriefs with core teams • Annual phone visits with core team and other selected partners • Interaction at cross-site convenings and learning institutes • Annual collection of quantitative data indicators from college partners • Annual interviews/focus groups with planning only and affiliate sites • Partnership and TA surveys • Policy and practice templates	• Monthly evaluation team/intermediary check-in calls • Monthly CP management team calls (including intermediaries, Gates Foundation, and OMG) • Annual interviews with intermediary partners • Two Theory of Change refresh retreats • Planning and interaction at cross-site convenings and learning institute • Calls with TA teams before site visits • Annual report debrief calls • Post-site visit debrief calls	• Monthly evaluation team/Gates Foundation check-in call • Monthly CP management team calls (including intermediaries, Gates Foundation, and OMG) • Annual interviews with Gates Foundation partners • Two Theory of Change refresh retreats • Interaction at cross-site convenings and learning institute • Annual report debrief calls

We designed rapid feedback memos and summaries for all of our data collection activities to share lessons and test emerging findings about high impact strategies and tactics as quickly as possible. In addition to these memos, we delivered annual reports for PPS and CLIP to the Gates Foundation and the intermediary partners.

We designed data collection, analysis, and presentations to meet the following core evaluation objectives:

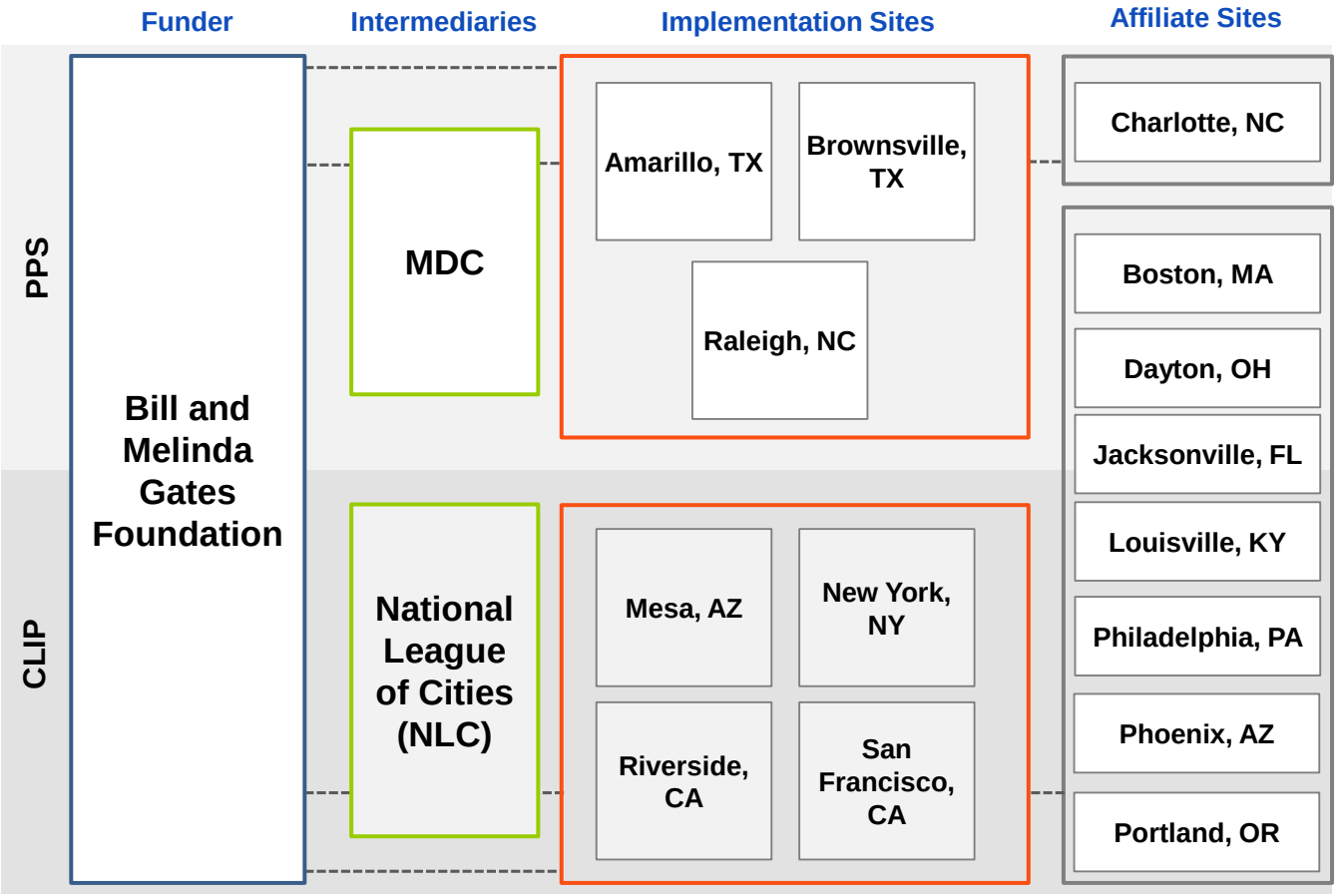
- Regularly reflect on progress and identify accomplishments and challenges.
- Understand more deeply how sites engage in and implement a Community Partnerships approach.
- Identify and consider issues for sustainability and ensuring the continuation of this work beyond Gates Foundation funding.

Below is an overview of our evaluation methods and timeline for both PPS and CLIP:

Method	Fall 2010	Winter 2011	Spring/Summer 2011	Fall 2011	Winter 2012	Spring/Summer 2012	Fall 2012	Winter 2013	Spring/Summer 2013
Annual site visits	✔		✔	✔		✔	✔		✔
Annual phone interviews with sites	✔			✔		✔	✔		✔
Annual interviews with Gates Foundation and TA/coaching teams	✔			✔			✔		
Document review					Ongoing				
Data collection template					✔			✔	
Check-in calls with TA/coaching teams					Ongoing				
Check-in calls with Gates Foundation					Ongoing				
Observations of cross-site convenings	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔		✔
Focus groups/interviews with CLIP planning and affiliate cities			✔		✔			✔	
Theory of Change refresh retreat				✔				✔	
TA/coaching survey		✔							
Partnership survey		✔							
Policy and practice snapshots			✔						

✔ PPS ✔ CLIP ✔ Both

Appendix B: An Overview of the Community Partnerships Investment



Timeline: The Communities Learning in Partnership (CLIP) planning process began in November 2009 and concluded in June 2010. Implementation grants were announced in summer 2010; the implementation phase ran from August 2010 through June 2013, although most sites received no-cost extensions through the end of 2013. Partners for Postsecondary Success (PPS) was designed by MDC, and then funded by the Gates Foundation. Its planning process began in October 2010 and concluded in May 2011. The PPS implementation phase was extended from the original 21 months and concluded in mid-2013, instead of the end of 2012 as originally planned.

Level of investment: The CLIP planning grants were up to $250,000 to support nine months of work. The PPS planning grants were up to $100,000 to support seven months of work. The CLIP implementation grants of $3 million supported three years of work. The PPS implementation grants of $1.3 million supported one year and nine months of work.

Planning phase design: The CLIP planning phase was a competitive design. Seven communities received customized technical assistance from the National League of Cities (NLC), which has a

track record of providing community technical assistance and supporting learning communities, to help them develop strong implementation proposals. Based on these implementation proposals, four sites were selected to move forward with an implementation grant. NLC invited the three unsuccessful planning sites and four other communities to join in a national learning community – i.e., the affiliate cities.

MDC implemented a reflective planning and coaching framework during the planning phase. Reflective planning is rooted in group analysis of community history, context, and patterns of decision-making to reveal gaps in the understanding and practice of equity, and is designed to yield strong partnerships with data-driven strategies to close those gaps. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and MDC invited four sites to receive planning funds. Three sites moved forward into implementation, and one joined the learning community as an affiliate site.

Type of lead organization: CLIP grantees could select the local community college, mayor's office, or other third party organization of their choice to lead the work. PPS was designed to be led by community based organizations that are non-governmental. PPS lead organizations were also expected to identify local resources to supplement Gates Foundation funds during the implementation period. Examples provided in the RFP included philanthropies, chambers of commerce, United Ways, etc. In the end, for PPS, the leads included a four-year institution, a United Way, and a local area foundation.

Intermediary expertise: The National League of Cities is a Washington DC-based membership organization that focuses on issues that affect municipal governments. Within NLC, the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (NLCI) is leading the CLIP work. NLCI has expertise in developing foundation-funded peer learning initiatives in the areas of education and disconnected youth. Evidence from the planning phase indicated that NLCI's municipal government expertise contributed to the rapid buy-in of mayors and other city leaders for this work. Additionally, NLCI's access to a large network of cities across the country provided an opportunity for rapid and large-scale dissemination of CLIP findings.

MDC is a private non-profit in Durham, NC, dedicated to removing the barriers that separate people and communities from opportunity. Raising postsecondary achievement levels, opening living wage employment pathways, and improving personal financial stability for underrepresented populations is MDC's core strategic focus. Due to MDC's expertise in community change initiatives, MDC's coaching emphasized leadership development, community engagement, and sustainability.

Regional emphasis: PPS cities are located in North Carolina and Texas, two Gates Foundation postsecondary states of interest. CLIP was designed as national in scope.

Appendix C: The Development of the Outcomes and Indicators

The OMG Center developed these outcomes and indicators in 2010, in partnership with the Community Partnerships (CP) portfolio management team – the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, MDC, and the National League of Cities – to frame and guide our evaluation as CP communities entered the implementation phase. We also drew on a variety of external resources in developing this framework.

Building Commitment: The development of Commitment outcomes and indicators was informed by: (1) *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* (ORS, 2007), which defines the base of support needed for policy change as consisting of the general public, interest groups, and opinion leaders (referred to here as stakeholders, partners, core partners, and leaders), and provides examples of interim outcomes for strengthening the support for an issue; and (2) *Building Public Will* (Metropolitan Group, 2009), which describes stages of building public will.

Using Data: The development of Data outcomes and indicators was informed by: (1) OMG's *Communities Learning in Partnership Planning Phase Evaluation Report* (September 2010), which describes the stages of data collection and analysis experienced by CLIP sites; and (2) *Using Data to Drive Change* (OMG Center, July 2009), which describes the role of data in policy and systems change, including the use of data by partnerships.

Building and Sustaining Partnerships: The development of Partnership outcomes and indicators was informed by: (1) *Evaluating New Versus Mature Partnerships* (Westat, 2005), which describes how evidence and indicators of a strong partnership shift over time, and provides a framework for an effective partnership; and (2) *Collaboration Factors Inventory* (Amherst Wilder Foundation, 2008), an assessment tool for measuring the strength of a partnership across 20 research-based success factors.

Aligning Policies and Practices: The development of Policy and Practice outcomes and indicators was informed by: (1) *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* (ORS, 2007), which provides examples of interim measures of policy change, and frames the social changes that result from policy change (e.g., increased community degree attainment and completion rates) as long-term outcomes.

As part of our evaluation refresh in the Fall of 2011, OMG used information from a Theory of Change refresh with CP management partners and site-level data collection to refine and update the Community Partnerships outcomes and indicators based on the most current lessons from the field.

Appendix D: Key References from the Community Change and Collective Impact Literature

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