

## **Broader Partnerships Toolkit**

### **What this is**

Ready by 21<sup>®</sup> is a set of innovative strategies developed by the Forum for Youth Investment that helps communities and states improve the odds that all children and youth will be ready for college, work and life. The Forum organized those strategies and the related tools under “the four B’s”: Broader Partnerships, Bigger Goals, Better Data and Bolder Action. This toolkit helps groups of leaders build or strengthen a partnership’s leadership infrastructure, including the backbone support function; align and strengthen existing coalitions; and engage key stakeholders in setting priorities and solving problems.

### **How this connects to Collective Impact**

While the leadership council or “steering committee” may lead the charge in a collective impact effort, dedicated staff is critical for the “backbone support” functions, coordinating the efforts of participating organizations, networks and individuals in ways that create the conditions for collective impact success. Specifically, they help participants:

- develop a common agenda – such as a shared set of desired outcomes and a plan to achieve those outcomes;
- collect and share data – about youth outcomes, community support and leadership actions;
- align their activities and resources – so that they are mutually reinforcing, and do not unnecessarily overlap or leave gaps; and
- continuously communicate – with each other and with other stakeholders, including the public.

### **How this tool is used**

Many community and state leadership groups use this tool at the beginning of new initiatives, to help them assess the need for an initiative and what shape such an effort should take. The tool helps them answer questions about such issues as roles, governance and structure.

One tool helps communities identify or build a leadership council according to six components of success: scope, authority, home, scale, resources and local connections. The Mapping Moving Trains tool documents existing coalitions, networks and organizations that are working on the issue at hand, to get a clear picture of what resources are available, where there are gaps and where efforts overlap. The toolkit also provides readings and other resources.

Most of the tools in this kit are carried out as a group activity, at least initially, often with in-person facilitation by the Forum for Youth Investment. The tools and worksheets were created for partnerships working on child and youth issues, but they can be (and have been) used by partnerships focused on other populations or on specific community issues.

**To find out more**

See the [Broader Partnerships toolkit](#). Some of the tools require free registration in the Ready by 21 Leadership Network or are available only to partnerships working directly with the Forum.



# Ready by 21<sup>®</sup> Broader Partnerships Toolkit

## Ready by 21 Toolkits

*The resources highlighted in this toolkit are available at [www.readyby21.org/toolkits](http://www.readyby21.org/toolkits)*



Ready by 21 is meeting leaders where they are across the country to reach the goal of having all youth ready for college, work and life. Ready by 21 is a set of innovative strategies developed by national experts at the Forum for Youth Investment based on decades of experience and the knowledge to make a measurable difference in young people's lives.

Ready by 21 helps leaders to build broader partnerships, set bigger goals, collect and use better data, and take bolder actions. Within these four Building Blocks for Effective Change, the Forum has identified 14 standards that leaders consistently cite as important to improve youth outcomes. To help you learn more about the Building Blocks, their related standards and ways that you can apply them to your work, the Ready by 21 Partnership offers this toolkit series.

For more information about Ready by 21, please visit [www.readyby21.org](http://www.readyby21.org). To speak to someone about how Ready by 21 strategies can align with your efforts, contact [ReadyLeader@ReadyBy21.org](mailto:ReadyLeader@ReadyBy21.org).

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For links and more information, please visit [www.readyby21.org/toolkits/broader-partnerships](http://www.readyby21.org/toolkits/broader-partnerships)

“Partners share the vision, the mission, the work, the joy and the setbacks. But most of all, at the end of the day, the partners can see what they did to help youth succeed.”

— Linda McReynolds, United Way of Greater Chattanooga

You can't do this alone.

No person or organization can change the odds for youth by themselves. You need to work in concert with others.

That means more than “let's get together sometimes.” After all, concerts are more than just a bunch of musicians making noise at the same time (certain bands notwithstanding.) Working in concert means agreeing on what to play, playing in unison and contributing your own special sound to create something beyond what any of you could do on your own.

To accomplish that, you need someone to align the efforts of existing organizations and to involve the key stakeholders in your community or state.

Is that challenging? You bet. Through years of working with all sorts of partnerships at the state and local level, the Ready by 21 National Partnership has seen complications stem from politics, programmatic differences, uneven commitments and geographic boundaries, just to name a few. We've helped partnerships overcome those impediments through the power of their united efforts.

Based on those lessons, the Forum for Youth Investment has developed three standards for building and maintaining broader partnerships:

- **Build an overarching leadership council** that establishes accountability for improved outcomes from birth to young adulthood.
- **Align and strengthen coalitions, commissions and intermediaries** to ensure full coverage of issues, populations and strategies.
- **Engage key stakeholders in setting priorities and solving problems** – from young people to professionals, from front-line providers to policymakers.

**Here's a quick self-assessment of your community's or state's capacity to build broader partnerships. Your answers can help you decide which areas to tackle first.**

BROADER PARTNERSHIPS	DOING THIS WELL	DOING OKAY	DON'T HAVE BUT NEEDED	NOT A PRIORITY NOW
<b>Build an overarching leadership council</b> – Has any entity taken on the task of “adding it up” – figuring out how to bring the pieces together and keep the work coordinated? Does that organization have the capacity, motivation and authority to align resources?				
<b>Align and strengthen coalitions, commissions and intermediaries</b> – Are the current coalitions and coordinating bodies concerned with children and youth intentionally linked? Are there ongoing mechanisms for mapping, aligning and coordinating their efforts? As new initiatives are started, are they brought to a common table?				
<b>Engage key stakeholders in setting priorities and solving problems</b> – Is there a broad base of stakeholders – public, private and nonprofit – who have the capacity, motivation and resources to affect change? Are stakeholders from all systems and settings connected and committed? Are all levels of leadership involved, from top-level to frontline, from policymakers to parents and young people?				

**To learn more about building broader partnerships, check out these resources below:**

**Thinking Outside the Box: Creating Catalytic Partnerships to Change the Odds for Children and Youth:** Karen Pittman, president and CEO of the Forum for Youth Investment, challenged Chattanooga, Tenn., to come together as a community to change the way it serves and supports young people. Learn more about the dynamic potential of catalytic partnerships through this speech and accompanying graphics.

**Georgetown Divide, CA: Building a Broad Partnership to Improve Results:** See how community leaders on California's Georgetown Divide brought together a wide range of organizations to improve services and results for youth. The community formed a broad coalition using Ready by 21 strategies, tools and technical assistance.

**Ready by 21 and Collective Impact:** When community leaders and organizations work together in unison toward common goals, they can achieve collective impact. Karen Pittman writes here about this concept and how it plays out through Ready by 21's commitment to such things as shared agendas and measurement systems.



## Standards Toolkits

*These tools will help you examine your strengths and gaps for building broader partnerships.  
Each set of tools is designed to help you fulfill a specific standard.*

### Ready by 21 Toolkits

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## Build Broader Partnerships:

### Build an overarching leadership council that establishes accountability for improved outcomes from birth to young adulthood.

First, you need a conductor for your concert.

With various people and organizations playing unique roles in your community – focusing on particular issues, populations and geographic areas – someone needs to keep an eye on the big picture, connect the work of those groups and make sure there are no gaps. That’s why every successful Ready by 21 state or community has an overarching leadership council.

This is a task force, coalition or committee with a clear governance structure, responsibilities to engage public and private stakeholders, and members that hold each other accountable for carrying out their part of the big picture action plan. The council can be a new entity or an existing one. It can take many forms; only you know what’s best for your community or state. You can, however, learn from those who have already done it.

**Here are resources that address common questions:**

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#### What makes a successful local leadership council?

Certain elements are crucial for success. The Forum for Youth Investment has learned this through years of working with a variety of leadership councils, and from that experience created **Dimensions of a Leadership Council**. The chart outlines the important factors when selecting or forming a leadership council at the local or regional level.

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#### How can we build a successful children’s cabinet?

Many state governments form children’s cabinets to coordinate the policies and practices of the myriad agencies whose programs serve youth and families. Children’s Cabinets are typically made up of the heads of all state government agencies with child- and youth-serving programs. They meet regularly to coordinate services, develop a common set of outcomes, and collaboratively decide upon and implement plans to foster the well-being of young people in their state.

This issue brief, **State Children’s Cabinet and Councils Series - Elements of Success: Structural Options**, reviews the range of existing children’s cabinet and council structures, and offers tips for getting the most effective structure in place. The brief was developed by the Forum for Youth Investment, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Governors Association Center on Best Practices.

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#### What can we learn from successful children’s cabinets?

Whether you’re building a children’s cabinet or another type of overarching leadership council, you can learn from those who have led successful cabinets. The **Overarching Leadership Body Structural Assessment Chart** looks at components such as scope, authority, home, scale, resources and local connections. Use this chart to assess where your leadership body falls on each component.

## Build Broader Partnerships:

### Align and strengthen coalitions, commissions and intermediaries to ensure full coverage of issues, populations and strategies.

If your community is like most, it already has lots of partnerships in place: partnerships with their own websites, logos, mission statements and memorandums of understanding. These partnerships can be an enormous asset – if you can organize them into a coherent patchwork that meets the needs of the whole child and the whole community.

When you get all of these groups working together harmoniously, you'll bring everyone's efforts closer to that concert we talked about earlier. The community will see an alignment of goals, strategies and functions among its leading organizations. Not every problem will be solved, but all of the community's issues and populations will be covered by somebody.

Here are resources that address common questions:

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#### There must be dozens of partnerships out there. How do I find them and figure out how they fit together?

The Forum for Youth Investment created an adaptable tool to help you get a full picture of the child- and youth-focused initiatives, coalitions and networks in your community or state. The [Mapping Coalitions and Networks Facilitator's Packet](#) will show areas for collaboration as well as gaps to be addressed.

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#### Our organizations and groups that focus on youth issues aren't even aligned. Does that matter?

It does to them. Because here's something ironic, as observed by the National Collaboration for Youth: When communities and states form overarching leadership councils to improve youth supports, "too often the sector that is least organized and systematically represented is the youth-serving sector." There might be coalitions around issues such as child abuse or juvenile justice, but no one group addresses child and youth development broadly nor leverages the collective power of all the organizations serving youth.

One way to bring them together is by forming a Local Collaboration for Youth. The National Collaboration lays out how and why to do that in [An Invitation to the Big Picture: Implementing a Local Collaboration for Youth \(LCY\) in Your Community](#).

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#### Now we have to create another collaboration to oversee the collaborations?

No. Partnerships can work collectively without redundancy. [Don't Stop Collaborating, Just Stop Creating New Collaboratives](#) shows how states and communities have aligned their existing collaborations.

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#### How can we make government policies line up with our existing collaborations?

They sure mean well: those government policies that address issues for young people by, among other things, mandating the creation of a new board or commission to study an issue or oversee solutions. Sometimes, the result is a hodgepodge of coalitions, commissions and networks with overlapping missions and no coordination among them.

Learn how to avoid this pitfall in [Ready by 21 Policy Alignment Series: Align New Policies with Existing Efforts to Collaborate](#). This white paper provides real world examples of what can go wrong when policy language does not encourage new initiatives to blend with existing collaborations.

## Build Broader Partnerships:

### Engage key stakeholders in setting priorities and solving problems – from young people to professionals, from front-line providers to policymakers.

To really change the odds for children and youth, your community needs the involvement of its influential leaders from all sectors. That includes education, business, government, nonprofits and families. “Involvement” goes beyond signing up and saying, “Call me when you want something.” These leaders need to be committed and collaborative in ways that contribute to the overarching mission of the group.

They show this by their:

- Sense of urgency to improve conditions and outcomes.
- Commitment of human and financial resources.
- Interest and experience in collaborating.
- Commitment to “big picture” goals that extend beyond their immediate interests.

Here are resources that address common questions:

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#### How do I figure out if we have the right mix of people? Who else do we need to reach?

You can probably sit down and compile a quick list of the “usual suspects” – the highly involved leaders and workers you know you can count on. They might already be with you in this search for dramatic change.

You need a lot more – which might sound daunting, but should be invigorating. Ready by 21 pulls together people from all sectors and corners of the community whose work touches the lives of youth, including people who have never worked together or even been in the same room together.

To figure out who to involve and what roles they can play, the Forum for Youth Investment developed the **Stakeholders Wheel Facilitator’s Packet**, which includes an easy-to-use worksheet that helps you determine what groups you’ve already got engaged and who to reach out to. The facilitator’s guide shows how to use the wheel in a group activity, while the examples illustrate how the wheel has been used in other communities.

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#### OK, everyone is in the same room. Now what?

Now is the time to get people inspired and help them see the crucial roles that they will play in forging significant, long-lasting community change. We’ve laid out some guiding principles for stakeholder engagement in the **Building a Broad Stakeholders Group Action Brief**. Use it to jumpstart and sustain your stakeholder engagement efforts.

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#### How do we engage business leaders in meaningful roles?

For many businesses, “partnering” with their community’s education and human services providers has often meant writing a check or sending over some computers. Those are important contributions – but now might mark the first time these business people have been asked to partner with such a variety of stakeholders in a deeper way: to develop a plan in unison with the whole community and make sure it gets carried out.

That requires a strategy to:

- Identify the right business partners.
- Use each one’s specific strengths.
- Ensure successful long-term collaborations.

Several Ready by 21 National Partners have produced tools to help you do that.

United Way Worldwide and Corporate Voices for Working Families teamed up with the Workforce Strategy Center to develop this toolkit and companion website: **Supporting the Education Pipeline: A Business Engagement Toolkit for Community-Based Organizations**. You'll find tools and resources for identifying potential partners, setting realistic goals and achieving long-term success.

Corporate Voices also produced:

**The Business Engagement Menu**, showing business leaders various ways to be involved in their communities. Nonprofit leaders can use the menu to see the array of options for businesses to join a partnership that's working toward common goals for youth.

The **Business Engagement Stakeholders Wheel: Identifying Business Leaders in Your Community**. Use it to consider different business leaders as potential partners and explore the roles that businesses can play.

If you're looking for fresh ideas or want to share a resource with your local businesses and schools, see this brief: **Common Goals, Unique Strengths: Education and Business Partnerships**, co-authored by Corporate Voices and the American Association of School Administrators.