A Practical Guide to Evaluating Systems Change in a Human Services System Context

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A Practical Approach to Systems Change Evaluation

In the social sector we are collectively moving toward a systems perspective. A term that was once esoteric – systems change – has migrated into common parlance for nonprofits and funders. Suddenly, it seems, systems change initiatives are everywhere. And it is a good thing, too. It will always be important to develop programs locally and bring them to our neighbors – but without a focus on systems, we cannot address the scale and complexity of our most intractable social problems.

As evaluators, we want to know how to *evaluate* systems change. On some days, this can feel as challenging as creating it. Systems are complex and rich, not reducible to a few conceptually neat descriptors. And there is relatively little down-to-earth guidance for the workaday evaluator. Most frameworks out there tend to be highly abstract, and point us to questions and taxonomies, rather than to answers and indicators. It is hard to use these frameworks to develop straightforward evaluation designs, because they take us quickly into the realms of exploratory and divergent thinking. We soon find ourselves with a long list of very general and open-ended research questions, a mountain of data to collect, and then – further down the road – the task of wrestling that mountain of data to the ground.

This Guide is for evaluators who would like a practical "way in" to thinking about systems and systems change. The key practical step the Guide takes is to limit the type of system to be evaluated to a particular *type* of system (a type that systems change initiatives often target): a human services delivery system (e.g. health, education, workforce development, etc.). Definitions of "system" are general and abstract because they encompass *all* system types – a cell, a body, a family, an organization, a weather system. Once we limit ourselves to human service delivery systems, we are allowed to adopt much more specific, concrete concepts.

This Guide – while taking a pragmatic approach – does not ignore the complexity of systems change. For an evaluator, complexity often manifests as shifting (and unpredictable) contexts, deep differences among perspectives, and even conflict among stakeholders. An excellent way for an evaluator to take this type of complexity into account is to adopt a *developmental evaluation* approach, working shoulder-to-shoulder with systems change agents to support their ongoing learning and initiative implementation.

Ultimately, the Guide proposes that we can tackle complexity by staying grounded in straightforward and familiar concepts – while at the same time respecting the complex nature of systems change. To help evaluators walk this fine line, the Guide offers:

- A concrete way to operationalize the concept of *systems* (with a focus on human service delivery systems),
- A correspondingly concrete way to visualize what it means to say that the system is *changing*,
- A way to think about the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the collaboratives that undertake systems change initiatives,
- A list of the steps involved in systems change evaluation (likening this evaluation to standard change-over-time program evaluation),
- A set of tools for you to tailor and use in your own evaluation, and
- Guidance for how to bring together this approach with some key aspects of a developmental evaluation.

For those of you who may have found the concepts of systems and systems change to be a little too abstract: after reading Part One of this toolkit, these concepts should feel less mysterious and easier to

operationalize. And for those of you who have sometimes wondered where to gain the first foothold on a systems change evaluation: after surveying the tools available in Part Two, you should feel ready to design and carry out your own evaluation of a systems change initiative.

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PART ONE:
Concepts to Guide Systems Change Evaluation

1: Introduction

For several decades, a consensus has been growing in the public, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors that we must use systems change approaches to effectively address society's most intractable challenges. And there is a corresponding growth in the demand to *evaluate* systems change efforts. Accepting this challenge, many theorists and practitioners have built the sub-field of systems change evaluation. It is an eclectic area of study and practice, incorporating concepts from fields as disparate as sociology, biology, and computer science. As Margaret Hargreaves, a prominent writer on the subject of systems evaluation says: "Those interested in learning more about systems may encounter a bewildering array of competing definitions, theories, frameworks, and methods" (Hargreaves, 2010).

While there is clearly no shortage of systems concepts, it can be hard for an evaluator to find a lot of truly practical guidance for conducting a systems change evaluation. This is because systems theory is usually quite abstract. For example, systems have been defined as: "a whole made up of two or more related parts" (Cabrera, Colosi, and Lobdell, 2008), and "a collection of parts that, through their interactions, function as a whole" (Foster-Fishman et al 2007). These definitions are general enough to apply to every system, but are of little practical help to an evaluator seeking insight into a *particular* system at hand.

Some evaluators have offered practical guidance to the field. For example, we have Julia Coffman's *A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives* (2007)*,* and Margaret Hargreaves's *Evaluating System Change: A Planning Guide* (2010)*.* In addition, those building the collective impact knowledge base have offered some concrete ways to operationalize systems change (see the *Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact: Supplement: Sample Questions, Outcomes, and Indicators*, by Preskill et al (2014)). The first goal of this toolkit is to add to the practical guidance already out there by offering a systems framework that gives us a way to organize the messy reality of systems and systems change into relatively neat conceptual categories.

But given recent attention in the field to the complexity of systems change and to systems change initiatives, the focus on neatness and pragmatism may seem misguided. Advances in *developmental evaluation* (DE) have encouraged us to take seriously the emergent, dynamic, uncertain, and volatile reality that systems change agents face, and to see the lack of alignment between systems change and traditional evaluation approaches.

DE clearly has critical insights for how evaluation can be more useful in supporting systems change agents as they undertake their challenging work. But we can incorporate these insights even as we "reduce" a complicated reality to a simpler model in order to pave the way for analysis. This Guide shows how a utilitarian approach to systems change evaluation can simplify an evaluator's job, while peacefully coexisting with a DE approach.

Framework Overview

The first step toward a utilitarian systems framework is to narrow the focus to just one important class of systems: human service delivery systems. These systems "have multiple programs, policies, agencies, or institutions at the national, state, and local level with the common goal of achieving better outcomes for [clients]" (Coffman 2007). Improving human service delivery systems is a common focus of systems change initiatives, so the framework developed here should be applicable to many systems change evaluations. At the same time, focusing in on just this one system type allows us to define *system* in a fairly specific and concrete way. Using this focus on human service delivery systems as our starting point, we can build a framework by understanding three things:

What are the elements of a system?

- **Pathways.** Organizational and inter-organizational arrangements set up to deliver programs and services. Pathways comprise a set of programs and services (organized in a particular domain, e.g. health, education, workforce development), designed to move clients through a progression of steps, supporting them to achieve positive outcomes.

- **Institutional structures.** These structures comprise: policies, laws, and regulations; funding flows and resource allocations; culture, norms, and standard operating procedures; and knowledge bases. All of these structures form the institutional context in which pathways function. They are the factors typically outside the control of actors that incentivize, constrain, and enable the approaches that actors use to build and maintain pathways.

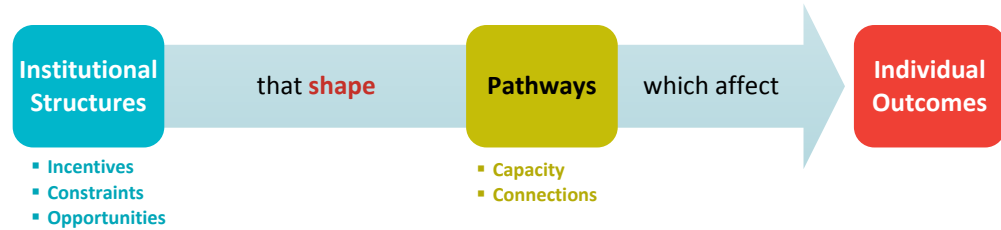### What are the elements of (positive) systems change?

- **More effective pathways.** Improvement in how pathways function, leading to improved outcomes for clients. Improvements entail:
  - **Increased pathway capacity:** A set of programs and services that shows improvements in: (1) scale (additional program slots and better access so that the supply of program slots is able to meet the need of the focal population(s); (2) **quality** (the ability of programs and services in the system to meet quality standards, and the adequacy of tailoring for the purpose of meeting participant/client needs); and (3) **comprehensiveness** (the extent to which there is the right mix of programs to meet the diverse needs of potential participants/clients).
  - **Improved pathway connections:** A set of programs and services that shows increases in: (1) linkage between steps (so that clients can successfully move from one step to another); (2) alignment of pathway step outcomes (so that all steps build on one another and/or have complementary purposes); and (3) **cross-system coordination** (linkage and alignment with complementary systems).

- **More conducive institutional structures.** Changes to institutional structures that create new sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities, which – in turn – allow and encourage actors to build more effective pathways. More conducive institutional structures can mean reduced structural barriers (barriers which were in the way of effective pathways), and new/enhanced structural enablers (institutional arrangements which create new possibilities for action).

How do systems change efforts influence systems change results?

- **Systems change initiatives managed by collaboratives create intentional systems change.** Systems change agents almost always work in collaboration, since no single organization has the technical capacity, jurisdiction, or resources to solve society's most intractable problems by itself. The effectiveness of collaboration, then, will affect the likelihood of a successful systems change initiative.

- **Three factors contribute to collaborative effectiveness: member engagement, governance structure and process, and an accountability framework.**
  - **Member engagement:** The extent to which collaborative members: (1) prioritize the collaborative's initiative within their own organizations; and (2) commit to a shared path of negotiating common goals and working toward them together with other members.
  - **Governance structure and process:** The extent to which structure is "hierarchically unified," and the extent to which process is formalized.
  - **Accountability framework:** The use of performance measurement as a management tool for the collaborative.

Systems Change Framework

Seeing a system:
What are the elements of a system?

| Institutional Structures | that **shape** | Pathways | which affect | Individual Outcomes |

- Incentives
- Constraints
- Opportunities

- Capacity
- Connections

Seeing systems change:
How can initiatives build systems that work better for individuals?

What keeps systems from working well for individuals?

| Structural Barriers | that **restrict** ability of actors to improve | Ineffective Pathways | which lead to | Limited Individual Outcomes |

- Adverse Incentives
- Undesirable Constraints
- Limited Opportunities

- Insufficient Capacity
- Missing Connections

How do systems change initiatives contribute to systems change results?

| Effective Collaboration | supports | Effective Systems Change Initiatives | contributing to | Conducive Structures | that **enable** actors to build | Improved Pathways | which lead to | Improved Individual Outcomes |

- Strong Member Engagement
- Hierarchically Unified Structure & Formalized Process
- Effective Accountability Framework

- Altered Incentives
- Relaxed Constraints
- New Opportunities

- Increased Capacity
- Improved Connections

This framework can help users to address some of the important (and sometimes tricky) issues in systems change evaluation. The framework:

- **Tackles the issue of how the collaboratives championing systems change initiatives affect the success of those initiatives.** With the recent focus on Collective Impact, we have begun paying more attention than ever to the role played by cross-sector partnerships. But what are the factors of partnerships that influence how systems change unfolds? A rich literature on "collaborative governance" and "networked governance" actually has a great deal to say on the matter. This framework brings in those insights by unpacking the connections between specific *aspects* of collaboration (governance structure and process, accountability frameworks, and member engagement) and the ability of a systems change collaborative to lower structural barriers and improve pathways.

- **Allows for identifying system changes that are "leading indicators:" indicators demonstrating that the initiative may be on the right track even before we see better outcomes for individuals.** Since systems changes are meant to provide more positive outcomes for clients, and since system improvements can be difficult to measure, sometimes evaluators use the "proof in the pudding" approach: if outcomes are better for clients, then systems improvements are assumed to have taken place. We need, instead, to be able to operationalize and assess *system-level improvements,* which will appear before change manifests at the level of the individual. This framework points to two types of system-level improvements: improved pathways, and declining structural barriers. As we look for what is happening in the institutional structure and in the pathways, we can see the system-level change that is percolating, even when dramatic or large-scale improvements for individuals may still be in the future.

- **Provides an obvious way to "bound" the system.** Systems literature warns that systems can expand infinitely; everything is related to everything else and so it is up to the analyst to conceptually bound something and *name* it a system for the purposes of analysis. The trick is finding an approach to bounding that keeps things manageable. A pathway approach allows you to identify a particular pathway to evaluate. It is up to the evaluator to limit the system's "size" by focusing on a particular pathway, a *section* of a pathway, or a particular juncture between two or more pathway types (for the systems change initiatives that focus on integrating different across different systems (e.g. health and education)).

- **Includes pathways as the "meso level" as part of the system, thus making it easier to see how systems changes manifest "on the ground" and also affect the lives of individuals.** Systems are often understood to include the macro-level factors such as policy and resource flows. Systems *do* include these things, but if the concept stops there, it is hard to trace how factors at this level translate into other changes that are closer to the ground and to individual lives. By bringing in pathways, this framework has a concrete way to link macro-level factors to the meso-level organizations, programs, and services that directly influence how individuals fare. By bringing in this middle level, we can more easily trace the causal pathways of systems change.

Collaboration is not a Component or a Level of a System

While collaboration is critical *to* systems change, it should be understood as *conceptually distinct* from a system and from systems change. Collaboration is the way that stakeholders organize themselves in order to become "systems change agents," and to intentionally *bring about* systems change. It is a mechanism that allows stakeholders to intervene in the system.

What you Will Find in this Guide

- **Part One: Concepts to Guide Systems Change Evaluation.** This part of the Guide describes the framework in more detail. First, it provides practical definitions of "system" and "systems change." Next it focuses on collaboration as the vehicle for organizing systems change initiatives. It unpacks the concept of collaboration, demonstrating how the collaboration can vary on specific dimensions relating to governance, accountability frameworks, and member engagement – and discusses how variation along these dimensions relates to variation in the effectiveness of systems change initiatives.

- **Part Two: The Toolkit.** Part Two lays out an architecture for undertaking systems change evaluation. Beginning with a list of research questions derived from the systems change framework presented in Part One, it provides a series of tools designed to help an evaluator collect and analyze data that can answer these research questions.

2: What are the elements of the system?

For the purpose of this framework, we circumscribe the concept of "system" to make it easier for an evaluator to operationalize a *specific* system. Here we focus in on just one class of systems that is frequently the focus of systems change initiatives: human service delivery systems (e.g. school systems, health services systems, workforce development systems, etc.).

Even focusing on just this one type of system, however, we still have challenges of conceptualization because these systems are so large, multi-faceted, and messy. Messiness derives from the fact that systems usually include sets of organizations exhibiting overlapping jurisdictions, and at least some degree of fragmentation: coordination may be challenging and rules in different parts of the system may work at cross purposes. Different organizations include many actors with varied perspectives, and guided by different – sometimes conflicting – interests.

The question for the evaluator is: how can we impose order on this complexity? What conceptual categories can help us know where to look when we want to analyze how the system works, what prevents it from changing, and how change *can* happen? To impose order, we can build on several familiar concepts that are often evoked in one way or another in discussions of service delivery systems and of systems change. We then put them together in a way that gives us a fairly straightforward way to tackle systems change evaluation. In this framework, systems consist of **pathways** and **institutional structures**:

- **Pathways** are organizational and inter-organizational arrangements set up to deliver programs and services; these programs and services are designed to support individuals in progressing from their current state to a future state.

- **Structures** are institutional forces that shape the pathways. They include policies, laws, regulations, funding flows and resource allocations, knowledge bases, culture and norms, and standard operating procedures. They form the institutional context in which pathways function, and they influence the ability of individual and organizational actors to build and maintain effective pathways.

Evaluators can use the concepts of "pathways" and "institutional structures" to operationalize and bound a particular system they are assessing. This section provides a more detailed description of each of these concepts.

Pathways

Different types of human delivery systems share in common the design principle that they are meant to help people progress from a current state to another (more positive) future state, achieving goals along the way. This common element calls to mind the "pathway" metaphor, providing an easy way to think about how individuals engage with each human services delivery system. One straightforward example is that of a school system:

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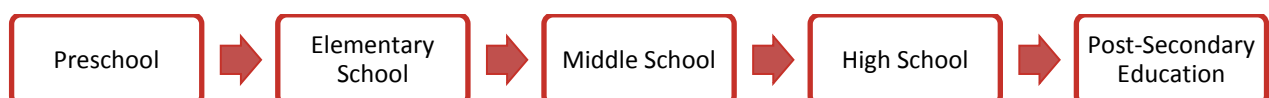
The school system is designed so that people move through each step in this pathway, successfully making the transition from one step to the next, until they complete a credential at a post-secondary institution (four- or two-year college, or vocational school). There are supports available along the way to the youth traveling this pathway, such as tutoring, counseling, and special education.

This educational pathway happens to be linear, but not all pathways are (in fact, linearity is the exception). Many types of pathways have multiple entries and exits, and different groups of people might travel different routes, depending on their needs, assets, and goals. However, all pathways are meant to provide a general *forward* motion to those traveling them (even if eventual forward movement requires some iteration through a few of the pathway steps).

The steps in the pathway may be thought of as "system parts," but systems theory highlights the importance of *relationships* as well. Systems should not be seen as a simple "collection of parts," because parts can never be understood in isolation. Instead, parts exist in relation to other parts, and it is often these relationships – rather than anything intrinsic to the parts themselves – that determine how a system as a whole functions (Foster-Fishman et al 2007).

If the system parts are the pathway steps, the *relationships* are the links between and among steps; they are the standard operating procedures and inter-organizational connections meant to support clients in moving from one step to another. These relationships bind the steps together to form the pathway. We can, then, more precisely define pathways if we see them as being composed of **capacity** (parts) and **connections** (relationships).

Of Parts and Relationships

In *A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives*, Coffman (2007) discusses the place that both have in the understanding of systems:

Relationships: "Systems initiatives that concentrate on connections focus on what makes a system a *system* – the integration, linkages, and alignment between its parts."

Parts: "[W]hile a system is made up of interconnected parts and those connections are critical, sometimes a system's problem is not so much that it lacks connections, but that it lacks the parts to connect in the first place. …[E]nsuring that a sufficient and comprehensive supply of quality … programs and services are in place should not be overlooked as a potentially important part of systems work."

Pathway Capacity

Pathways can vary in their capacity levels. The three dimensions along which pathway capacity can vary are **scale**, **quality**, and **comprehensiveness**:

- **Scale:** The supply of program slots for those who can potentially benefit from programming, and the accessibility of these slots to intended clients.

- **Quality:** The ability of programs and services in the system to meet quality standards, the adequacy of tailoring for the purpose of meeting participant/client needs, and the extent to which program staff and planners engage in ongoing quality improvement processes.

- **Comprehensiveness:** The extent to which there is the right mix of programs to meet the diverse needs of potential participants/clients, and whether there are enough of these different types of programs so that the system has few or no service gaps.

Pathways can vary in the degree to which their connections are functioning well. The three dimensions along which pathway capacity can vary are **linkages**, **alignment**, and **cross-system coordination**:

- **Linkages:** The extent to which linking mechanisms between related programs are present, allowing clients to successfully transition from one to another (including warm handoffs, common enrollment forms, joint protocols for referrals, cross-organizational case management teams, service bundling, shared data systems for tracking clients, etc.[1]).

- **Alignment:** The degree of alignment between intended outcomes for different programs, so that success in one program sets up clients to transition easily to, and succeed in, the next program (or related programs).

- **Cross-System Coordination:** The extent and effectiveness of work done by stakeholders in the focal system to pursue linkage and alignment with complementary systems in a way that supports focal system goals (e.g. coordination of schools with out-of-school time providers to support student achievement outcomes).

Institutional Structures

Pathways can be thought of as the core of the human services delivery system, but a broader conceptualization of the system also includes the *structural context in which pathways are constructed and maintained*. The idea of "structural context" denotes external forces that profoundly shape pathways. The institutional structures shaping pathways include policies, laws, and regulations; funding flows and resource allocations; culture, norms, and standard operating procedures; and knowledge bases. To unpack this idea, we need to bring in the actors: the providers, intermediaries, funders, planners, and policymakers that "own" sections of the pathway.

As these actors undertake their work every day, they construct and re-construct the pathways – but they do not have the freedom to construct these pathways any way they want to. The structural context shapes their actions in a variety of ways. For example, they are constrained to work within a certain level of resources; the pursuit of additional resources may incentivize particular behaviors; or a law will mean that they have to follow a certain set of rules.

Thinking about school systems, we can imagine that a resource-strapped district might choose to cut funding for arts programs; the availability of state funding for behavioral health might lead to establishing mental health services on campus; and federal policies on high-stakes testing means that schools are incentivized to "teach to the test." These policies on high-stakes testing, and access to certain types of resources and not others, profoundly shape the way that districts and schools construct the pathways that students tread as they make their way through the grade levels. In this example, schools have more mental health services, less art, and instruction geared to passing a standardized test.

How is the concept of institutional structures helpful? Systems are still messy and multi-faceted. True – but we can simplify matters by using three concepts that name the *ways* in which institutional structures shape the behavior of the actors who build the pathways:

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[1] See, for example: Coffman 2007, and Sandfort and Milward 2007.

- **Incentives (and Disincentives):** Potential payoffs of taking a particular action (and potential punishments or downsides). Incentives *pull* an actor toward action (and disincentives push an actor away).

- **Constraints:** Rules or limits that *prevent* a particular action, or make an action difficult. Constraints can prevent an individual or organizational actor from taking a desired action.

- **Opportunities:** Conditions that *enable* a particular action. Opportunities important to actors are often those that enable an individual or organizational actor to pursue goals in a new way.

All the institutional structures – policies, resources, knowledge, etc. – generate particular types of incentives, constraints, and opportunities for those who build pathways. As evaluators, we can impose order on the complex reality of institutional contexts by asking:

- What sets of incentives are guiding action in a certain direction? And what institutional structures are creating those particular sets of incentives?

- What are the constraints that limit the ways that actors can build pathways? What constraints make it hard (or impossible) for actors to improve pathway capacity and connections? And what institutional structures are at the source of those constraints?

- What opportunities are open to actors for building or improving pathways; and what opportunities are closed off? And what institutional structures can we point to in order to understand the set of opportunities open to pathway actors?

3: What are the elements of systems change?

Now that we have defined human service delivery systems as pathways and structures, it is easy to define *changes* to the system. Broadly, we can define (positive) systems change as:

- Changes to the institutional structures (that allow and/or encourage actors to construct more effective pathways), leading to:

- More effective pathways (which then enable improved outcomes for individuals progressing along the pathways).
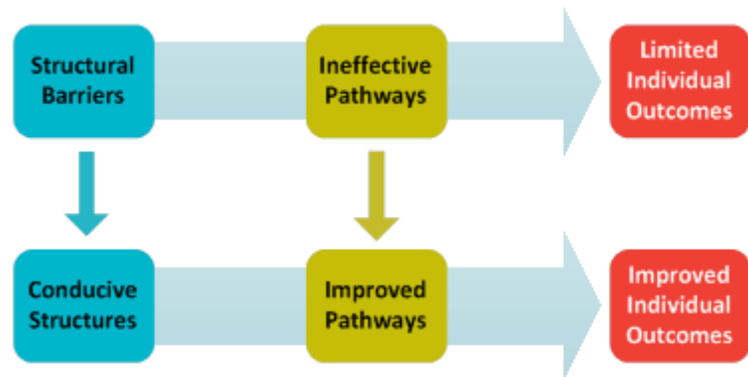
Shifts to More Effective Pathways

At the core of effective systems are effective pathways. In effective pathways, individuals can enter, move along the pathway in a relatively continuous manner from one step to the next, and exit with positive outcomes. One aspect of systems change, then, is a shift from *less* effective to *more* effective pathways. Using the concepts of capacity and connections, we can identify improved pathways in terms of **increased pathway capacity** and **improved pathway connections**.[2]

Increased Pathway Capacity

A pathway will not be effective unless the individual steps along the pathway are effective. Positive systems change entails **increased quality**, **increased scale**, and **increased comprehensiveness**:

- **Increased Quality:** An increase in the quality of service delivery for individual programs, and an increase in the number of high-quality programs.
    - o More programs are systematically adhering to program quality standards, and engaging in continuous quality improvement efforts.
    - o More providers implementing, and improving their fidelity to, evidence-based programs.
    - o More providers working to tailor programs to the needs of their focal client population.

- **Increased Scale:** Increased program supply, improved accessibility, and improved outreach/recruitment.
    - o Increased supply refers to growth in the number of program slots, with the goal being that program slot *supply* matches program *need* for particular client populations. Increases in scale can result from additional providers in the system, from providers offering additional slots, or both.
    - o Improved accessibility includes ensuring that programs are within the geographical reach of clients; transportation to programs is available (as well as convenient and safe), and that programs are free or affordable.
    - o Improved outreach/recruitment means that providers are doing a better job of spreading awareness about, and attracting clients to, their programs.

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[2] For similar ideas, see Sandfort and Milward 2007, and Walker and Kubisch 2008.

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- **Increased Comprehensiveness:** Ensuring not only that there are enough programs, but that a system has the right mix of programs. Service gaps decrease as the gaps are identified, and as system actors ensure that there is a sufficient supply of program slots tailored to the needs of diverse client populations.

Improved Pathway Connections

Connections within the pathway are also vital for overall pathway effectiveness. To progress smoothly along a pathway, clients exiting one step must be set up for success to enter their next step. To prevent a client from "dropping out" of the pathway, even after success with an individual program, a pathway must have effective connections. Positive systems change entails **improved linkage**, **improved alignment**, and **improved cross-system coordination**:

- **Improved Linkage:** Strengthening linkage among programs by ensuring that clients can transition easily into other programs. Improving linkage may entail increased/improved coordination among pairs of providers or within a network of providers. It also usually entails creating or improving specific types of linkage procedures or mechanisms, such as institutionalized warm handoffs or data-sharing among providers. With improved linkage, clients transition to the next appropriate program or service, and do not "fall through the cracks."

- **Improved Alignment:** Establishing or increasing aligned outcomes to ensure that different programs in a pathway are all contributing toward the same ultimate goals, and enhancing programs' ability to contribute to these aligned outcomes. Improved alignment often requires improved provider coordination so that programs serving the same client populations are basing their curriculum on the same framework, or can reinforce the learnings from a "previous" program.

- **Improved Cross-System Coordination:** Establishing, or increasing the level of, coordination between the focal system and complementary systems. With improved cross-system coordination, system leaders identify shared goals, and ways that programs and services can link and align to contribute jointly to those shared goals.

Changes to Institutional Structures: Reducing Structural Barriers and Developing Structural Enablers

Sometimes systems change comes about when pathway actors intervene *directly* in the pathway, with an individual program or individual link, or with a small set of them. For example, some providers might begin to implement evidence-based programs, thus raising program quality in the pathway. And pairs or small groups of providers might collaborate to create linkages between or among their programs. These actions mean pathway improvements – and therefore, by definition, they also mean systems change (since better-functioning pathways are part of better-functioning systems). This route to systems change, however, will tend to be piecemeal and incremental.

More far-reaching – more *systemic* – changes to pathways happen when there are shifts at the level of institutional structure (structural change), which then lead to changes affecting *many* programs or *many* connections. How does this work? To think about systems change in this way, it helps to first think about systems *stasis* or *inertia.*

Under ordinary circumstances, systems tend to resist change because organizations and the people within them do today what they did yesterday. So some of systems inertia is about the "stickiness" of organizational routines. But beyond the power of routinized behavior, organizations and the people

within them usually have an *interest* in sustaining the current way of doing things. "The way things are now" can confer a wide range of benefits: monetary reward, traction on a career trajectory, a sense of belonging, and alignment with one's definition of fairness.[3] People often experience a change in routine as a loss of some kind, so they resist change (Heifetz et al 2009).

The benefits that current structures confer, and the loss that would result from change, are due to the current set of incentives, constraints, and opportunities. These guide actions in specific directions, thus reproducing the system from day to day. Existing incentives, constraints, and opportunities function as *structural barriers to pathway improvements.* For example, a structural barrier might be a funding source that requires ambitious performance targets, which in turn incentivizes program staff to screen out clients who – they believe – would prevent the organization from meeting these targets. Structural barriers make it hard for providers to effectively serve the population that is screened out. Changes to institutional structures, then, mean *shifts* in incentives, constraints, and opportunities.

Sometimes these changes manifest as reduced structural barriers, which means that actors can make pathway improvements they were not able to make before. If the funding source relaxes the performance targets, then providers using that funding source will no longer face incentives to screen out certain applicants. This will open up new opportunities for pathway improvements through increasing access and possibly through new program tailoring.

Structural change can also manifest as the building or enhancing of structural enablers. For example, a system actor may organize a network of providers, with network meetings that open up new opportunities for coordination and knowledge-sharing.

Systems change, then, is about *changing the structures that shape our ability to improve pathways.* Our ability to improve pathways sometimes first requires changes to the structures that shape the pathways. When there are changes in things such as policies, funding streams, and available tools and knowledge, there are shifts as well in incentives, constraints, and opportunities. After new conditions of possibility open up, stakeholders can more easily build pathways that work well for clients.

Example of System Stickiness:
The Homelessness Service Delivery System

As more and more people became homeless during the 1980s, it became clear that temporary shelter was not enough to handle the problem. Thus was born "transitional housing," in which people stayed in longer-term housing and engaged in services to become "housing ready" before they were supported to find permanent housing. In the 2000s, the "housing first" approach was developed. In this model, people were rapidly re-housed, and then from the foundation of secure housing, they could voluntarily access additional services. The approach was effective, yet often resisted by homelessness professionals. Part of this resistance stemmed from the fact that many of these professionals had been trained as social workers. Social workers are needed for transitional housing models – and when providers move to a housing first approach they need fewer social workers and more housing specialists. So even though the housing first model showed better outcomes than the transitional housing model, some system actors resisted the new model because of the effect that the housing first model had on their professional survival. This systems change meant a *loss*, and went against their material interest.

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[3] Indeed, systems are set up the way they are because they tend to serve the interests of powerful groups – a point made by many sociologists, beginning with Karl Marx.

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The table below gives a few examples of how changes in structure can create conditions for more effective pathways.

Structural Changes	Conditions for More Effective Pathways
Access to expanded funding	Resources available for an increased program supply
The organization of provider networks	Ability of providers to organize ways to develop better alignment and linkages
New or expanded sources of funding available for new evidence-based practices that pathway providers have not used before (or use rarely)	The opportunity (and incentive) for providers to adopt new evidence-based practices that can raise program quality
Funding available for innovative programming (funding that comes with fewer restrictions)	The opportunity to develop a new program model that is better tailored to the focal population
Laws creating less restrictive eligibility rules	The opportunity to serve new groups of people, with different sets of risk factors
Policies mandating that providers in different parts of a pathway engage in joint planning or cross-training	Constraints that force greater alignment
Shifts in knowledge about how to bring about positive outcomes	The opportunity to develop higher-quality programs, using new knowledge

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4: How do systems change efforts influence systems change results?
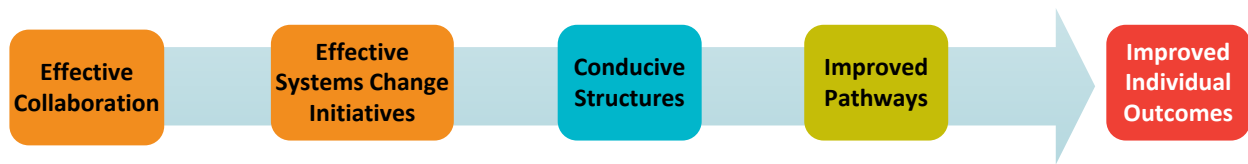
It may well be reasonable to confine a systems change evaluation to answer the questions: **What is the type and extent of systems change?** However, evaluators will often want to explore the relationship between systems change *initiatives* and their *results:* how "organized efforts to improve a system and its impacts" actually bring about change (Coffman 2007). And usually clients will share the desire to go beyond an inquiry into whether systems change has happened – they will want to understand the factors that can support systems change success, because understanding these factors will make success more likely.

To answer the question of how systems change efforts influence systems change results, we need to bring in the *systems change agents: the architects and implementers of systems change initiatives.* Systems change agents almost always work in collaboration, since no single organization has the technical capacity, jurisdiction, or resources to solve society's most intractable problems by itself (Agranoff 2003; Herranz 2008; Kreger et al 2007; Roberts 2000; Sandfort and Milward 2007). In practice, then, successful systems change depends critically on effective collaboration.

This section builds out the collaboration concepts in this framework, and discusses how effective collaboration can set up systems change initiatives for effective implementation. Often stakeholders see collaboration as inherently positive, but in fact it poses deep challenges to systems change implementers. We start with a quick tour of collaboration challenges, so that we can see why the factors related to collaborative effectiveness contribute powerfully to the effectiveness of systems change initiatives. We then address two questions:

- **What factors contribute to effective collaboration?** We unpack the concept of collaborative effectiveness by defining three key elements of collaboration: (1) governance structure and process; (2) accountability frameworks; and (3) member engagement.

- **How do the factors contributing to effective collaboration translate to effective systems change initiatives?** We propose a model of how these elements relate to collaborative efficacy. In discussing the dimensionality of each element, we show how variation along each dimension is related to variation in collaborative effectiveness, and to the ability to implement a systems change initiative.

Collaboration is Necessary, but Deeply Challenging

We can't solve wickedly complex problems without collaboration. Its necessity and increasing prevalence have made it tempting to operate on the assumption that collaboration is good, and more is better. Since we often assume that collaboration is a good thing, evaluations frequently focus on whether collaboration is happening, and to what extent. Are organizations linking with new partners? Are networks becoming denser? Are collaboratives moving successfully through the stages of cooperation, coordination, collaboration? We see collaboration as something to be valued for its own sake, rather than something that can actually create new challenges.

In fact though, we should adopt a more critical stance when assessing collaboration. Others make this point: "Rhetorically, collaboration is touted as providing important benefits to systems and clients. [...] It is purported to reduce duplication, improve coordination, prevent inefficiency, minimize costs, and improve responsiveness and effectiveness within the system. [...] Most of these purported consequences are not substantiated in the literature. [Collaboratives] are difficult to create, sustain, and use to mobilize resources in ways that that create positive results" (Sandfort and Milward 2007; see also McGuire 2006, and Provan and Milward 2001).

Why is collaboration so difficult? There are three main reasons:

- **Governance in a collaborative is much harder than managing within a traditional hierarchy.**
  Political theorists have coined the term "governance," in fact, to contrast with "government," acknowledging that most collective action undertaken to address social problems is not carried out by a single institution that can enforce its decisions with the backing of a "monopoly on legitimate coercive power" the way that governments can (Stoker 1998). As one theorist lays out the discouraging situation: "All along the network continuum, ... managers face challenges to multi-organizational coordination such as goal incongruence, imprecise oversight, miscommunication, fragmented coordination, data deficits, capacity shortages, and relationship instability." He goes on to say that "some network approaches may be unmanageable, unaccountable, and inefficient" (Herranz 2007).

- **Accountability frameworks (the use of performance measurement as a management tool) are critical to success, but difficult to adapt to the complex conditions of a collaborative.**
  Accountability frameworks can be relatively straightforward in a single organization or a single program. But in a collaborative, many different actors representing a range of organizational interests must find consensus on performance targets and indicators and it can be impossible to identify who should be accountable for jointly produced results (Moynihan et al 2011).

- **Full member engagement in collaboratives is not a given.** Members can have a strong moral commitment to the vision of a systems change initiative, but at the same time may have many competing priorities that grow out of their own organizational interests (Ansell and Gash 2007, Herranz 2007, Moynihan et al 2011). Goal conflict between members and the collective can result, introducing additional challenges to the effective implementation of a systems change initiative.

In understanding the inherent difficulty of collaboration, we can appreciate what architects of systems change initiatives are up against. From this empathic stance, we use the rest of this section to explore the conditions under which collaborative governance, accountability, and member engagement are more likely to function well and to contribute to positive systems change outcomes.

Governance Structure and Process

Implementing inter-organizational collaboration requires collaborative governance, which can be formally defined as:

> The processes and structures of public policy decision-making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private, and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished (Emerson et al 2011).

The question of collaborative governance efficacy is central to the evaluation of systems change initiatives, because of the prosaic fact that initiative implementation matters. The success of systems change initiatives, in other words, depends in large part on the ability of systems change agents to

effectively manage the collaborative itself. Systems change evaluators, then, should assess governance structures and processes, and explore how they constrain or enable the implementation efforts of collaborative members.

Structure and Process as Variables

The individuals and organizations participating in collaborative governance are arranged in particular *structures*: committee membership, committees with particular specializations and jurisdictions, hierarchical or flat relationships within and among committees, and linkages among committees. Collaborative governance also has particular *processes* it uses to manage the collaborative and initiative: the ways that the members codify standard operating procedures, make decisions, use dedicated staff support, convene, and manage knowledge.

When a collaborative develops its structure and processes, this development process can be characterized as varying along a continuum from *organic, emergent, and self-organizing* to *intentional, centralized, and rule-based.* When the structure and process develop organically, they grow out of ongoing interactions among collaborative members, while multiple champions throughout the system create new committees (or link to existing committees) as they respond to emergent needs (Emerson et al 2011). Collaborative structure and process may, conversely, result from a highly intentional and centralized planning and design process (Buse and Harmer 2007).

The type of development that collaboratives undergo affects the character of the resulting structure and processes. With organic development, the structure tends to be *adhocratic*: a form of organization that is flexible, adaptable, and informal – in a word, non-bureaucratic. In an adhocracy, there is little standardization, and roles tend not to be clearly defined (Waterman 1993). Committees tend not to be arranged hierarchically, and they often have overlapping jurisdictions and functional duplication. As a result, the division of labor is not highly rationalized or articulated. In addition, a premium is put on democratic participation and consensus. Processes tend not to be formalized: it is likely that these collaboratives are slow to develop charters and MOUs, and slow to formalize decision-making processes and rules, convening protocols, collaborative goals, and roles and responsibilities.

With an intentional and centrally-controlled planning and design process, a collaborative will form in a "top-down" way: a person or committee in charge will design a committee structure. Under these circumstances, a collaborative's design is likely to mimic hierarchy, and be "hierarchically unified." Individual committees have lead agencies, and if there are multiple committees, they are organized in a hierarchical structure with committees at one level accountable to those at the level above. The division of labor in a hierarchy is quite clearly defined, and decision-making and convening processes quite formalized.

While the origins of a collaborative strongly influence the nature of its

The Emotional Coding of the Term "Hierarchy"

The term "hierarchy" is encoded in our culture in a way that typically evokes a negative reaction. It is understood as denoting *centralization*, with centralization defined as tight control from one central unit at the top of the hierarchy, and everyone outside that unit simply executing orders. Hierarchy is seen as a structure enabling domination, and in opposition to the values of democracy, participation, and consensus. We should try to move past this coding for words with the root *hierarch.* Hierarchical unification is not about domination; it is about efficiency, role clarity, and the resulting ease of coordination. Even when structures are hierarchically unified, they can and should promote voice and participation at all levels.

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structure and process, over time a more adhocratic structure and informal process can evolve into a more hierarchically unified structure and a more formalized process if stakeholders perceive a need for greater rationalization, clarity, and control. The evolution might go the opposite direction if stakeholders perceive the hierarchy as fostering siloes and believe that wider participation and a greater focus on consensus are called for.

Structure and process, then, can vary along dimensions of hierarchical unity and formalization. A collaboratives' governance structure can range from *adhocratic* to *hierarchically unified*. Its process can range from *informal* to *formalized.* The tables below lay out the contrasts between the extremes of the two continua of hierarchical unification and formalization.

STRUCTURE		
Adhocratic		Hierarchically Unified
Within committees, there is no lead agency	**Hierarchy**	Within committees, there is a lead agency that leads the collaborative process and provides administrative support
If there are multiple committees, no committees have authority over others, and no committees are directly accountable to others		If there are multiple committees, they exist in a hierarchical relationship to one another: those lower are accountable to those higher, and those higher have authority over those lower
The tasks that committee members and committees take on emerge organically; a division of labor is not formally or clearly defined	**Division of Labor**	There is a highly codified division of labor, with roles and responsibilities formally and clearly defined
Committees may have overlapping jurisdictions (or areas in which they take action)		Each committee has its own jurisdiction, with no overlap with the actions of other committees
Inter-committee linkages arise organically, are not institutionalized, and people use them in an ad hoc way	**Structural Linking Mechanisms**	Inter-committee linkages are intentionally designed and are institutionalized
There are no project managers; projects move forward based on members' internal motivation and coordination	**Managers**	There are dedicated project managers at every level who assign responsibility for task execution and ensure that others follow through

Informal	PROCESS	Formalized
Committees do not have charters Organizations within a committee do not have an MOU for working together as a collaborative	**Codification**	Committees have charters codifying their roles and responsibilities Organizations within a committee have an MOU for how they will work together as a collaborative
There is no protocol for the roles that different committees play in decisions There are no decision rules for specific decisions	**Decision-Making**	There is a protocol for the roles the different committees play in decisions There are decision rules for specific decisions
Committees do not have staff support	**Dedicated Staff Support**	Committees have staff support, providing administrative support and ensuring good information flow
Meetings do not take place regularly Meeting facilitation rotates Meetings have informal or very general agendas, without formally stated meeting objectives Participants do not receive information in advance of the meetings	**Convening**	Meetings take place regularly Meetings are facilitated by a dedicated convener Meetings have formal agendas with clear objectives Participants receive information in advance of the meetings
Information is passed on by word of mouth and in response to current needs	**Knowledge Management**	Specific types of information is formally shared at regular intervals

How Structure and Process Affect Collaborative Efficacy

The degree of hierarchical unification and formalization has implications for the efficacy of collaborative governance.

- **Hierarchy.** The more a collaborative mimics hierarchy, the easier it is to manage (Herranz 2008, McGuire 2006, Provan and Milward 2001). This makes sense, because the management tools we have been building up for more than a century are geared to hierarchy. Also, however, hierarchy is just much *simpler*. People know who does what, and there is clear accountability for getting work done. There is a central entity that leads and coordinates the collaborative (Provan and Milward 2001), and each level is accountable to the one above it.

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- **Division of Labor.** Clear and well-defined divisions of labor provide clarity for the members and committees involved; they all know how their role fits into a larger whole. Participants know that their work is part of moving a larger effort forward – there is not a perceived risk that effort will be expended for a task that is never completed, or that others somewhere else in the collaborative will be working on the same task with a different approach (Buse and Harmer 2007; McKinsey 2005; Riley and Kraft 2010).

- **Structural Linking Mechanisms.** If the collaborative has more than one committee, linkages between committees will support knowledge-sharing across committees. Linking mechanisms are likely to be more effective when they have been intentionally implemented as a part of the formal structure. If they are ad hoc and emerge organically, they are likely not to be used in a routine way, and they are not likely to aid in effective knowledge management. Helpful linkages include assigning "liaison roles" to individuals who can coordinate among committees, and "integrator roles" to individuals whose task is not to supervise others, but to ensure that processes involving multiple committees are executed efficiently (Mercer Delta Consulting 2000).

Collective Impact and Hierarchy

Collective Impact, a collaborative-based model, has gained visibility as an approach that is highly successful in creating social impact. In a few SSIR blog posts, scholars of this model argue for hierarchy without ever using the word. In *How to Organize Alliances of Multiple Organizations,* Keevil and Martin (2012) lay out the common elements of successful alliances. Some of these elements are: an executive council, a leadership team, program management teams, project work groups, and support staff. "These elements are related by a structure of accountability: The support staff and project work groups are accountable to the project management teams. The project management teams are accountable to the leadership team. The leadership team is accountable to the executive council." In *Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,* Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) say that "we have observed markedly similar patterns in the way successful collective impact efforts are structured…." They call this structure "cascading levels of linked collaboration." Otherwise known as hierarchy.

- **Managers.** Tasks are much more likely to be executed when they are formally managed. Centrally located managers who can coordinate the work of multiple actors will be able to move implementation forward.

- **Codification.** Codification of roles and responsibilities in charters support a clear and well-defined division of labor; MOUs that define how committees will work together facilitate the efficiency of joint efforts (Brinkerhoff 2002; Jobin 2008; Riley and Kraft 2010).

- **Decision-Making.** Explicit decision-making protocols are important in collaboratives (Emerson et al 2011). In decentralized and informal collaboration, there may be strongly shared norms that consensus is the decision rule. Under these circumstances, decision-making may be efficient within one committee. However, if there are power imbalances within one committee or a lack of strongly shared norms, or if there are multiple committees not organized hierarchically, decision-making will be inefficient and ineffective without decision-making protocols. These protocols will support collaborative members to have a shared understanding of what their role is in a given decision, and will ensure that decisions move forward (rather than stalling or being "re-made").

- **Dedicated Staff Support.** Committee members do not have sufficient bandwidth to absorb the transaction costs associated with coordination (arranging meetings, facilitating ongoing communication, ensuring people have the information they need). Without staff to take care of coordination tasks like these, information flow is inefficient and the operations needed to maintain

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the collaborative may go undone. Having dedicated staff for these administrative tasks will provide the coordination for maintaining the collaborative.

- **Convening.** Face-to-face meetings are the lifeblood of collaboratives. Members meet "together in a deliberative, multilateral forum … to strive toward consensus or, at least, to strive to discover areas of agreement" (Ansell and Gash 2007). Also through the process of convening together, members build trust and a sense of shared purpose (Emerson et al 2011). Meetings are where important decisions are considered and made. Meetings serve as an effective decision-making forum if the meetings themselves are well organized, and if staff make sure that participants are prepared for the discussion ahead of time. Formalized process is the way to ensure that agendas with objectives are set, and that participants are well-prepared.

- **Knowledge Management.** Knowledge management plays an important role in collaboration (Agranoff 2003, Ansell and Gash 2007). Collaborative members need to build on the knowledge they are accumulating from experience, in order to make good decisions (Emerson et al 2011). They need to keep in their mind what has happened at critical junctures. If there is a lack of formal knowledge management, information is not passed on a systematic way, and important knowledge can be lost. Managers and support staff need to take responsibility for storing and sharing information so that the collaborative does not need to "re-learn" what participants at one time knew, and so that there is a shared knowledge base.

How Effective Structure and Process Contribute to the Ability of a Collaborative to Implement a Successful Systems Change Initiative

Hierarchically unified structure and formalized process will facilitate the discussions necessary to move the collaborative action designed to create a more conducive institutional structure and to improve pathways. First, a hierarchically unified structure with a clear division of labor will make it easy for committee members at various levels to know which committee should take charge of addressing different aspects of the systems change initiative. With an unclear division of labor and overlapping jurisdictions, collaborative members who are in charge of specific work streams are less likely to know whom to communicate with – and thus are less likely to communicate with anyone. Ideas for how to address structural barriers or ineffective pathways might be raised informally, then dropped without going anywhere. Discussions might eventually reach the right committee, but the progress is likely to be much slower than it would have been if each committee member had clearly understood the jurisdiction of all committees.

With a hierarchically unified structure and efficient project management, strategies that committees identify to address structural barriers are more likely to be successfully executed. Managers can develop a workplan based on strategies, delegate the work and ensure that it moves forward in a timely manner.

Accountability Frameworks

For collaborative efforts, developing clear goals constitutes a foundational task (Brinkerhoff 2002; Huxham and Vangen 2004; Kania and Kramer 2011; Riley and Kraft 2010). Collaborative systems change initiatives involve so many different moving parts that without clear goals it is nearly impossible to align all these parts to work together and move in the same direction (Auspos 2010). Establishing clear goals is only the beginning, however; goals also must be incorporated into a system that systems change agents can actively use for the purposes of alignment and progress. This system is an *accountability framework:* performance management systems that involve identifying performance indicators and targets, measuring the indicators, and managing to the targets (Moynihan et al 2011).

Accountability Frameworks as a Variable

Collaboratives vary in the extent to which they are able to establish accountability frameworks and use them effectively. There are three steps necessary for an effective accountability framework: (1) establishing clear goals; (2) identifying metrics and targets aligned with the goals; and (3) designing and consistently using a process for reflecting on the collaborative's performance relative to its targets. These tasks are not easy even when undertaken by a single organization, and they become much more complicated when multiple organizations come to the table with their own interests (Walker et al 2012). In addition, when multiple organizations are jointly responsible for an outcome, allocating accountability for meeting a target becomes a real puzzle.

Some argue that accountability frameworks will *never* function in a straightforward manner in the context of collaboration – but that even so, they are "a necessary part of an evolving and inevitably imperfect system of governance" (Moynihan et al 2011). Accountability frameworks for collaboration will always be a work in progress, and their effectiveness will vary, depending on where the collaborative is in its journey to establish and use performance measures as a management tool.

The sections below focus on the challenges inherent in each of the steps involved in establishing and maintaining an accountability framework for systems change initiatives. Collaboratives will succeed to varying degrees in meeting these challenges – and a systems change evaluator can look for how a given level of success in accountability framework implementation influences the ability of an initiative to progress toward its systems change goals.

Is a Focus on Accountability Out of Sync with Systems Change?

The focus on a performance management system for a collaborative may seem out of place in this context. How can such a rigid approach work well, given the complex and emergent nature of systems change? We may think of accountability as working well when there is greater certainty that cause X will lead to effect Y, but that is not the case with systems change. If we put effort into performance management, we run the danger of treating systems change as if it were predictable. But the problem is less with the idea of an accountability framework, and more with how we *treat* metrics and targets. In an article arguing that we court trouble by treating theories of change as blueprints – when instead they should be treated as collections of hypotheses – Patrizi and her colleagues still find a place for indicators.[4] We should use them as "questions rather than answers" – we should treat them as places to begin the conversation rather than a way to determine our degree of progress. If we use an accountability framework in a reflective fashion, it will serve us well, even in the context of complex systems change efforts. Without this framework, we are likely to be rudderless. We should not throw the metrics baby out with the bathwater of an exaggerated faith in blueprints and certainty.

Establishing Clear Goals

Even when collaborative members are united by a common vision, when it comes time to articulate the vision as a clear set of concrete goals, tension can surface due to the heterogeneity of specific organizational missions, roles, and perspectives (Huxham and Vangen 2004; Kania and Kramer 2011; Moynihan et al 2011). Collaboratives face the task of navigating the heterogeneous, and sometimes divergent (or even conflicting) interests of the collaborative members. As the size of the group grows, divergent interests become more likely – and it becomes ever more difficult for a collaborative to establish consensus (Post 2004).

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[4] See Patrizi, P. et al, 2013.

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Identifying Metrics and Targets Aligned with Goals

Identifying metrics and targets is typically even more difficult than defining goals. Metrics are more concrete than goals, and with the additional specificity organizations can see more clearly how tracking a particular outcome might in fact *not* be to their advantage. And after goals are chosen, organizations often have different levels of agreement with the goals that have already been chosen. As a group of theorists discussing accountability frameworks in the context of collaborations argue: "Policy areas characterized by task complexity, multiple and possibly contradictory goals, disagreement about goals … run at odds with performance systems that are designed to generate consensus around a manageable number of indicators…. […] …Specific measures that emerge are likely to reflect hard-fought compromises rather than obvious and neutral solutions" (Moynihan et al 2011).

Targets are likely to be particularly contentious. In the simpler context of one organization providing one program, the direct connection between service provision and outcomes is plausible. But in the context of collaboration and systems change, making this direct link is far more difficult. First, as outcomes depend partly on overall changes to the systems context, outcomes are much less predictable than is the case when outcomes are less contingent. Second, because collaborations *jointly* produce outcomes, it is often impossible to hold any single organization accountable for a particular outcome (Moynihan et al 2011; Provan and Milward 2011). It is difficult to distribute accountability among a set of organizations, and organizations will often resist the risk of publicly committing to a target performance level when they must depend on other organizations – outside of their control – to deliver on their "slice" of the target.

Furthermore, it is in collaborative members' interests to establish easy targets. With easy targets, organizations can participate in the ceremony of accountability, without actually committing to undertake anything that will bring about significant change.

With all of these challenges, collaboratives will typically wrestle with identifying metrics, specifying those metrics by laying out targets, and generating targets which will hold members' feet to the fire in terms of doing things differently. To arrive at meaningful metrics and targets takes a great deal of effort by skilled leaders. Sometimes identifying metrics will be the product of effective process, and strong member engagement and the mobilization of authority within a hierarchy will also support this effort.

Reflecting on Performance against Targets

In order for an accountability framework to support initiative management, the systems change collaborative must design and institute a system for collecting and using data on performance metrics. Setting up a data collection and reporting system is typically a time-consuming and arduous process (Carlson et al 2011), but it is obviously a requirement for reflecting on performance (Keevil and Martin 2012). A relatively common pitfall, however, is *collecting* data on metrics, but then neglecting the next step of reflecting on it (Moynihan et al 2011). Yet without regularly and systematically reviewing performance data,[5] a collaborative cannot judge its progress and make data-informed decisions on how to move forward (Brinkerhoff 2002; Keevil and Martin 2012).

Even if a collaborative has completed the task of establishing performance metrics, and reached the step of reflecting against performance targets: the collaborative still faces the challenge of deciding "who is accountable for what" when organizations are jointly responsible for change. This is a tension that – by its very nature – is never resolved; it must simply be managed. Collaboratives will therefore vary in their ability to make good use of the data and to translate the feedback into decisions about how to move forward.

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[5] These regular reviews are also more likely to happen when the collaborative has a formalized governance process.

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The Connection between Accountability Frameworks and Collaborative Efficacy

The utility of clear goals for a systems change collaborative is undisputed. Clearly articulated goals support the collaborative to: hold the larger picture for moving forward (Emerson el al 2011; Sandfort and Milward 2007); design strategies needed to reach those goals (Riley and Kraft 2010); and align the disparate moving parts of a complex initiative (Auspos 2010; Kania and Kramer 2011).

If goals can be operationalized within an accountability framework, so much the better: performance metrics "direct attention and shape behavior" (Moynihan et al 2011, 153) Accountability frameworks support collaboratives to translate goals into action (by clarifying what – in particular – needs to change), and to produce the data that the collaborative needs in order to evaluate (and possibly adjust) its strategies (Moynihan et al 2011). The accountability framework, while inherently challenging, can be used as a valuable tool for initiative management, and studies have shown that "articulating and measuring performance help[s] to direct activities, motivate stakeholders, celebrate accomplishments, and enhance learning" (Sandfort and Milward 2007).

How Effective Accountability Frameworks Contribute to the Ability of a Collaborative to Implement a Successful Systems Change Initiative

The development of ambitious targets will serve a collaborative well (as long as they are not so ambitious that they are out of reach). Committing to targets that push members to shift their current organizational practices beyond the status quo will support genuine systems change. Without these ambitious targets, organizations can simply continue with business as usual.

A strong accountability framework can also play an important role in the ability of the collaborative to ask the right questions about pathway improvements. The conversations that raise critical questions about pathways are those conversations in which collaborative members are reflecting on the performance of the initiative against its targets. Performance may signal that the initiative is falling short of its goals. Members will ask why, and the reflection on the reasons for disappointing performance may lead to the realization that pathways cannot be improved under the current conditions. Without clearly articulated metrics and a forum in which the collaborative reflects on performance relative to targets, this conversation is less likely to happen (and members are less likely to realize that there is a need to address structural barriers and enhance structural facilitators).

Member Engagement

Member engagement is the extent to which collaborative members: (1) prioritize the collaborative's initiative within their own organizations; and (2) commit to a shared path of negotiating common goals and working toward them together with other members.

- **Prioritizing the collaborative's initiative** entails committing sufficient staff time to participate fully in collaboration, reorganizing operations to fulfill collaborative goals, funding programs with the express purpose of aligning with collaborative goals, and allocating funding to the initiative.

- **Committing to a shared path** denotes the determination to "cross organizational, sectoral, and/or jurisdictional boundaries" in order to understand other members' organizational perspectives, interests, and constraints – thus creating a forum that supports the negotiation of shared goals (Emerson et al 2011).

It is important to distinguish the concept of member engagement from the idea of *normative commitment.* Normative commitment is a belief in an initiative's vision, and a subjective desire to see it

succeed. Members can personally believe in an initiative's goals but still have low engagement. This is because member engagement depends largely on the answer to the question that each organization must ask itself as it considers whether to join a collaborative: "will my organization be better able to achieve its mission if we join the collaborative?" If the answer is no, then there is little internal motivation to join or to engage deeply and authentically (Ansell and Gash 2007; Huxham and Vangen 2004).

<u>Member Engagement as a Variable</u>

If organizations join collaboratives out of self-interest, why is member engagement a variable? Wouldn't engagement be high for all those who join? Not necessarily. There are three reasons for variation in member engagement: (1) initial engagement level based on rational calculation; (2) an organization's capacity and motivation to prioritize the initiative's goals; and (3) the extent to which convening processes foster commitment to a shared path.

<u>Initial Engagement Level Based on Rational Calculation</u>

Many organizations will answer the self-interest question with "yes," and for them, membership in the collaborative will mean an enhanced performance in pursuing their own organizational mission. Other organizations will answer "no," or "not really," but it is possible that they will be required or pressured to join in any case (Huxham and Vangen 2004; Ostrower 2005). Under these circumstances, members will be reluctant partners. Engagement may certainly increase over time, but the initial engagement level affects ongoing engagement.

<u>An Organization's Capacity and Motivation to Prioritize the Initiative's Goals</u>

An organization's capacity and motivation to prioritize an external initiative's goals are a function of its own organizational interests in combination with the way that institutional structures (structural incentives, constraints, and opportunities) shape what organizations can and cannot do. How do organizational interests and institutional structure affect prioritization? The answer pertains mainly to resources, since the competition for resources is at the basis of organizational interests.

- **Organizational Interests, Resources, and Prioritization.** At a very basic level, organizations have an interest in maximizing their capacity to achieve their mission. Since they need resources in order to maximize their capacity, and since they operate under conditions of scarce resources, it is in their organizational interest to: (1) increase their resources; (2) increase their reach (with the same or fewer resources, without sacrificing results) and (3) achieve better results (with the same or fewer resources, without sacrificing reach). Because prioritizing the collaborative's initiative entails using resources (allocating staff time, funding programs to align with collaborative goals, and allocating funding to the initiative), an organization is likely to prioritize the initiative only if by doing so it can increase its reach, achieve better results, or both.

- **Institutional Structure, Resources, and Prioritization.** Organizations receive most of their funding from public agencies (federal, state, local) and from philanthropy. These funding sources come with regulatory or contractual restrictions and requirements. Because an organization needs funding to achieve its mission, funding restrictions drive many of the structural incentives, constraints, and opportunities that an organization faces. Funding restrictions shape programs by allowing an organization to offer a specified range of services, and to serve only certain populations. Funding also comes with performance targets, which incentivize an organization to organize its operations in order to reach those targets. An organization, then, is more likely to prioritize the initiative if: (1) the initiative's focal populations and program design overlap sufficiently with those of the organization; and (2) participating in the initiative will help the organization reach its performance targets (or will not undermine the ability to reach its targets).

An organization's capacity and motivation to prioritize systems change initiative goals are not static; they can change as the initiative progresses – and in fact the collaborative itself has the power to influence prioritization. This can happen in at least two ways. First, funders (either public or private) can allocate dollars to collaborative members that are targeted to the focal populations on which the systems change initiative focuses. Allocating these dollars will change organizational prioritization, because dollars are tied to pursuing the goals of the systems change initiative. Organizations will increase their resources, and will be able to increase their reach without pulling resources away from serving other clients. In addition, these new dollars will come with target population requirements and performance targets of their own, thus introducing new incentives, constraints, and opportunities into the institutional structure the organization faces. These new structural factors will align with systems change initiative goals, and will encourage prioritization.

Collaborative Structure as a Moderating Factor: How Hierarchical Unification Affects Member Engagement as Structural Barriers Rise

Level of Pre-Existing Congruence between Organizational Interests and Collaborative Goals
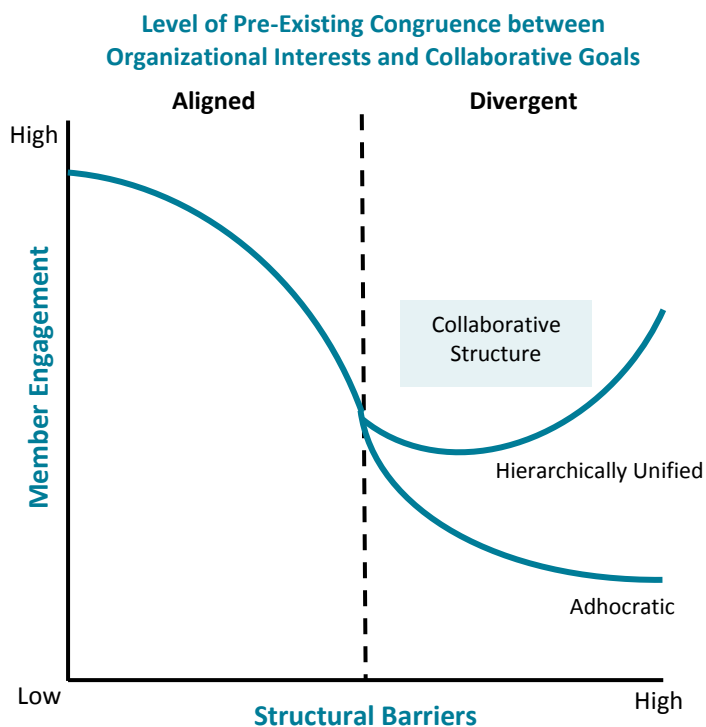
Second, a strong, hierarchically unified governance structure can increase member engagement by pushing collaborative members to prioritize the initiative. When an organization's interests do not naturally align with those of a systems change initiative, this is likely to be one *manifestation* of high structural barriers. In other words, a particular resource configuration is driving an organization to fund and/or implement programs that don't support effective pathways. Instead, its organizational interests may be aligned well with the *existing* institutional structure. The organization may indeed have vested interests in continuing with current programs and services, and thus will have little motivation to change their programs and services to support the systems change initiative goals.

Under these circumstances, a collaborative member needs a new incentive to push it to contribute to systems change. In a hierarchy, directives from higher levels can create those incentives; the job security of managers at each level depends on that manager's execution of directives from those at higher levels of organizational authority. Hierarchical authority is not usually a type of power that members mobilize in the context of collaboration. However, if a collaborative's governance has a hierarchically unified structure, then managers at higher levels *can* in fact mobilize this type of power. If upper level managers in the collaborative give directives to managers and staff at lower levels, these directives will alter the incentive structure. Upper level managers can, if they wish, spend some of their political capital on pushing for the prioritization of a systems change initiative's goals within organizations under their jurisdiction.

<u>Capacity of Convening Process to Foster Commitment to a Shared Path</u>

The commitment to a shared path represents the interpersonal and relational aspects of the work that members do together in a collaborative (Emerson et al 2011). While this commitment may be made easier by agreement on goals and strategies, commitment can happen even in the absence of such agreement. Commitment is the product of ongoing deliberative interaction, which is fostered by effective convening processes. When governance processes are formalized, collaborative meetings are much more likely to foster commitment. Formalized convening processes include regular meetings with formal agendas and clear objectives, facilitated by dedicated staff, and with appropriate information provided to members in advance. High quality convening processes create forums in which members can build trust with one another, encouraging them to see the perspectives of other members. Commitment and interaction reinforce one another in a virtuous cycle (Emerson et al 2011).

The Connection between Member Engagement and Collaborative Efficacy

Higher levels of member engagement will contribute to greater collaborative efficacy. First, if an organization is able to prioritize the initiative internally, this means a capacity and motivation to support the goals and operations of the initiative (Brinkerhoff 2002). Another payoff is the commitment of staff time. This time and intellectual capital are especially valuable in pursuing coordination, which is very time-intensive. In addition, the willingness to reorganize its own operations and to fund programs aligned with initiative goals will not only support implementation, but also signal the willingness to come to a negotiated agreement on a set of collaborative goals (thus strengthening the accountability framework).

The accountability framework is likewise strengthened when members commit to a shared path. As organizations deliberate together, and seek to understand one another's perspectives, interests, and constraints, they are laying the foundation for negotiating agreement on goals for the systems change initiative. Goals of collaborative members are rarely perfectly aligned, so high member engagement is necessary to surface and address differences in a constructive way (Huxham and Vangen 2004).

Finally, highly engaged members are more likely to allocate resources that may be used to build pathway capacity (e.g. by increasing the number of program slots available or by funding new programs that follow evidence-based practices). Resource allocation and leveraging is, clearly, one of the most important payoffs of bringing organizations into a collaborative and fostering their commitment (Thompson and Perry 2006).

How Strong Member Engagement Contributes to the Ability of a Collaborative to Implement a Successful Systems Change Initiative

Greater levels of member engagement are also more likely to lead to efforts and success in building conducive institutional structure and improving pathways. As members allocate staff time and attention to the initiative, this bandwidth means that the right collaborative members are likely to be in the room to "connect the dots" on the relationship between institutional structural barriers and improved pathways.

In addition, powerful and engaged collaborative members can take steps on their own to change the institutional structure to be more conducive to improved pathways. The collaborative members that represent public agencies and foundations control funding streams. If the members with direct influence over resource allocation are highly engaged, they are more likely to *provide* funding with new constraints or performance targets. Some collaborative members will also have political power that translates into efficacy in advocating to build constituencies for differently structured funding streams. If member engagement is high, they are more likely to use this political power.

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PART TWO:
Systems **Change Evaluation Toolkit**

Toolkit Introduction

Part One of this Guide offered a way to "see" systems and systems change, and a way to think about the interventions that are designed to create intentional systems change. Part Two builds on the concepts of pathways, structure, and the components of effective collaboration to describe a procedure and tools for tackling a systems change evaluation. It also offers a dual approach:

- A practical, traditional approach to the task that emphasizes the familiar evaluation questions focused on over-time change, and the factors that have contributed to change.

- A developmental evaluation approach that acknowledges the complexity and emergence inherent in systems change initiatives.

A Practical, Traditional Approach to Systems Change Evaluation

Here we continue to emphasize pragmatism by demonstrating the strong family resemblance between systems change evaluation and a familiar, straightforward program evaluation: one that assesses over-time change among program participants. Consider this quite typical sequence in terms of how such a program evaluation might unfold:

1. Become oriented to the program model,
2. Plan the evaluation,
3. Develop data collection instruments,
4. Collect baseline data program participant outcomes,
5. Collect follow-up data on program participant outcomes,
6. Describe change between baseline and follow-up and determine its magnitude,
7. Analyze *how* the intervention contributed to change between baseline and follow-up, and
8. Use findings to develop recommendations for how the intervention might improve, in order to produce better follow-up outcomes.

This sequence of program evaluation steps translates easily into a sequence of steps for systems change evaluation:

Evaluation Phases for a Systems Change Evaluation	
1. Orientation	- Learn about the systems change initiative's goals and strategies - Learn the basics about the collaborative that is implementing the systems change initiative - Collect basic information on your system's pathway
2. Evaluation Planning	- Decide on priorities for the evaluation - Identify research questions - Develop a data collection plan
3. Develop data collection instruments	- Develop instruments for collecting data at baseline - For subsequent rounds of data collection, develop instruments for collecting data at follow-up periods
4. Collect baseline data	- Collect data on pathway effectiveness - Collect data on institutional structure - Collect data on collaborative effectiveness

5.	Collect follow-up data	• At a follow-up period:
		    o Collect data on pathway effectiveness
		    o Collect data on institutional structure
		    o Collect data on collaborative effectiveness
		• Ask stakeholders about their perceptions of the systems changes, and changes in collaborative effectiveness, that have taken place between baseline and follow-up

6.	Describe change between baseline and follow-up	• Compare the follow-up data to the baseline data to assess the extent to which systems changes have taken place:
		    o Changes in pathways
		    o Changes in structures
		• Take into account the stakeholder arguments about the extent and type of change in pathways and structures

7.	Analyze *how* the intervention contributed to change between baseline and follow-up	• Assess how the initiative was able to identify and reduce structural barriers • Assess how the initiative was able to build or enhance structural enablers • Assess the way, and extent to which, structural change (reduced structural barriers or enhanced structural enablers) contributed to increased pathway capacity and/or improved pathway connections • Assess the extent to which effective collaborative functioning contributed to successful implementation (or the ways that less effective collaborative functioning has contributed to challenges in the initiative's implementation)
8.	Develop recommendations	• Identify ways that pathways can continue to improve • Identify ways that the structure might be reconfigured in order to facilitate pathway improvements • Identify ways that collaborative members or other system actors might contribute to a more conducive structure and to improved pathways • Identify ways that collaborative structures and processes might improve to facilitate the implementation of the systems change initiative

Although systems are complex, we can actually consider a system to be just like any other object of evaluation, in the sense that we want to know *what it is like at different time-points*, describe *how it has changed over time*, and explain *what has contributed to this change*. In this way, an evaluation of systems change is not so different from standard program evaluation.

At the same time, the complexity and emergence inherent in systems change require us to layer on a

Beyond Baseline and Follow-up: Assessing at Multiple Time-Points

This guide uses the terms *baseline* and *follow-up* – but you will no doubt be looking at systems change at more than two time-points. All of the guidance for follow-up can be considered as a stand-in for any time-point after baseline. And when looking at over-time change, for some purposes you may want to compare to baseline, and for other purposes you may want to compare to the most recent time-point.

And in practice, in the context of systems change you should not limit data collection to discrete time-points. Instead you are more likely to be working in close partnership with initiative stakeholders, and you will be collecting data along the way. (More about this in the next section on developmental evaluation.) However, in *representing* changes in systems over time, it will make sense to focus on a set of discrete time-points so that stakeholders can clearly see the ways that the system is differs from time-period to time-period.

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developmental approach as we conduct the evaluation. The next section talks about how we might do that, while not losing the elegant simplicity of a traditional evaluation approach.

Taking a Developmental Evaluation Approach while Staying Practical about Assessing over-Time Change

Over the past few years, the developmental evaluation (DE) approach has been gaining traction. Part of the reason for its traction is the recognition that while traditional, summative evaluation works well for many objects of evaluation, it does not work well in complex contexts. Summative evaluation works well for routinized activity in which there is a well-defined path from activities to outcomes. Using this cause/effect chain, the evaluation plan can grow naturally from a logic model, and we are able measure success against well-defined outcomes.

However (it is argued), when assessing change in complex systems, the object of evaluation does not tend to match the summative approach well. Systems change is dynamic, emergent, and characterized by uncertainty, volatility, and adaptation – while traditional evaluation often assumes a linear and predictable chain of cause and effect. Furthermore, systems change initiatives unfold in a world where outcomes are highly unpredictable, control over events is fragmented, interests diverge, and there may be low levels of agreement on solutions to problems (or even on problem definition). In addition, the organizational, political, economic, and funding contexts are turbulent, with new opportunities and barriers arising often. Under these circumstances, it is folly to posit cause and effect, and to define outcomes against we will measure progress. This mismatch points us to the DE alternative. DE:

> …informs and supports innovative and adaptive development in complex dynamic environments. DE brings to innovation and adaptation the processes of asking evaluative questions, applying evaluation logic, and gathering and reporting evaluative data to support project, program, product, and/or organizational development with timely feedback. (Patton 2011.)

Another reason to take the DE route is that whereas the traditional evaluator takes the third-party, objective stance, the developmental evaluator becomes a key actor at the strategy table for a systems change initiative. In other words, the evaluation can be a valuable asset to the architects of the systems change initiative, because answering evaluation questions will often provide needed insight as the initiative unfolds. The developmental evaluator has the opportunity to assist change agents as they cope with complexity and undertake the ongoing development of the initiative. The evaluator is a steward of the emerging data and learnings, and can provide relevant and timely information, and work with strategic decision-makers to "interpret[] the meaning of data and uncover[] the implications together" (Coffman and Beer 2011).

How do we reconcile the advice to focus on straightforward, traditional evaluation change with the cogent argument to adopt a DE approach when analyzing systems change? We believe that there are compelling reasons for *both* modalities, and that a hybrid approach is not only possible, but preferable. The hybrid approach is preferable because it allows us to impose conceptual order, thus reducing the cognitive load of trying to understand deep complexity – while at the same time capitalizing on the benefits of the DE approach (avoiding oversimplification, paying attention to emergence and systems dynamics, using evaluation as an input for strategy rather than as a third-party, "objective" assessment, etc.).

But if systems change isn't a good fit for traditional evaluation, is a hybrid approach really possible? We believe that the mismatch between systems change and traditional evaluation is often over-drawn. One of the main assertions here is that traditional evaluation assumes that we can predict outcomes and

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measure progress using indicators based on these outcomes. In fact, we can decouple the practice of *defining and operationalizing outcomes and indicators* from the practice of *assuming linear progress toward an ultimate outcome.* Even if the context and the initiative are uncertain, volatile, nonlinear, etc., we can certainly still develop systems change concepts and track their indicators over time.[6]

We can actually reconcile the traditional with the developmental approach quite easily for our purposes, since there is nothing about DE that prevents us from assessing a system at different time-points, and seeking to understand what has contributed to over-time change. The table below shows how we can take advantage of the helpful aspects of traditional *and* developmental evaluation for the purposes of creating a hybrid approach.

Selecting from Aspects of Developmental and Traditional Evaluation to Create a Hybrid Approach

Evaluation Component	Traditional Evaluation	Developmental Evaluation	Hybrid Approach
Purpose	- To test a model. - To judge an effort's success, merit, and scalability. - To hold organizations accountable to their stated objectives.	To incorporate data and ongoing reflection into social change strategies, thus informing strategy decisions, or to change or refine strategies or implementation.	- To understand the type and extent of change that has occurred. - To understand that factors contributing to change. - To inform decisions about how to improve a systems change initiative.
Role of the Evaluator	- Outside observer. "Hands-off" in terms of program implementation. - Delivering reports at the end of regular reporting periods.	- Embedded and hands-on, working in partnership with key staff who can determine when and how strategy is planned, executed, and adjusted. - Working rapidly, responsively, and flexibly. Reporting meets the organization's decision-making needs.	- Embedded and hands-on, working in partnership with key staff. - Meets the organization's decision-making needs. - Provides reports that track systems change progress, showing the state of the system at regular time-points.
Evaluation Process	- Articulate how program activities are intended to achieve a set of outcomes. - Specify the indicators that measure progress toward those outcomes. - Collect and analyze data on those indicators. - Follow a fixed plan.	- Intentional learning and reflection processes are built into the process so that the data's end-users – the strategic decision-makers – become sense-makers that can interpret the meaning of data and uncover the implications as a team. - Adjust evaluation as needed.	- Articulate how the initiative plans to bring about systems change. - Operationalize systems change: how we know it when we see it. - Allow for a range of ways that systems change might manifest. - Be open to operationalizing systems change in new ways as the context and initiative evolve. - Develop an evaluation plan, including a data collection plan, but adjust it as needed. - Include strategic decision-makers in the learning and reflection process.

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[6] In fact, those who argue that the notions of cause and effect embedded in traditional summative evaluation are incommensurate with complexity tend to ignore the ways in which traditional approaches handle complexity well. For example, many statistical models that we use in summative evaluation are fully capable of taking into account nonlinearity, time lags, recursiveness, multiple causal pathways, context, nested processes, and non-determinism.

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Evaluation Component	Traditional Evaluation	Developmental Evaluation	Hybrid Approach
Data Use	• Use data for program improvement. • Decide whether to continue funding a program, or raise more funding, based on demonstrated effectiveness. • Share with the field a model that is shown to be effective.	• Make decisions about the next step, or the next question to ask. • Modify strategy and/or its implementation.	• Same as for developmental evaluation.

To show how we might use a hybrid approach to systems change evaluation, this Guide incorporates a DE approach where it is helpful, highlighting ways that you can add in a "developmental stance" at various points along the way. The developmental stance comes in handy when thinking about being flexible about data collection, engaging a learning team to support co-learning and reflecting on data, sharing findings when they are useful for decision-making (rather than waiting for the end of regular reporting periods). For guidance on incorporating a DE approach, look for the DE icon at the right!

Where to Go for Guidance on Conducting Qualitative Analysis of Complex Cases

The data analysis you will conduct as part of the systems change evaluation will include creating summaries, describing changes over time, and making inferences about how efforts have contributed to results. Analysis will also include the reflection you do along with way with stakeholders.

This Guide provides you with tools about how to organize your thinking as you undertake each of these types of analysis tasks, but it does not provide any instruction on analysis methods. The techniques you will use are likely to be familiar to most evaluators: coding transcripts or documents using software such as Dedoose, NVIVO, or Atlas.ti.

Qualitative coding is, of course, a technique that can be used in the context of multiple analytical approaches. Particularly helpful for systems change evaluation is knowledge of how to conduct case studies, since these approaches focus on discerning how causes contribute to effects in a complex system, the use of qualitative data, and what to do when you have a very small number of cases – or only one case. For a review of useful analytical approaches (that includes a comprehensive bibliography of additional resources), see *Addressing Attribution of Cause and Effect in Small-n Impact Evaluations: Towards an Integrated Framework* (White and Phillips, 2012).

Step 1) Orientation

By the time evaluators begin their engagements, they typically have a basic understanding of a systems change initiative's goals and strategies, as well as of the collaborative implementing the initiative (especially since the client is frequently a lead agency in this collaborative). As the engagement launches, it will be time to deepen your knowledge of the initiative and of the collaborative. This section provides guidance about what you should seek to learn during the orientation phase. Guidance focuses on:

- Getting oriented to the systems change initiative,
- Learning the basics of who is in the collaborative and how it is organized, and
- Conducting a *pathway inventory* and *pathway challenge summary*.

Getting Oriented to the Systems Change Initiative

To learn about the systems change initiative, you should ask these types of questions:

- What are the stated goals of the initiative?
- What challenges of pathway effectiveness has the collaborative identified?
- Has the collaborative identified any structural barriers? If so, what are they?
- What are the strategies the collaborative plans to employ for improving pathways?
- If the collaborative has identified structural barriers, what are the strategies for developing a more conducive structure?

You can learn the basics about the initiative mostly through document review. You will want to visit an initiative's website (if one exists), and work with the client and other stakeholders to collect the following types of documents:

- **Theory of change and/or logic models.** If the collaborative has developed a theory of change, or possibly a set of logic models, these will usually contain information about the initiative's goals and strategies.

- **Dashboards and other performance tracking documents.** If the collaborative has set up (or is in the early stages of setting up) an accountability framework, it will have some type of document that lays out targets or objectives: something that specifies its goals. If the accountability framework is well-developed, there will be a dashboard (scorecard, report card, etc). But even if there is no dashboard, there may be other performance tracking or evaluation documents that will be useful to you in understanding where the initiative is in its "accountability framework trajectory."

- **Proposals.** Initiative implementers often apply for funding to carry out their initiatives. If they have applied for funding, see if you can access the proposals. Proposals often provide thorough (if slightly rosy) descriptions of the initiative, and of collaborative committees governing the initiative.

- **Presentations.** Initiative implementers may have developed presentation decks for the purposes of orienting stakeholders to the initiative, or to update funders. These decks will contain descriptions of the initiative, its goals, activities, actors, etc.

- **RFPs**. Collaborative members may have drafted RFPs for the purposes of selecting grantees that will support the initiative's implementation. These will often contain information about their approach to the intervention, and to systems change.

Learning the Basics of the Collaborative

At this stage you will also want to learn the basics of the collaborative and its division of labor. You will want to know:

- What organizations are collaborating to govern, implement, and coordinate the initiative?
- How is governance organized? What are the committees, and what is each committee responsible for?

Here are some documents you can look for that will help you answer these questions:

- **Committee charters.** Sometimes committees will have developed charters that lay out their roles and responsibilities within the initiative. This is more likely when the collaborative has a more formalized process and a more hierarchically unified structure. When such charters exist, you can locate information about roles; when you find out they do *not* exist, you have learned something about lack of formal process.

- **MOUs.** If there are multiple committees involved in the collaboration, they may have MOUs with one another, and MOUs often contain important descriptive information about the collaborative. Again, these are more likely to exist when the structure is more hierarchically unified and/or the process if more formalized – and again, a lack of MOUs becomes data for you.

- **Lead agency grant agreements.** If collaboratives are part of a formal funding strategy, lead agencies will have a grantee agreement that spells out how the collaborative is meant to function.

For learning about the collaborative, you may need to supplement document review by having short discussions with stakeholders. Collaboratives can sometimes grow up organically, and when this is the case there are less likely to be formal charters or MOUs; under these conditions, conversations with stakeholders are especially important.

Conducting a Pathway Inventory and Pathway Challenge Summary

The orientation phase is also a good time to develop a solid understanding of what is at the core of your system: the system's pathway and the pathway's challenges. At this stage, you will answer such questions as:

- What programs and services are included in the pathway?
- In what ways do the programs connect to one another?
- How do clients engage the pathways?
- What are the pathway capacity challenges and pathway connections challenges?

Adding to the Collaborative's Understanding of Pathway Challenges

After you collect and analyze information about the pathways, you can share your findings with the collaborative. A thorough baseline understanding of the system's pathways – and its challenges – is useful to the collaborative as it makes strategy and implementation decisions.

In this section we suggest how you might go about collecting the documents you will need to answer these questions, as well as outline a procedure for conducting the inventory and documenting its challenges. This section also includes a pathway inventory table that you can use to store the information you're collecting, as well as a pathway challenges summary table.

Collect Relevant Documents

To collect information on the programs available for particular pathway steps, as well as on the funding sources for these programs, you can begin with document review. Below is a list of documents to look for. Begin with the easiest entry point, and you are likely to accumulate references to additional useful documents. Remember to consult with key stakeholders to see if they have suggestions for where to find helpful documents.

- **Collect documents that others have developed to show the pathway (or part of the pathway).** If a systems change initiative is launching or underway, key stakeholder groups are likely to have already done some work that will support your efforts to understand a pathway. If you don't know about any existing efforts, talk to key advisors who are likely to know the location of any such documents. Look for:
  - o Theories of change,
  - o Strategic plans, and
  - o Initiative planning documents focusing on pathway-related issues.

- **Review RFPs from public agencies and foundations that fund programs that are part of the pathway.** RFPs contain a great deal of information about program design, performance targets, and focal populations. The RFPs will not have information showing which provider was funded, but you can get that information elsewhere.

- **Access reports that list grantees of publicly-funded programs in the pathway.** Public agencies often release reports with information about the organizations they have funded to provide services. You can use this to find information on the nonprofit providers that are working with the population that engages the pathway.

- **Look for brochures that lay out the program offerings available.** Public agencies that fund multiple organizations often have brochures that describe available services. These provide a wealth of information that often links together the provider, the program name, who is included in the focal population, and a description of services provided by the program.

- **Look up provider websites.** If you can't find useful brochures, or if you have been able to collect only scant information using brochures, you can directly consult provider websites. Providers often house information online that will show you who is eligible to participate in their programs, and what services are provided.

- **Work with stakeholders to gain access to funder contracts with providers.** If you are able to see the contracts that a public agency or foundation has with its providers, you will have access to a great deal of information about program design, performance targets, and other funding requirements.

Complete the Pathway Inventory Table

In your efforts to inventory the pathway, you may want to be exhaustive. It's a natural evaluator tendency to want to include the whole pathway and all of its sub-pathways: every program, service, connection, etc. It is better at this point to include just enough to get a basic sense of what is involved – this will set you up so that you know enough to tailor your baseline data collection, while you can avoid getting overwhelmed by too much information.

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Here are the steps you can take to inventory the pathway:

1. **Identify the steps in the "ideal pathway."**
Usually human services systems have at least a rough order to the steps that clients take as they move through a pathway. Not all individual clients will move through it in exactly the same way: some will enter the pathway at different points, skip over steps, or complete steps in a different order. However, it is helpful to simplify things and begin with an "ideal pathway" – a complete set of steps and the order in which they are typically completed – so that you can clearly delineate how programs should fit together. For example, here is one way to represent the ideal pathway in a workforce development system:

Workforce Barrier Removal → Pre-Readiness Training → Workforce Readiness Training → Hard Skill Training → Job Search Prep → Job Search → Employment

2. **Use the "ideal pathway steps" to tailor your pathway inventory table.** The table on page 40 can serve as a pathway inventory template, which you can tailor for your own purposes, completing one table for each step (by filling out the top row with a short step descriptor, and intended outcomes). By using one table for each pathway step, you can organize the information you are collecting in terms of the ideal pathway. Organizing the information up front this way helps you to avoid information overload, and helps you to see which programs and connections apply to which steps.

3. **Using the documents you collected that provide information about the programs and providers in the pathway, store program information in a pathway inventory.** As you review each document, enter the information into the pathway inventory, recording the program name, services provided, and provider name. In the "linkages" column, write a short description of the mechanisms that are designed to help clients transition. In the "alignment" column, write a short description of how clients are meant to be prepared at one

step to succeed in the next step (or in a related step). Include the names of providers who are involved in helping clients transition. For example, when a client completes a job readiness program and needs to enroll in a job skills program, a case manager may coordinate directly with the job skills program staff to learn whether a particular client has actually become successfully enrolled in that program. The last column on this table also has a place to describe the ways that providers are working to coordinate with the actors in other systems (e.g. out-of-school time providers coordinating with schools). Here you can note such approaches as cross-disciplinary groups, networks that cross system boundaries, data-sharing, etc.

Create a Pathway Challenge Summary

As you conduct the inventory, you will inevitably learn about pathway *challenges* as well. As you collect basic pathway information, it will be efficient to record your initial thoughts about ways in which the pathway is not serving its clients well. Later, as you describe the pathway at baseline, your preliminary analysis about the challenges will be a rich source of data for that description. In looking for pathway challenges, you can explore such questions as:

- For what kinds of programs and services is there an undersupply?

- Which programs and services appear to have room for quality improvement? For example, are there programs that could benefit from learning about evidence-based practice? Do any providers engage in active quality improvement?

- What is the program mix like? Are there significant service gaps?

- Is it difficult for clients to move from one program to another? Do clients sometimes "fall through the cracks"?

- Do programs work at cross purposes, so that completing one program does not set clients up to be ready for another program?

- Are there ways in which this system could link better to another, related system?

Taking what you have learned as you filled out the pathway inventory, use the Pathway Challenges Summary table to store information about what the most prominent pathway challenges are. The Pathway Challenges Summary table provides space for you to describe challenges related to scale, quality, comprehensiveness, linkages, alignment, and cross-system coordination. There is no need to find a challenge in each category; describe only what is most important.
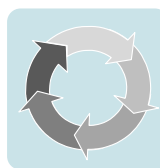
	PATHWAY INVENTORY			

STEP NAME:

INTENDED OUTCOME(S) FOR THIS STEP:

Services Provided	Providers	Linkages: Mechanisms for Supporting Clients to Transition to the Next Step	Alignment: How Clients are Meant to be Prepared for the Next Step	Cross-System Coordination
Program Name: • • • •				
Program Name: • • • •				
Program Name: • • • •				
Program Name: • • • •				
Program Name: • • • •				

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PATHWAY CHALLENGES SUMMARY		
Aspects of Pathway Challenges	**Questions about Pathway Challenges**	**Description of Challenge**
Scale	Are there insufficient program slots for the focal population?	
	Do clients have trouble accessing programs?	
Quality	Are providers paying insufficient attention to quality?	
	Are programs insufficiently tailored to the needs of the focal population?	
Comprehensiveness	Is the mix of programs unable to meet diverse needs of the focal population?	
	Are there service gaps?	
Linkages	Are there insufficient linking mechanisms enabling participants to successfully transition from one program or pathway step to another?	
Alignment	Is there lack of alignment in the content of programs, so that participants exiting one pathway step or program are not set up to succeed in the next?	
Cross-System Coordination	Are system actors challenged to link or align the focal system with other, complementary systems?	

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Step 2) Evaluation Planning

There are several steps to planning your systems change evaluation:

- Deciding where to focus the evaluation,
- Identifying your research questions, and
- Developing a data collection plan.

This planning stage also provides a good opportunity to engage a learning team: a team of initiative stakeholders that you will work with to reflect on findings and use data to provide feedback on systems change strategies.

Engaging a Learning Team

The idea of working with a *learning team* is an important part of the DE approach. In traditional third-party evaluation, the evaluator seeks to maintain an objective distance; in DE, the evaluator and the initiative stakeholders work in deep partnership. The evaluator seeks to engage the client as well as other stakeholders as co-learners – what we're calling here a "learning team." Working with this team will mean you can collaborate with key players to make meaning of the data, thus ensuring that the evaluation findings will be maximally relevant. The more meaningful the findings, and the greater the engagement of the stakeholders in the meaning-making process, the more likely stakeholders are to *use* the evaluation to inform the initiative's strategy. And as the evaluation unfolds, the learning team can help you identify the most useful *next questions* to ask: the questions that – if answered – will be most useful to the initiative's implementers.

Identifying the Learning Team Members: Two Scenarios

The task of identifying the learning team will unfold in two basic ways, based on the context of the initiative. If the initiative is well underway, *and* its collaborative has a structure more toward the hierarchically unified end of the spectrum, it is likely that you will be able to easily capitalize on committees already in place to identify your learning team. A word of caution here, however: when the initiative is hierarchically unified, the "obvious choice" for learning team may appear to be the initiative's highest-level governance body. This will not always be the best choice, since the people sitting on this body may be *too* high-level to truly engage, and it is also a good idea to bring in people from different levels of the structure. You will want to make sure that the committee you choose to work with includes people who have the authority to make use of the evaluation findings, as well as people close enough to the front lines of implementation that they will be able to offer insights about how clients engage with pathways.

If the initiative is in the early stages of development, or if its structure is more adhocratic, the choice of who should come together to form the learning team will not be as clear. Under these circumstances, you can actually support the initiative by helping to put together a high-functioning team. To identify team members, start with the client and then open a conversation about who else should be brought on. The basic principles here are the same as the ones pointed out above: you need people and organizations that will make active use of the evaluation findings, and you also need people who know how the initiative is unfolding on the ground. You should consider including:

- The collaborative's lead agency (if the collaborative has one),
- Public agencies at the city or county level (and potentially at the state level),

- Foundations that fund the systems change initiative,
- Community-based organizations that provide services to system beneficiaries,
- Community leaders, and
- Intermediary organizations that support the efforts to strengthen pathway connections.

You and your client may want to limit the number of people on the learning team, so that it does not become too unwieldy, or too difficult to find the time to convene the team. But again, it is important to have representatives from the organizations that will be taking the evaluation findings and making adjustments to their strategies and programs, *and* to have people engaged directly in work "on the ground" (or close to the ground).

Sharing the Systems Change Framework

It is important for the learning team to have a good understanding of the systems change framework that underpins your approach. That way, you and the learning team can all "see" the system in the same way: categorizing the world with the same concepts, and using the shared language. To establish this shared understanding, you should facilitate a meeting in which you introduce the framework from Part One of this toolkit (adapting it however you like so that it fits your particular systems change initiative). You may want to consider taking materials directly from the toolkit to share with them, in particular:

- The framework overview and graphic on pages 2-4,
- Section 2: What are the elements of a system?, and
- Section 3: What are the elements of systems change?

At the beginning of the engagement it may be less important to share the framework that brings in collaborative effectiveness (although you certainly can). People who are launching systems change initiatives are often highly focused on the system itself and on their desire to see the lives of system beneficiaries improve – which means they may have little patience for considering their own process as a focus of analysis. You will find out if they want to include collaboration as a focus when you engage with them to decide on learning priorities (see the tool on pages 44-45). If you and your team decide that the evaluation will include a focus on collaborative efficacy, you can then hold another meeting to introduce them to a shared language of collaboration. In preparation for this meeting, you may want to ask them to read Section *4: How do systems change efforts influence systems change results?*

Deciding on Priorities for the Evaluation

Systems change evaluations can easily get very large and unwieldy without careful prioritization. This may in fact be one of the first things you notice as you dive in: that there is so much to investigate that it's hard to know where to begin. An advantage of the systems change framework offered here is that it helps to *chunk* your object of evaluation. (The different chunks are pathways (or even sections of pathways), structure, and the collaboration driving the initiative.) This "chunking" of systems and systems change can help you and your client to decide on where to focus. You can set broad priorities, essentially answering the question: "where should we look?" Then you can identify a preliminary set of evaluation questions to answer. The list will be preliminary because you will most likely revisit the research question list after you have completed part two of your orientation to the system and systems change initiative. The information you collect during the deeper orientation will doubtless give you additional insights into where the most fruitful areas of exploration are.

Guidance on Setting Priorities

To decide on evaluation priorities, you should answer these questions:

- If a systems change initiative takes on change for multiple systems, which system will the evaluation focus on?
- Within a given system, which pathway steps and connections will the evaluation pay the most attention to?
- Will the evaluation include a focus on collaborative efficacy?
- Will the evaluation include a focus on the link between the systems change efforts and systems change results?

The evaluator must engage the client to decide on evaluation priorities, and can do this by working with the learning team to reflect on several questions, the answers to which will help the groups to make the appropriate decision.

The table below provides prioritizing questions, along with reflection questions to think about during the prioritizing exercise, as well as decision guidance. The questions and guidance should help you and your learning team decide where to focus the systems change evaluation.

Bounding the System

One of the critical pieces of advice that systems change theorists almost always give is that you must "bound the system." Because everything is ultimately connected to everything, systems can expand indefinitely. Systems have no natural, objectively true boundaries. Instead, humans conceptually *impose* boundaries, thus defining what is "inside" and "outside" the system. Even a "small" system is complex and requires a non-trivial amount of an evaluator's bandwidth, so it behooves us to define the system to a manageable size: including enough so that the analysis of it will be useful to stakeholders, but not including so much that the evaluation grows out of control.

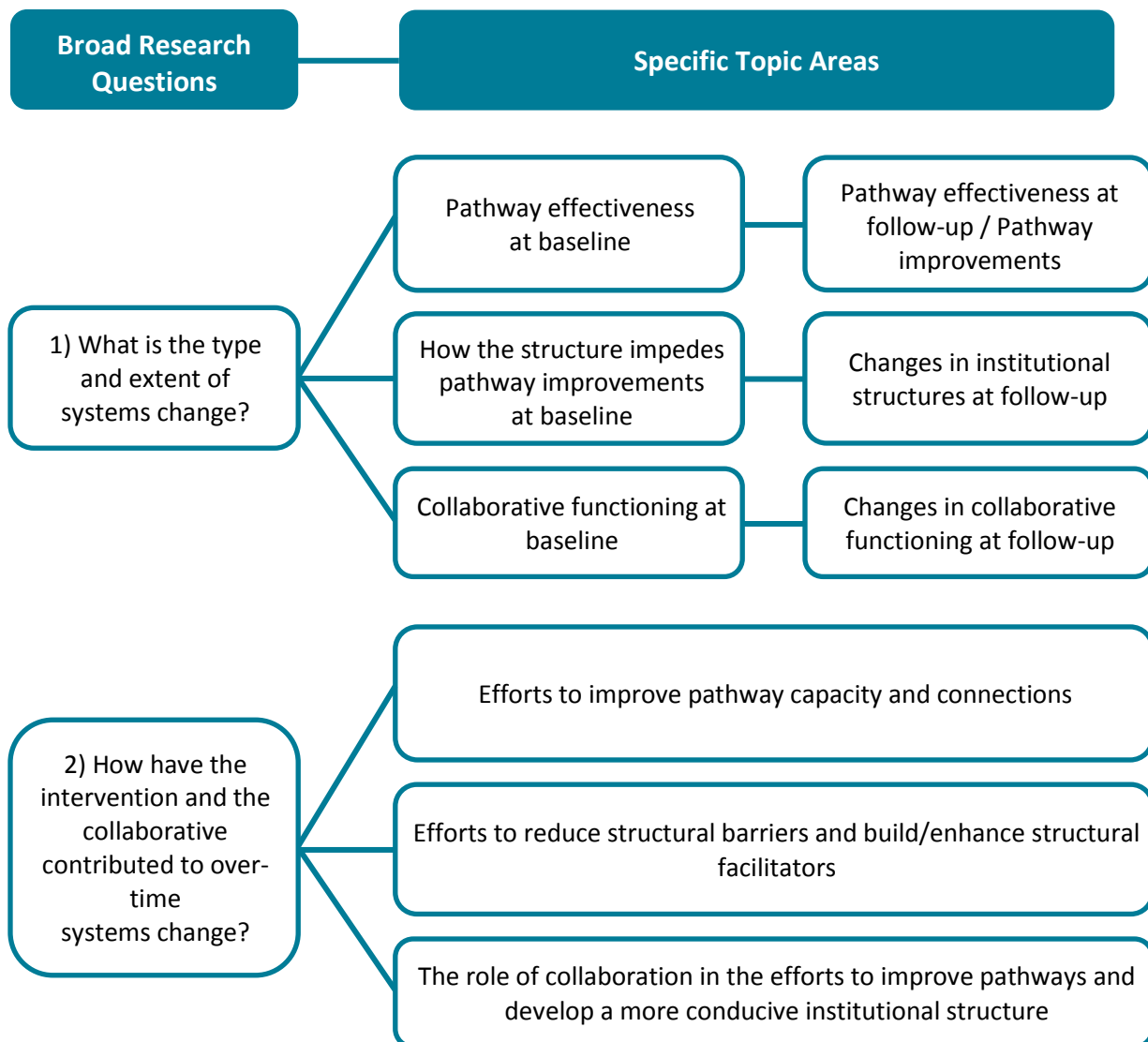| EVALUATION PRIORITIZATION		
Prioritizing Question	**Reflection Questions**	**Decision Guidance**
For initiatives that take on multiple systems, on which system should the evaluation focus?	• Which systems are "foundationally critical"? For which systems is the following statement true: "if this system doesn't work well, the entire initiative will fail"? (If this statement is true for multiple systems, can you identify systems that in some way take priority over others?) • Which system is in the greatest danger of not accomplishing sufficient improvement?	• Focus on a system that is foundationally critical *and* in high danger of failure.
Within a given system chosen as a focus, which pathway steps and connections will the evaluation pay the most attention to?	• At which steps are client failing to engage most often, or failing most often to emerge with positive outcomes? • At which connections are clients most likely to fall through the cracks?	• Focus on the steps and connections in a pathway where the greatest "pain points" exist.

EVALUATION PRIORITIZATION		
Prioritizing Question	**Reflection Questions**	**Decision Guidance**
Will the evaluation include a focus on collaborative efficacy?	• Is the systems change initiative unfolding with a well-established collaborative, in which members have a history of working well together? • Does the initiative involve the formation of a new collaborative (or a new set of collaborative committees)? • Is the initiative governed by a collaborative with a history of diverging priorities, or by a collaborative with an adhocratic structure and informal processes? • Is the collaborative's efficacy a politically sensitive topic?	• If the systems change initiative looks to have a well-functioning collaborative, do not focus evaluation resources here. • If the collaborative is new, or has a governance structure and process that are adhocratic and not very formalized, consider including a study of the collaborative as part of the systems change evaluation. • If the collaborative's efficacy is a topic too politically sensitive to focus on, exclude this from the study – at least for now. As you build trust with stakeholders, and as the collaborative builds trust over time, you may be able to revisit this topic later.
Will the evaluation include a focus on the link between the systems change efforts and systems change results?	• Are stakeholders mostly interested in tracking the evolution of systems change? • Do stakeholders want to reflect in an ongoing way on how their efforts are contributing to systems change outcomes, and how their efforts could improve?	• If stakeholders have a strong interest in reflecting on *how* the collaborative's actions lead to systems change results (or how actions may be hindering change), include this as a focus of the evaluation. • If stakeholders want to track systems change over time and see less of a need to reflect on how their efforts are bringing systems change about (or hindering systems change) do not include an evaluation focus on the link between effort and results. (It may also be the case that stakeholders do not see the need for this at the beginning of the initiative, but will see a need for it as the initiative evolves. This component can be added down the road.)

Identifying Research Questions

The foundation of your evaluation plan is the set of research questions you will answer. To simplify things, think at first of the short list of very high-level questions that you will be answering:

1. *What* is the type and extent of systems change taking place? In other words, how does the system (pathways and institutional structure) differ between baseline and follow-up?

2. *How* have the intervention, and the collaborative implementing it, contributed to this over-time change in the system?

You can then drill down to more specific research question topic areas in order to answer each of these two broad questions:

Broad Research Questions	Specific Topic Areas	
1) What is the type and extent of systems change?	Pathway effectiveness at baseline	Pathway effectiveness at follow-up / Pathway improvements
	How the structure impedes pathway improvements at baseline	Changes in institutional structures at follow-up
	Collaborative functioning at baseline	Changes in collaborative functioning at follow-up
2) How have the intervention and the collaborative contributed to over-time systems change?	Efforts to improve pathway capacity and connections	
	Efforts to reduce structural barriers and build/enhance structural facilitators	
	The role of collaboration in the efforts to improve pathways and develop a more conducive institutional structure	

Starting from the foundation of these two basic questions and their associated topic areas, this toolkit offers a list of basic systems change evaluation research questions. You can use this basic list to develop your own research question list, tailoring the questions to the needs of your own evaluation. The two ways that you can tailor are by prioritizing questions, and by customizing your questions by adding content.

- **Prioritize: choose only a subset of the evaluation questions in the list.** With the complexity and comprehensiveness of systems, it is tempting to adopt a very long list of research questions in order to be as thorough as possible. You should try to resist this temptation, because the list of questions can soon become unmanageable. The reflection exercise you undertook with the learning team will aid you in choosing a subset of research questions, cross out all the research questions that address areas you and your team decided not to focus on.

- **Add content.** All of the research questions are stated in the abstract; you should customize your set of questions by adding the specifics according to what pathway (and section(s) of the pathway) on which you are focusing.

Addressing the Broad Question: What is the Type and Extent of Systems Change?

Pathway Effectiveness at Baseline

- Is the program supply adequate relative to the number that should be served within the focal populations?
- To what extent are programs high-quality, and/or pursuing quality improvement practices?
- To what extent are programs tailored to focal populations' needs?
- Does the mix of programs match the needs of different sub-populations?
- When clients complete one step, are the mechanisms effective for their successful entry into the next step?
- As clients move from one step to another, are they well-prepared to succeed at the next step?
- How well coordinated with complementary systems are the programs in this system?

Pathway Effectiveness at Follow-up / Pathway Improvements

- Is there an increase over time in the supply of program slots? To what extent, and at which steps?
- Is the level of quality of those programs available to the population increasing? In what ways has quality increased?
- Is there an increase in the extent to which programs tailored to focal populations' needs? In what ways has tailoring increased?
- Has the mix of programs improved, so that the needs of different sub-populations are better met?
- Is linkage improving? Are there additional, or more effective, mechanisms in place for supporting clients to move from one step in the pathway to the next?
- Is alignment improving? Have there been changes in program delivery that ensure that clients leave steps in the pathway with the skills and qualifications identified as needed for success in subsequent steps?
- Is there better coordination with complementary systems?

A Practical Guide to Evaluating Systems Change

How Structural Barriers and Lack of Structural Enablers at Baseline Make Pathway Improvements Difficult to Undertake

- To what extent do structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) create sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that make it difficult to increase pathway capacity?
- Is there a lack of structural enablers, making it difficult to increase pathway capacity?
- To what extent do structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) create sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that make it difficult to improve pathway connections?
- Is there a lack of structural enablers, making it difficult to improve pathway connections?

Changes in the Institutional Structure at Follow-up

- Have structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) been reduced, resulting in new sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that create the conditions for increasing pathway capacity?
- Are there new structural enablers that create the conditions for increasing pathway capacity?
- To what extent do structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) create sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that make it difficult to improve pathway connections?
- Are there new structural enablers that create the conditions for improving pathway connections?

Collaborative Functioning at Baseline

- Has the collaborative set up the governance structure and process in a way that maximizes its effectiveness?
- Does the collaborative have an accountability framework that supports its effectiveness?
- Is member engagement strong enough to maximize the probability of an effective initiative?

Changes in Collaborative Functioning at Follow-up

- How is the collaborative evolving over time – in terms of structure, process, accountability framework, and member engagement?

Addressing the Broad Question: How Have the Intervention and the Collaborative Contributed to Over-Time Systems Change?

Initiative Efforts to Improve Pathway Capacity and Connections (Baseline)

- What are the issues of pathway that the initiative has identified? In what ways are the initiative's strategies designed to address these issues?
- What are the issues of pathway connections that the initiative has identified? In what ways are the initiative's strategies designed to address these issues?

Reflections on Efforts to Improve Pathway Capacity and Connections (Follow-up)

- To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to increasing scale, quality, and comprehensiveness?

- To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to improving linkage, alignment, and cross-system coordination?

Initiative Efforts to Create a More Conducive Institutional Structure (Baseline)

- What are the structural barriers (to improved pathway capacity and connections) that the initiative has identified?
- Has the initiative identified new structural enablers that are needed to create the conditions for improved pathway capacity and connections?
- In what ways are initiative strategies designed to shift incentives, mandates, or constraints in ways that will allow improvements in pathway capacity and/or connections?

Reflections on Efforts to Reduce Structural Barriers (Follow-up)

- To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to reducing structural barriers that made it difficult to increase pathway capacity?
- Was the initiative able to create any new structural enablers that supported pathway capacity?
- To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to reducing structural barriers that made it difficult to improve pathway connections?
- Was the initiative able to create any new structural enablers that supported pathway connections?
- Where have efforts to address the institutional structure been particularly challenging? Why have certain barriers been more intractable than others?
- To what extent, and in what ways, have changes in the institutional structure cleared the way for pathway improvements?

The Role of Collaboration in Systems Change

- Are changes in collaborative functioning supporting the initiative's ability to implement its strategies successfully? If so, in what ways? Are there aspects of collaborative functioning that continue to make it challenging to implement the initiative's strategies?
- How have any changes in the collaborative (structure, process, accountability framework, member engagement) affected the extent to which systems change took place?

Develop a Data Collection Plan

At this point you have decided on a preliminary list of research questions, and gained a thorough understanding of the system (its pathways and structure). You are now ready to develop a data collection plan. The first thing you may want to do is refine your list of research questions to reflect new information that you learned when you inventoried the pathway and the structure. Then with your refined list, you can use the template provided in this section to develop your data collection plan. The template aligns data collection tools and data sources with research questions, using the generic research questions presented in the Guide. In the "data collection instruments" column of the template, it refers to tools that are introduced in *Step 3: Develop Data Collection Instruments.*

Here is how you can tailor the template to your evaluation:

1. Remove any rows containing research question topics you are not addressing.
2. Replace the generic versions of the research questions with your own tailored questions.
3. Tailor the headings for the "data sources" columns (these headings may not perfectly match how you can best describe the stakeholders for the systems change initiative you are evaluating).

4. In the "data sources" columns, write in the names of the people you plan to interview in each of these categories, or the organization and role of the person you need to interview in each category.

Using this data collection plan, you can embark on baseline data collection. You are also likely to revise this plan as you go along, adding to or modifying the lists of stakeholders from whom you will collect data.

Research Question Focus	Research Questions	Data Collection Instruments	Key Informant Data Sources				
			High-Level Collaborative Members (Strategic View)	Initiative Planners (High-Level View of Implementation)	Initiative Implementers (Project Managers, Frontline Staff)	Funders (Public Agencies, Foundations)	Providers
Pathway Capacity (at Baseline)	• Is the program supply adequate relative to the number that should be served within the focal populations? • To what extent are programs high-quality, and/or pursuing quality improvement practices? To what extent are programs tailored to focal populations' needs? • Does the mix of programs match the needs of different sub-populations?	Baseline Systems Assessment Interview Protocol					
Pathway Connections (at Baseline)	• When clients complete one step, are the mechanisms effective for their successful entry into the next step? • As clients move from one step to another, are they well-prepared to succeed at the next step? • How well coordinated with complementary systems are the programs in this system?	Baseline Systems Assessment Interview Protocol					
How Structural Barriers Prevent Improvements in Pathway Capacity and Connections (at Baseline)	• To what extent do structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) create sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that make it difficult to increase pathway capacity? • Is there a lack of structural enablers, making it difficult to increase pathway capacity? • To what extent do structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) create sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that make it difficult to improve pathway connections? • Is there a lack of structural enablers, making it difficult to improve pathway connections?	Baseline Systems Assessment Interview Protocol					

SYSTEMS CHANGE DATA COLLECTION PLAN TEMPLATE

SYSTEMS CHANGE DATA COLLECTION PLAN TEMPLATE							
Research Question Focus	**Research Questions**	**Data Collection Instruments**	**Key Informant Data Sources**				
			High-Level Collaborative Members (Strategic View)	**Initiative Planners** (High-Level View of Implementation)	**Initiative Implementers** (Project Managers, Frontline Staff)	**Funders** (Public Agencies, Foundations)	**Providers**
Initiative Efforts to Improve Pathway Capacity and Connections (at Baseline)	• What are the issues of pathway capacity that the initiative has identified? In what ways are the initiative's strategies designed to address these issues? • What are the issues of pathway connections that the initiative has identified? In what ways are the initiative's strategies designed to address these issues?	Baseline Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol					
Initiative Efforts to Lower Structural Barriers (at Baseline)	• What are the structural barriers (to improved pathway capacity and connections) that the initiative has identified? • Has the initiative identified new structural enablers that are needed to create the conditions for improved pathway capacity and connections? • In what ways are initiative strategies designed to shift incentives, mandates, or constraints in ways that will allow improvements in pathway capacity and/or connections?	Baseline Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol					
Collaborative Functioning (at Baseline)	• Has the collaborative set up the governance structure and process in a way that maximizes its effectiveness? • Does the collaborative have an accountability framework that supports its effectiveness? • Is member engagement strong enough to maximize the probability of an effective initiative?	Baseline Collaboration Assessment Interview Protocol					

SYSTEMS CHANGE DATA COLLECTION PLAN TEMPLATE							
Research Question Focus	**Research Questions**	**Data Collection Instruments**	**Key Informant Data Sources**				
			High-Level Collaborative Members (Strategic View)	**Initiative Planners** (High-Level View of Implementation)	**Initiative Implementers** (Project Managers, Frontline Staff)	**Funders** (Public Agencies, Foundations)	**Providers**
Changes in Pathway Capacity (at Follow-up)	• Is there an increase over time in the supply of program slots? To what extent, and at which steps? • Is the level of quality of those programs available to the population increasing? In what ways has quality increased? • Is there an increase in the extent to which programs tailored to focal populations' needs? In what ways has tailoring increased? • Has the mix of programs improved, so that the needs of different sub-populations are better met?	Follow-up System (and Systems Change) Assessment Interview Protocol					
Changes in Pathway Connections (at Follow-up)	• Is linkage improving? Are there additional, or more effective, mechanisms in place for supporting clients to move from one step in the pathway to the next? • Is alignment improving? Have there been changes in program delivery that ensure that clients leave steps in the pathway with the skills and qualifications identified as needed for success in subsequent steps? • Is there better coordination with complementary systems?	Follow-up System (and Systems Change) Assessment Interview Protocol					

Change

Research Question Focus	Research Questions	Data Collection Instruments	Key Informant Data Sources				
			High-Level Collaborative Members (Strategic View)	Initiative Planners (High-Level View of Implementation)	Initiative Implementers (Project Managers, Frontline Staff)	Funders (Public Agencies, Foundations)	Providers
	SYSTEMS CHANGE DATA COLLECTION PLAN TEMPLATE						
Changes in Structural Barriers (at Follow-up)	• Have structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) been reduced, resulting in new sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that create the conditions for increasing pathway capacity? • Are there new structural enablers that create the conditions for increasing pathway capacity? • To what extent do structural barriers (related to resources, policies, the knowledge base, culture, etc.) create sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities that make it difficult to improve pathway connections? • Are there new structural enablers that create the conditions for improving pathway connections?	Follow-up System (and Systems Change) Assessment Interview Protocol					
Efforts to Improve Pathway Capacity (at Follow-up)	• To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to increasing program scale, quality, and/or comprehensiveness?	Follow-up Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol					
Efforts to Improve Pathway Connections (at Follow-up)	• To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to improving linkage, alignment, and cross-system coordination?	Follow-up Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol					

SYSTEMS CHANGE DATA COLLECTION PLAN TEMPLATE							
Research Question Focus	**Research Questions**	**Data Collection Instruments**	**Key Informant Data Sources**				
			High-Level Collaborative Members (Strategic View)	**Initiative Planners** (High-Level View of Implementation)	**Initiative Implementers** (Project Managers, Frontline Staff)	**Funders** (Public Agencies, Foundations)	**Providers**
Efforts to Reduce Structural Barriers (at Follow-up)	• To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to reducing structural barriers that made it difficult to increase pathway capacity? • Was the initiative able to create any new structural enablers that supported pathway capacity? • To what extent, and in what ways, did the initiative's strategies contribute to reducing structural barriers that made it difficult to improve pathway connections? • Was the initiative able to create any new structural enablers that supported pathway connections? • Where have efforts to address structural barriers been particularly challenging? Why have certain barriers been more intractable than others? • To what extent, and in what ways, have changes in the institutional structure cleared the way for pathway improvements?	Follow-up Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol					
Changes in Collaboration and the Role of Collaboration in Systems Change (at Follow-up)	• How is the collaborative evolving over time – in terms of structure, process, accountability framework, and member engagement? • Are changes in collaborative functioning supporting the initiative's ability to implement its strategies successfully? If so, in what ways? Are there aspects of collaborative functioning that continue to make it challenging to implement the initiative's strategies? • How have any changes in the collaborative (structure, process, accountability framework, member engagement) affected the extent to which systems change took place?	Follow-up Collaboration Assessment Interview Protocol					

Step 3) Develop Data Collection Instruments

After developing your data collection plan, you will be ready to develop your data collection instruments. This step contains some instrument templates that can help get you started. In addition to some guidance on how to develop the protocols, you will find:

Baseline Data Collection Instrument Templates

- Baseline Systems Assessment Interview Protocol
- Baseline Collaboration Assessment Interview Protocol
- Baseline Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol

Follow-up Data Collection Instrument Templates

- Follow-up Systems Assessment Interview Protocol
- Follow-up Collaboration Assessment Interview Protocol
- Follow-up Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol

Guidance for Developing Interview Protocols

- **You should not tailor your follow-up protocols until shortly before you are ready to conduct the interviews.** The protocols will help you ask some versions of this question: "here is what we knew about the system at some point in the past – can you tell us about what has changed and what has stayed the same, and what has contributed to changes (or stasis)?" But the specifics of *how* you ask this question will depend on where the system is at the time of the interview. In traditional evaluation we could feasibly develop all our data collection instruments at the outset because we will know from the beginning exactly what we want to measure. In the context of systems change, new storylines will be constantly emerging. Protocols are not developed once – instead, conversations with stakeholders happen multiple times and protocols are developed in an ongoing way to build off of previous conversations, and in response to current information needs.

- **You can use "data aggregation tools" introduced in *Step 1) Orientation* and *Steps 4 & 5) Collect Data at Baseline and Follow-up* to help you tailor your follow-up protocols.** Those two sections of the Guide provide you with tools that will help you organize the information you collect at baseline and along the way. Step 1 included the Pathway Challenge Summary table. The section on steps 4 and 5 includes a Structural Barriers Summary table and a Collaborative Description table. You will be updating these tables as you go, and they can be used as a consistent touch-point of where things are with the pathways, the institutional structure, and the collaborative. The tables will become handy references as you develop new interview protocols throughout the evaluation.

- **Use these interview protocols as guides for facilitating discussions with your learning team or other stakeholder groups.** Rather than using the protocol to conduct individual interviews, you may be able to bring up these questions to your learning team or other groups or committees. You may also want to divide the learning team into smaller sub-groups, and tailor the protocol according to the areas of expertise that each sub-group has.

- **Collecting data on systems may be more like investigative reporting than it is like traditional qualitative data collection – so you may end up collecting slightly different data for each person you speak with.** Usually, when evaluators collect qualitative data using key informant interview protocols, we use the same protocol for each stakeholder type, and look for areas of agreement or disagreement. If a certain percentage of stakeholders tell a similar story, we have found a theme, and consider that this story accurately describes the situation we are exploring. Collecting data to

understand a system is a little different. You will find yourself interviewing multiple stakeholders with very different perspectives on the system, many of whom have knowledge of different *parts* of the system. We want to gradually collect these different perspectives and different stores of knowledge, and in this way build up our understanding of the full picture. As you investigate the system, you will also identify new questions to ask, which you can add to protocols for interviews not yet conducted. You will probably also need to double back and ask follow-up questions to those you have already interviewed, to confirm information or to pursue a new line of investigation.

- **Go beyond these protocol templates by keeping a running list of emerging questions and taking advantage of informal conversations.** This section of the Guide provides templates for formal interviews that you might – for a traditional evaluation – conduct at specified, regular time-points. In taking a DE approach, though, you are more likely to collect data all along the way. (And the next section – on data collection – discusses the advantages of being a "learning partner.") So don't limit yourself to these formal data collection periods; make sure that you use all stakeholder meetings as opportunities for data collection. As the initiative unfolds, new questions are likely to arise. Keep a list of these questions, and take advantage of meetings and less formal conversations to see if you can uncover the answers (or stakeholder perspectives on the answers). And it is a good idea to consult this list of emerging questions to integrate them into your formal data collection as well.

Baseline Systems Assessment Interview Protocol

Instructions:

1. **Tailor this protocol:**
   a. Name the system that you are focusing on (replace "*[X system]*");
   b. Name the focal population that the systems change initiative is focusing on(replace "*[focal population]*"); and
   c. Name the outcomes that the system is designed to produce for the focal population (replace *"[X outcome]"*).
   d. Insert the appropriate confidentiality statement.

2. **Share the ideal pathway graphic with the interviewee.**
   a. The purpose of sharing this graphic is to help the stakeholder focus on the particular steps and connections about which they are most informed, and to offer some shared vocabulary.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today! The purpose of this interview is to discuss how well *[X system]* is functioning. We can think of this system very simply: as a set of programs and services designed to support *[the focal population to accomplish X outcomes]*. I'm going to be referring to this set of programs and services as a "pathway," because clients typically move from one type of program to another, getting closer to *[the ultimate outcome].* To help us think concretely about this system during this interview, I want to share this graphic showing an "ideal pathway." It shows the steps that a client might typically move through in order to be successful with the ultimate outcome.

What I want to learn from you today is where you believe the steps in the pathway need the most improvement. I'll be asking about the steps at which clients in *[the focal population]* are experiencing the most challenges, and where are clients most likely to have difficulty moving from one step to the next.

[Confidentiality statement.] Do you have any questions before we begin?

Pathway Capacity and Related Structural Barriers

Scale

[Refer to the ideal pathway graphic. Repeat the second question in this section for each step discussed. Focus on the steps that the interviewee has specific knowledge of.]

1. Can you identify pathway steps where the supply of program slots is not enough to meet the need of *[the focal population]*? Can you identify pathway steps where clients are challenged to access the programs available?

2. *[For the steps where supply is insufficient:]* Can you tell me more about these challenges of supply and access? To what extent do these prevent clients from getting the services they need?

3. Can you explain what stands in the way of being able to ensure that there are enough program slots, and that clients can access them? How do you think the challenges of supply and access could be resolved? *[Listen for issues of funding, policy, knowledge base, or culture of the field, and how these create sets of particular incentives, constraints, and opportunities for system actors.]*

Quality

[Refer to the ideal pathway graphic. Repeat the second question in this section for each step discussed. Focus on the steps that the interviewee has specific knowledge of. In some fields, issues of program quality are common parlance. In others, quality can be a very sensitive topic, so you may want to frame the issue in terms of tailoring – how well the programs meet the needs of the focal population.]

4.   Can you identify any steps where the programs and services offered may not be of sufficiently high quality, or may not be sufficiently meeting the needs of the focal population?

5. *[For each step identified:]* What would need to change about the programs offered so that they could better meet the needs of the focal population?

6. *[For each step identified:]* Can you tell me what gets in the way of making these changes so that programs work better for clients? *[Listen for issues of funding, policy, knowledge base, or culture of the field, and how these create sets of particular incentives, constraints, and opportunities for system actors.]*

Comprehensiveness

[You may have gotten to issues of comprehensiveness when asking about issues of program supply. If not, ask these questions.]

7. Do you feel that there is the right *mix* of programs offered to clients? Are there are any significant gaps in services?

8. What would need to change in order to ensure that the different *types* of programs needed are offered?

9. Can you tell me what gets in the way of making those changes? *[Listen for issues of funding, policy, knowledge base, or culture of the field, and how these create sets of particular incentives, constraints, and opportunities for system actors.]*

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Pathway Connections and Related Structural Barriers

So far we've been focusing on what happens *at* each step. Now I want to turn to the connections *between* each step. How do we make sure that clients successfully transition from one step to the next? Looking at the pathway graphic again, I'd like get your help in thinking about what happens *between* the steps.

Linkage

[Refer to the ideal pathway graphic. Repeat the three questions in this section for each step discussed. Focus on the connections that the interviewee has specific knowledge of.]

10. Looking at the connections between the steps in the ideal pathway, do you see places where the clients might be likely to fall through the cracks – completing one program but then not successfully moving onto another program?

11. *[For each link where a deficiency was identified:]* What connection mechanisms could be implemented so that clients are more successful in continuing their movement along the pathway? *[Listen for things like warm handoffs, common enrollment forms, joint protocols for referrals, cross-organizational case management teams, service bundling, shared data systems for tracking clients.]*

12. Can you tell me what gets in the way of making these changes so that clients are more likely to stay involved in the programs they need? *[Listen for issues of funding, policy, knowledge base, or culture of the field, and how these create sets of particular incentives, constraints, and opportunities for system actors.]*

Alignment

[Refer to the ideal pathway graphic. Repeat the second question in this section for each step discussed. Focus on the connections that the interviewee has specific knowledge of.]

13. Looking at the ideal pathway, do you see places where the clients who enroll in the programs in a particular step are often not sufficiently prepared to succeed in that step? Are there any programs that you feel are working at cross-purposes to one another?

14. *[For each connection where a deficiency was identified:]* What does the client need at a previous step in order to have the skills and qualifications (or other readiness factors) in order to succeed at that step? What services need to be provided so that a client is ready to succeed?

15. Can you tell me what needs to change so that programs will be better aligned? What gets in the way of making these changes? *[Listen for issues of funding, policy, knowledge base, or culture of the field, and how these create sets of particular incentives, constraints, and opportunities for system actors.]*

Cross-System Coordination

16. Can you think of ways that providers or other system actors work with those in other fields to help their clients reach their goals? (For example, out-of-school time providers or providers supporting healthy behaviors integrating with school systems, mental health providers or adult education providers supporting workforce development systems, etc.)

17. Do you believe that there are opportunities for additional coordination with complementary systems?

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18. What stands in the way of this type of coordination, or more effective coordination? *[Listen for issues of funding, policy, knowledge base, or culture of the field, and how these create sets of particular incentives, constraints, and opportunities for system actors.]*

Baseline Collaboration Assessment Interview Protocol

Instructions for Tailoring the Protocol:

1. Name the systems change initiative that you are evaluating (replace "[*X initiative*]");

2. Name the collaborative that governs/implements the initiative (replace "[*X collaborative*]") OR: if there are multiple collaborative committees involved in governance and implementation, name these committees.

3. If there are multiple collaborative committees, choose just one to focus on for a particular interview (the committee chosen will depend on who the key informant is). This instruction does not apply to those items that intentionally focus on multiple committees.

4. There are two sections on member engagement: one for members, the other for high-level staff who are informed about member engagement. Choose the appropriate section to include in the protocol.

5. Insert the appropriate confidentiality statement.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today! As you know, the *[X Initiative]* is the work of *[X collaborative]. [If there is more than one collaborative committee involved in the initiative, you can use this type of language instead:]* As you know, there are multiple collaboratives involved in the governing and implementation of the *[X Initiative].* They include: *[names of the collaborative committees.]* The purpose of this interview is to discuss the role of collaboration bringing about systems change, and today we will discuss the role, in particular, of *[X collaborative committee]*.

I want to hear your thoughts on the how several aspects of collaboration support the initiative's progress. I would also like to hear any suggestions you may have on how collaboration might be improved in ways that would *better* support the initiative's progress.

[Confidentiality statement.] Do you have any questions before we begin?

Governance Structure and Process

I'd like to first ask you a few questions about the collaborative's structure and process, and how its structure and process support its ability to successfully move the systems change initiative toward its goals.

1. Do you feel that roles and responsibilities of collaborative members are clearly defined? *[If yes,]* In what ways do clear roles and responsibilities support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear roles and responsibilities are unclear hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how roles might become more clearly defined?

2. Are roles and responsibilities of different committees delineated in such a way that the set of committees involved in the initiative has a clear division of labor? *[If yes,]* In what ways do clear roles and responsibilities support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear roles and responsibilities are unclear hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how roles might become more clearly defined?

3. Are there clear decision-making protocols for *[X collaborative committee]*? Do collaborative members know what decisions they "own," and what the decision rules are for making a particular decision

(consensus, majority vote, etc)? *[If yes,]* In what ways do clear decision-making protocols support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear decision-making protocols hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how decision-making for *[X collaborative committee]* might become more effective?

4. Are there clear decision-making protocols at work among multiple committees? Do the different collaborative committees understand their roles in specific decisions, such as ultimate sign-off, providing input, owning a decision, etc? *[If yes,]* In what ways do clear decision-making protocols support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear decision-making protocols hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how decision-making for the initiative overall might become more effective?

5. Are the lines of communication among committees effective? *[If yes,]* In what ways does effective communication support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways does ineffective communication hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how lines of communication might become more effective?

6. Is there effective project management that moves different projects along and coordinates among projects, so that the work of the initiative can move forward smoothly? Do you have suggestions for how project management might become more effective?

7. Do you have any other suggestions for how to improve the collaborative's structure and process so that it can more effectively support progress on the systems change initiative's goals?

Accountability Framework

8. What are your thoughts about how well the collaborative has done to identify clear goals? Do you have any suggestions for improvement here?

9. What are your thoughts about how well the collaborative has done to create a system of accountability in which the collaborative members are accountable to specific goals? Do you have any suggestions for improvement here?

10. Does the collaborative periodically reflect on performance against targets? *[If yes,]* Do you feel that this periodic reflection supports progress in the systems change initiative? In what ways? Do you have any suggestions for improvement here?

11. *[If no,]* Do you feel that periodic reflection could support progress in the systems change initiative? In what ways? Do you have any specific suggestions for improvement here?

Member Engagement (for Collaborative Members)

Organizations have their own goals. Being part of a collaborative can often help them meet those goals, but it is also true that committing resources to the collaborative goals can be difficult in the face of competing demands.

12. I'd like to hear first about goal alignment. In what ways does being part of this collaborative and initiative help your organization to meet its own goals?

13. Can you tell me about initiative goals that are *difficult* for your organization to meet, due to competing demands on its resources and staff time? Can you provide an example or two?

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14. Organizations in a collaborative often find it difficult to support collaborative goals or strategies due to their own funding constraints. For example, the collaborative might be asking your organization to allocate resources to a type of programming that your funding does not cover. Is that the case at all? *[If yes,]* Can you describe how that creates divergence between collaborative goals and your own goals?

15. In general within the collaborative, do you feel that there could be some improvement in aligning the goals of the member organizations with those of the systems change initiative? *[If yes,]* To what extent do you feel that lack of goal alignment is challenging for the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for how to create greater goal alignment?

Member Engagement (for High-Level Staff Informed about Member Engagement)

Organizations have their own goals. Being part of a collaborative can often help them meet those goals, but it is also true that committing resources to the collaborative goals can be difficult in the face of competing demands. I would like to hear your thoughts about the organizations that are members of the collaborative.

16. I'd like to hear first about goal alignment. In what ways do you believe that being part of the collaborative and initiative has helped the member organizations to meet their own goals?

17. Do you see ways that the initiative goals that are *difficult* for member organizations to meet, due to competing demands on their resources and staff time? Can you provide an example or two?

18. Organizations in a collaborative often find it difficult to support collaborative goals or strategies due to their own funding constraints. For example, the collaborative might be asking an organization to allocate resources to a type of programming that your funding does not cover. Do you feel that this is the case for any of the member organizations? *[If yes,]* Can you describe how that dynamic creates divergence between collaborative goals and the goals of the collaborative members?

19. In general within the collaborative, do you feel that there could be some improvement in aligning the goals of the member organizations with those of the systems change initiative? *[If yes,]* To what extent do you feel that lack of goal alignment is challenging for the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for how to create greater goal alignment?

Baseline Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol

Instructions for Tailoring the Protocol:

1. Name the systems change initiative that you are evaluating (replace "[X initiative]");
2. Name the focal population that the systems change initiative is focusing on (replace "*[focal population]*"); and
3. Name the outcomes that the system is designed to produce for the focal population (replace *"[X outcomes]"*).
4. Insert the appropriate confidentiality statement.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today! The purpose of this interview is to discuss the systems changes that the *[X initiative]* seeks to bring about. When I say "system," I mean it in a very

simple and concrete way: as a set of programs and services designed to support *[the focal population to accomplish X outcomes]*.

What makes this set of programs and services a "system" is two things. First, it's the fact that accomplishing *[x outcomes]* goes beyond the work that just one organization can do – instead it is the work of many organizations contributing to the support of *[the focal population]* in many different ways. Second, these organizations and programs are all connected to one another. In particular, there are connections between programs as clients move from one program to another to make continuing progress toward *[X outcomes]*.

So when I say "systems change," I'm just talking about two things. The changes in the *capacity* that these programs have to serve *[the focal population]* well, and the changes in the *connections* between programs so that clients are able to smoothly progress from one program to another.

So today I want to hear your thoughts about the efforts that *[X initiative]* is undertaking to bring about systems change. I'll be asking questions about what the efforts have been to build capacity of programs, and make the connections among programs more effective.

[Confidentiality statement.] Do you have any questions before we begin?

Efforts to Improve Pathway Effectiveness

1. What has the collaborative identified as the major reasons that *[the focal population]* is challenged in reaching goals? *[Listen for issues of both capacity and connections.]*

Pathway Capacity

2. *[For interviewees who identify program scale as an issue:]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to expand program supply or expand client access to programs?

3. *[For interviewees who identify program quality as an issue:]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to support a greater focus on quality or tailoring programs, in order to better meet client needs?

4. *[For interviewees who identify comprehensiveness as an issue:]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to make sure that there is the right mix of programs, and no gaps in services?

Pathway Connections

5. *[For interviewees who identify linkage as an issue:]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to create or bolster mechanisms that help clients link from one program to another?

6. *[For interviewees who identify alignment as an issue:]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to support changes in programs so that clients are well-prepared to succeed at later steps in the pathway, after completing earlier steps? How are they helping providers to align their programs?

7. *[For interviewees who identify cross-system coordination as an issue:]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to support cross-system coordination?

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Efforts to Reduce Structural Barriers and Build/Enhance Structural Enablers

8. Has the collaborative identified factors that make it hard to increase the scale, quality, or comprehensiveness of the programming available? *[If yes,]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to address these underlying factors?

9. Is the collaborative supporting or building any new organizations or institutions that can contribute to increased scale, quality, or comprehensiveness of the programming available? *[If yes,]* Can you tell me about those organizations or institutions?

10. Has the collaborative identified factors that make it hard to improve linkage and alignment for programs, or to improve cross-system coordination? *[If yes,]* What work is the collaborative undertaking to address these underlying factors?

11. Is the collaborative supporting or building any new organizations or institutions that can contribute to improved linkage or alignment, or to cross-system coordination? *[If yes,]* Can you tell me about those organizations or institutions?

Follow-up System (and Systems Change) Assessment Interview Protocol

Instructions:

1. **Tailor the protocol introduction:**
   a. Name the system that you are focusing on (replace "*[X system]*");
   b. Name the focal population that the systems change initiative is focusing on(replace "*[focal population]*");
   c. Explain the time in the past you are referring to (you are looking for updates on what has occurred since that time); and
   d. Insert the appropriate confidentiality statement.

2. **Use the completed challenges summary tables (for pathway capacity, pathway connections, and structural barriers) to tailor the protocol items:**
   a. Make multiple versions of the first question in each section, tailoring this item to the steps and connections appearing in the pathway capacity and connections summary tables (as well as to the steps and connections that you believe this stakeholder will be most informed about).
   b. Tailor the second item in each section by including a brief explanation of what you have learned about how structural barriers prevent pathway improvements.

3. **Share the ideal pathway graphic with the interviewee.**
   a. The purpose of sharing this graphic is to help the stakeholder focus on the particular steps and connections about which they are most informed, and to offer some shared vocabulary.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today! As part of the evaluation of the *[X Initiative,]* we are tracking over time the changes in *[X system]*. We can think of this system very simply: as a set of programs and services designed to support *[the focal population to accomplish X outcomes]*. I'm going to be referring to this set of programs and services as a "pathway," because clients typically move from one type of program to another, getting closer to *[the ultimate outcome].* To help us think concretely about this system during this interview, I want to share this graphic showing an "ideal pathway." It shows the steps that a client might typically move through in order to be successful with the ultimate outcome.

We did an assessment of the pathway at *[a time-point in the past]*. The goal of this interview is to gain some insights into where the system may have changed, and where it is not. I'd also like to hear your thoughts about what is *preventing* changes that could make the pathway more effective for the clients who participate in this set of programs.

[Confidentiality statement.] Do you have any questions before we begin?

Assessing over-Time Change in Pathway Capacity and Related Structural Barriers and Enablers

Scale

[Focus on the steps that the interviewee has specific knowledge of.]

1. In the last stakeholder assessment we collected data about program supply and access. We heard from stakeholders that *[at X step]* the number of program slots available wasn't enough to meet the need of *[the focal population]*, and/or that clients have challenge with accessing services. Can you tell me about the progress that has been made on scale since then?

2. *[If progress has been made,]* How do you explain the progress? What has contributed to growth in supply and access? *[If little progress has been made,]* What is creating challenges for additional progress?

Quality

[Focus on the steps that the interviewee has specific knowledge of.]

3. In the last stakeholder assessment we collected data about the challenges related to program quality. We heard from stakeholders that lack of program quality was an issue for *[X step].* Can you tell me about the progress that has been made on program quality since then?

4. *[If progress has been made,]* How do you explain the progress? What has contributed to increased quality? *[If little progress has been made,]* What is creating challenges for additional progress?

Comprehensiveness

[Focus on the steps that the interviewee has specific knowledge of.]

5. In the last stakeholder assessment we collected data about the challenges related to program comprehensiveness – whether there is the right mix of programs and no service gaps. We heard from stakeholders *[X information about comprehensiveness.]* Can you tell me about the progress that has been made on comprehensiveness since then?

6. *[If progress has been made,]* How do you explain the progress? What has contributed to greater comprehensiveness? *[If little progress has been made,]* What is creating challenges for additional progress?

Assessing over-Time Change in Pathway Connections and Related Structural Barriers

So far we've been focusing on what happens *at* each step, or on the attributes of programs and services. Now I want to turn to the connections *between* steps, or between programs that are in different steps. Connections are about making sure that clients successfully transition from one step to the next, and make progress toward their ultimate goals (in this case, *[goals for the pathway]*). As part of the

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evaluation, we are tracking how these connections are improving. Here I have a table summarizing what stakeholders have most recently said about the effectiveness of pathway connections, and I want to hear what you think about where connections might be getting more effective. *[Show the pathway connections challenges table.]*

Linkage and Alignment

[Focus on the connections that the interviewee has specific knowledge of. When the interviewee has discussed all of the relevant connections, ask the second question in this section.]

7. In the last stakeholder assessment we did about challenges that clients may face in making these transitions from *[those that are summarized in the connections challenges summary table].* Do you feel that there have been improvements here? If yes, what are they?

8. *[If progress has been made,]* How do you explain the progress? What has contributed to better linkages and alignment? *[If little progress has been made,]* What is creating challenges for additional progress?

Cross-System Coordination

9. In the last stakeholder assessment we did about challenges of coordination between this system and *[a complementary system].* Do you feel that there has been greater coordination? If yes, what does that look like?

10. *[If there is greater coordination,]* What has contributed to better improved coordination? *[If little progress has been made,]* What is creating challenges for additional progress?

Follow-up Collaboration Assessment Interview Protocol

Instructions for Tailoring the Protocol:

1. Name the systems change initiative that you are evaluating (replace "[*X initiative*]");
2. Name the collaborative that governs/implements the initiative (replace "[*X collaborative*]") OR: if there are multiple collaborative committees involved in governance and implementation, name these committees.
3. If there are multiple collaborative committees, choose just one to focus on for a particular interview (the committee chosen will depend on who the key informant is). This instruction does not apply to those items that intentionally focus on multiple committees.
4. Throughout the protocol, there are two versions of most questions: one for collaboratives that faced a challenge (or for interviewees that had given a positive answer during the previous interview); the other for collaboratives that excelled in that area (or for interviewees that had given a negative answer). Delete the items that do not apply to a particular collaborative or interviewee.
5. There are two sections on member engagement: one for members, the other for high-level staff who are informed about member engagement. Choose the appropriate section to include in the protocol.
6. Insert the appropriate confidentiality statement.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today! As you know, the *[X Initiative]* is the work of *[X collaborative]. [If there is more than one collaborative committee involved in the initiative, you can use this type of language instead:]* As you know, there are multiple collaboratives involved in the governing and implementation of the *[X Initiative].* They include: *[names of the collaborative committees.]* The purpose of this interview is to discuss the role of collaboration bringing about systems change, and

today we will discuss the role, in particular, of *[X collaborative committee]*. We have been tracking over time how the collaboration is changing. Collaborations tend to get stronger over time, although progress is not always linear. I want to hear your thoughts on the how the collaboration is changing, and perhaps is improving in terms of its ability to support the initiative's progress. I would also like to hear any suggestions you may have on how collaboration might be improved in ways that would *better* support the initiative's progress.

[Confidentiality statement.] Do you have any questions before we begin?

Governance Structure and Process

I'd like to first ask you a few questions about the collaborative's structure and process, and how its structure and process support its ability to successfully move the systems change initiative toward its goals.

1. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as challenged by a lack of clarity in the division of labor:]* Do you feel that roles and responsibilities of *[X collaborative committee]* members are becoming more clear over time? *[If yes,]* How has this additional clarity supported the progress of the initiative? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear roles and responsibilities hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how roles might become more clearly defined?

2. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having a clear division of labor:]* From what we understand, *[X collaborative committee]* has done well in terms of setting up a clear division of labor among members. How has this clarity supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

3. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as challenged by a lack of clarity in the division of labor among multiple committees:]* Do you feel that the division of labor among different committees has become more clear over time? *[If yes,]* In what ways has this additional clarity support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear roles and responsibilities hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how roles might become more clearly defined?

4. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having a clear division of labor:]* From what we understand, *[X collaborative committee]* has done well in terms of setting up a clear division of labor among committees. How has this clarity supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

5. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as challenged by a need for more clearly defined decision-making protocols:]* Have decision-making protocols for *[X collaborative committee]* become more clearly defined over time? Do collaborative members know what decisions they "own," and what the decision rules are for making a particular decision (consensus, majority vote, etc)? *[If yes,]* In what ways has this additional clarity support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear decision-making protocols hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how decision-making for *[X collaborative committee]* might become more effective?

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6. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having clearly defined decision-making protocols:]* From what we understand, *[X collaborative committee]* has done well in terms of creating clear decision-making protocols. How has this clarity supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

7. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as challenged by a need for more clearly defined decision-making protocols among multiple committees:]* Have decision-making protocols among multiple committees become more clearly defined over time? Do the different collaborative committees understand their roles in specific decisions, such as ultimate sign-off, providing input, owning a decision, etc? *[If yes,]* In what ways has this additional clarity support the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways do unclear decision-making protocols hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how decision-making for the initiative overall might become more effective?

8. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having clearly defined decision-making protocols among multiple committees:]* From what we understand, the initiative has done well in terms of creating clear protocols for decisions that need the participation of multiple committees. How has this clarity supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

9. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as challenged by a need for clearer lines of communication:]* Have lines of communication among committees become more effective over time? *[If yes,]* In what ways has more effective communication supported the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* In what ways does ineffective communication hinder the ability of the initiative to make progress? Do you have suggestions for how lines of communication might become more effective?

10. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having clear lines of communication:]* From what we understand, the initiative has done well in terms of setting up clear lines of communication among committees. How has effective communication supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

11. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as challenged by a need for more effective project management:]* Has project management become more effective over time, enabling the work of the initiative can move forward smoothly? Do you have suggestions for how project management might become more effective?

12. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having effective project management:]* From what we understand, the initiative has good project management that supports the initiative to move forward smoothly. How has good project management supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

13. Do you have any other suggestions for how to improve the collaborative's structure and process so that it can more effectively support progress on the systems change initiative's goals?

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Accountability Framework

14. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as needing to do a better job of identifying clear goals:]* Has the collaborative made progress in identifying clear goals? *[If yes,]* In what ways have clearer goals promoted the success of the *[X initiative]*? Do you have any suggestions for improvement here?

15. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having identified clear goals:]* From what we understand, the initiative has established clear goals. How would you say that clear goals have supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

16. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as needing to do a better job of developing a system of accountability:]* Has the collaborative made progress in developing a system of accountability in which the collaborative members are accountable to specific goals? *[If yes,]* In what ways have clearer goals promoted the success of the *[X initiative]*? Do you have any suggestions for improvement here?

17. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as having developed an effective system of accountability:]* From what we understand, the initiative has established an effective system of accountability in which the collaborative members are accountable to specific goals. How would you say that this system of accountability has supported the progress of the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

18. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as needing to do a better job of reflecting on performance:]* Does the collaborative periodically reflect on performance against targets? *[If yes,]* Do you feel that this periodic reflection supports progress in the systems change initiative? In what ways? Do you have any suggestions for improvement here?

19. *[For collaboratives that stakeholders have described in the past as doing a good job of reflecting on performance:]* From what we understand, collaborative members periodically reflect on performance against targets. Do you feel that this periodic reflection supports progress in the systems change initiative? In what ways? Do you have any suggestions for improvement, or would you say that *[X collaborative committee]* continues to excel in this area?

Member Engagement (for Collaborative Members)

[In developing a protocol for a specific organization, revisit the most recent interview transcript, so that you can tailor the questions according to the information they have most recently shared.]

Organizations have their own goals. Being part of a collaborative can often help them meet those goals, but it is also true that committing resources to the collaborative goals can be difficult in the face of competing demands.

20. *[For organizations that saw their goals as highly aligned with those of the initiative:]* When we last spoke, I heard from you that your organization's goals are well-aligned with those of the initiative. Does being part of this collaborative and initiative continue to help your organization to meet its own goals? *[If yes,]* can you provide a brief example? *[If no, go on to the next question.]*

21. Can you tell me about initiative goals that are *difficult* for your organization to meet, due to competing demands on its resources and staff time? Can you provide an example or two?

22. *[For organizations that experienced goal incongruence with those of the initiative:]* When we last spoke, I heard from you that there was some lack of alignment between your organization's goals and the goals of the initiative. Has that changed at all? Is there any greater alignment than there used to be? *[If yes,]* Can you tell me about how your organization's goals came to be more aligned with those of the initiative? And are there ways that the greater alignment has promoted the initiative's progress? *[If no,]* What are your thoughts about what has prevented an evolution toward greater goal alignment? Do you have ideas about how greater goal alignment might be accomplished?

23. *[If the interviewee has not already addressed funding constraints in the answer to the previous question:]* Organizations in a collaborative often find it difficult to support collaborative goals or strategies due to their own funding constraints. For example, the collaborative might be asking your organization to allocate resources to a type of programming that your funding does not cover. Is that the case at all? *[If yes,]* Can you describe how that creates divergence between collaborative goals and your own goals?

24. In general within the collaborative, do you feel that there could be some improvement in aligning the goals of the member organizations with those of the systems change initiative? *[If yes,]* To what extent do you feel that lack of goal alignment is challenging for the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for how to create greater goal alignment?

Member Engagement (for High-Level Staff Informed about Member Engagement)

Organizations have their own goals. Being part of a collaborative can often help them meet those goals, but it is also true that committing resources to the collaborative goals can be difficult in the face of competing demands. I would like to hear your thoughts about the organizations that are members of the collaborative.

25. I'd like to hear first about goal alignment. Do you feel that there has been positive evolution in terms of the member organizations seeing that membership in the collaborative helps them to meet their own organizational goals? *[If yes,]* Can you describe what that evolution has looked like? *[If no,]* Why do you think there has been little progress in this area?

26. Organizations in a collaborative often find it difficult to support collaborative goals or strategies due to their own funding constraints. For example, the collaborative might be asking an organization to allocate resources to a type of programming that your funding does not cover. This was the case for some of the member organizations the last time we collected data on collaboration. Do you feel that this is still the case for any of the member organizations? *[If yes,]* Can you describe how that dynamic creates divergence between collaborative goals and the goals of the collaborative members?

27. In general within the collaborative, do you feel that there could be some improvement in aligning the goals of the member organizations with those of the systems change initiative? *[If yes,]* To what extent do you feel that lack of goal alignment is challenging for the initiative? Do you have any suggestions for how to create greater goal alignment?

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Follow-up Systems Change Efforts Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today! As part of the evaluation of the *[X initiative],* we are tracking stakeholders' views of how successful As you know, the *[X Initiative]* is the work of *[X collaborative]. [If there is more than one collaborative committee involved in the initiative, you can use this type of language instead:]* As you know, there are multiple collaboratives involved in the governing and implementation of the *[X Initiative].* They include: *[names of the collaborative committees.]* The purpose of this interview is to discuss the systems changes that the *[X collaborative]* is seeking to bring about through the *[X initiative].* The *[X initiative]* is designed, in part, to ensure that *[the focal population]* is more successful in achieving *[X outcomes]*. So by "systems change," I simply mean growth in the capacity of programs, and improvements in connections among those programs, which result in greater success in achieving *[X outcomes]*.

So today I want to hear your thoughts about the efforts that *[X initiative]* is undertaking to bring about systems change, and whether those efforts are beginning to bear more fruit as the initiative progresses. I'll be asking questions about what the efforts have been to build capacity of programs, and make the connections among programs more effective.

[Confidentiality statement.] Do you have any questions before we begin?

General

1. An important part of systems change is the changed behavior of organizations in the system. Can you identify any significant differences in the role that your organization is playing in the system that are a result of the systems change initiative? *[If the organization is doing something differently,]* Can you tell me how the initiative brought about this change?

Efforts to Improve Pathway Effectiveness

Pathway Capacity

2. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to increase the supply of program slots and access to them. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

3. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to increase program quality. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

4. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to increase comprehensiveness. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

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<u>Pathway Connections</u>

5. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to increase effective linkages between programs. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

6. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to improve the alignment between programs. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

7. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to increase cross-system coordination. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

Efforts to Reduce Structural Barriers

12. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to address the underlying factors that have made it difficult to increase the scale, quality, or comprehensiveness of the programming available. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

13. When we last interviewed stakeholders, we heard that the initiative was using *[these strategies]* to address the underlying factors that have made it difficult to increase the linkage, alignment, and cross-system coordination. To what extent have these efforts been successful?

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Steps 4 & 5) Collect Data at Baseline and Follow-up

At its most basic, data collection is simply about scheduling and conducting key informant interviews (or focus groups, where appropriate), and reviewing documents. This section of the toolkit builds on these basics of formal data collection in two ways:

1. Offering guidance for how to supplement your formal baseline/follow-up data collection with a DE approach to data collection; and

2. Providing a few data "data aggregation tools" that you can use to aggregate and begin to process the data you've collected during interviews and document review.

Collecting Data as a Learning Partner

When conducting a systems change evaluation, limiting data collection to discrete time-points can be hazardous. Things never stop moving and changing – strategies are designed, tested, and adapted. New problems and solutions emerge, and the constellation of actors may change. Under these circumstances, an evaluator undertaking a traditional approach may feel constantly behind the curve, and initiative stakeholders may become impatient with the frequent need to bring the evaluator up to speed. While stakeholders can report to evaluators, this is not the same as witnessing the initiative's evolution first-hand – there is no substitute for being embedded, and acting less as a traditional third-party evaluator and more as a "learning partner."
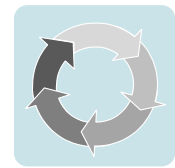
For this reason it is a good idea to build trust early on with key stakeholders so that you can participate in key collaborative meetings where problems are grappled with and decisions made. This will allow you a front-row seat to the ongoing development of the initiative: you will have the opportunity to observe collaborative functioning, and to witness changes unfolding within the system. Being at these tables will also open the door to quick, informal conversations where you can get your questions answered quickly.

Working as a learning partner may be especially helpful in learning about structural barriers, because information about these barriers is less likely to be documented in the more obvious ways that the pathway and the initiative goals and strategies are. This is because the structural barriers can be harder to "see," and will tend to be unearthed over time as the initiative evolves. You are more likely to discover these barriers while discussing the various challenges of the work with stakeholders. In these conversations, listen for what people say about how the current state of affairs is getting in the way of moving the initiative goals forward. What do the current sets of incentives, constraints, and opportunities look like? In particular, listen for such challenges as:

- How insufficient resources mean that there is an undersupply of program slots for the focal population.

- How the current allocation of resources makes it difficult for providers to design programs properly tailored to the focal population (e.g., categorical funding streams constrain providers to offer only a certain type of programming, which may not work for this population, or particular performance mandates incentivize providers to serve clients other than the focal population).

- How a lack of coordinating institutions reduces or prevents opportunities for providers to work well with one another to develop effective linkages or alignment.

- How a lack of coordinating institutions makes it difficult to coordinate across complementary systems.

- How relevant policies, laws, or regulations constrain actors' ability to build effective pathways, or set up incentives that run counter to actions that would support effective pathways.

- How the lack of a knowledge base, or lack of a widely-shared knowledge base, constrains the ability of providers to design high-quality programs.

- How culture, norms, or standard operating procedures limit the way that actors think about what is in the realm of the possible for making changes that would support effective pathways.

It can be very difficult for people to "see" the structure. But because structural barriers prevent systems change agents from building more effective pathways, the ability to see the barriers can be an important contribution to a systems change initiative. It will be very helpful for the evaluator to provide their insights to the learning team regarding what the structural barriers might be, and showing them the way that the current institutional structures are keeping pathways "stuck" as they are now (configured in such a way that pathways are not supporting clients as effectively as they should be).

Data Aggregation Tools

The data aggregation tools you will find in this section are actually a hybrid of data collection instruments and data analysis tools. As you collect and store your data, it is a good idea to begin preliminary analysis; that way you will stay on top of things, and not be saddled with hundreds of pages of notes and interview transcripts to process all at once. In addition, as a learning partner with a "DE stance," you should be making meaning of your data in an ongoing way, and working with your learning team to make good use of the findings in a timely way.

This section of the toolkit has two tools you can use for recording and storing data:

- **Structural Barriers Summary Table.** This table stores information about how various types of structural barriers stand in the way of actors' ability to make changes that would improve pathway capacity and pathway connections.

- **Collaborative Description Tables.** There are three tables that you can use to store information about the collaborative: its structure, process, and accountability framework.

In addition, you will want to use the Pathway Challenge Summary table that was introduced in the Orientation section, and keep updating the Pathway Challenge Summary as you go.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TABLE					
Aspects of Pathway Challenges	**Questions to Ask about Barriers to Effective Pathways:** What stands in the way of…	**Resource-Related Barriers**	**Policy-Related Barriers**	**Knowledge Base-Related Barriers**	**Culture-Related Barriers**
Scale	The capacity of providers to offer enough program slots?				
	The focal population being able to access programs?				
Quality	Greater program quality?				
	The capacity of providers to tailor the programs to the needs of the focal population?				
Comprehensiveness	Having the right mix of programs to meet diverse needs of the focal population?				
	Ensuring there are no service gaps?				
Linkages	Creating or maintaining linking mechanisms that enable participants to successfully transition from one program or pathway step to another?				
Alignment	Providers' ability to align the content of their programs, so that participants exiting one pathway step or program are set up to succeed in the next?				
Cross-System Coordination	System actors' ability to link or align the focal system with other, complementary systems?				

COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURE TABLE				
Aspect of Structure	Rating			**Description of Collaborative Structure**
	Mostly Adhocratic	In-between	Mostly Hierarchically Unified	
Hierarchy — Within committees, is there a lead agency?				•
Hierarchy — With multiple committees, are there lines of hierarchical accountability?				•
Division of Labor — Is there a clear and codified division of labor among committee members, and/or between committees?				•
Division of Labor — Are there clear jurisdictional lines for committee members or multiple committees, with no overlap?				•
Structural Linking Mechanisms — Are inter-committee linkages intentionally designed and institutionalized?				•
Managers — Are there dedicated project managers at every level who assign responsibility for task execution and ensure follow-through?				•

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS TABLE				
	Rating			
Aspect of Process	Mostly Informal	In-between	Mostly Formal	**Description of Collaborative Process**
Codification	Do committees have charters codifying their roles and responsibilities?				•
	Are there MOUs among member organizations and/or between committees?				•
Decision-Making	Is there a protocol for the roles that different committees will play in decisions?				•
	Are there decision rules for specific decisions?				•
Dedicated Support Staff	Do committees have staff support?				•
Convening	Do meetings take place regularly?				•
	Are meetings facilitated by a dedicated convener?				•
	Do meetings have formal agendas with clear objectives?				•
	Do participants receive information in advance of the meetings?				•
Knowledge Management	Are there specific types of information that are formally shared at regular intervals?				•

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ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK TABLE				
Aspect of Accountability Framework	**Rating**			**Description of the Collaborative's Accountability Framework**
	Framework not Institutionalized	**Framework Partially Institutionalized**	**Framework Institutionalized**	
Goals — Have clear goals been established?				•
Metrics — Have metrics been identified that align with goals?				•
Targets — Have targets been established?				•
Accountability — Are organizations accountable for meeting targets?				•
Joint Accountability — Do organizations within the collaborative have joint accountability for meeting targets?				•
Reflection — Does the collaborative reflect regularly on progress against targets?				•

Step 6) Describe Change between Baseline and Follow-up

To understand *how* over-time systems change has taken place, you should first have a thorough understanding of *what* the over-time change looks like. By organizing your findings using the layout below you will be able to see what the major changes are. You will need more room than is represented in this table, but it gives you an idea of how to set up a simple "compare and contrast" exercise. You can place next to one another the summaries you already developed in the Pathway Challenge Summary table and the Structural Barriers table. As you look at these summaries together, you should be able to spot the major changes for capacity, connections, and structure.

OVER-TIME SYSTEM CHANGES SUMMARY TABLE			
System Component	Baseline Summary	Follow-up Summary	Summary of Major Changes
Pathway Capacity			
Pathway Connections			
Institutional Structure			

After identifying the major changes in pathways and structures, you will want to look for ways that reduced structural barriers, or the development of new/better facilitating structures have *cleared the way* for changes at the pathway level. Consider:

- How have new policies, laws, regulations; more funding and different resource allocations; shifted culture, norms, and standard operating procedures; new or more widely disseminated knowledge bases:
  - o Supported system stakeholders (funders, providers, intermediaries) to expand program supply and quality, and ensure greater comprehensiveness?
  - o Made it easier for providers to link to one another effectively, improve their alignment, or coordinate with complementary systems?

RELATING PATHWAY CHANGES TO CHANGES IN INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE		
Summary of Major Changes in Pathway Capacity and Connections	Summary of Major Changes in the Institutional Structure	How Structural Changes have "Cleared the Way" for Pathway Changes

If you are including in your evaluation an exploration of the collaborative functioning, you will want to carry out a similar exercise for comparing the collaborative at different time-points.

OVER-TIME COLLABORATIVE CHANGES SUMMARY TABLE			
Aspect of Collaborative	Baseline Summary	Follow-up Summary	Summary of Major Changes
Structure & Process			
Member Engagement			
Accountability Framework			

Step 7) Analyze How the Intervention Contributed to Change between Baseline and Follow-up

After you describe how the pathways and structure differ at baseline and follow-up, you can take the analysis a step further and explore the ways that the initiative's strategies have contributed to the changes you identified. If you are focusing your evaluation on collaborative functioning, you will also want to bring in an analysis of the effect that collaborative functioning has had on the success of the systems change initiative.

You can organize the analysis using the structure outlined in the table below, with these three steps:

1. Complete the first column with findings from interviews and document review,
2. Complete the second column by copying from the final column of the over-time system changes summary table in step 6,
3. Complete the third column by tracing the story of how changes link to efforts, and
4. Complete the fourth column by considering how the functioning of the collaborative has contributed to the extent of success that the initiative has had.

| RELATING SYSTEMS CHANGES TO CHANGES IN COLLABORATIVE EFFECTIVENESS				
System Component	Systems Change Efforts	Summary of Major Changes	Story of how Systems Changes are Related to Efforts	The Contribution of Collaborative Effectiveness
Pathway Capacity				
Pathway Connections				
Institutional Structure				

Work with your learning team (and other key stakeholders) to uncover the story of how efforts are related to changes, and what the contribution of collaborative effectiveness has been. You can bring together your groups of stakeholders for reflection exercises for the purpose of making sense of your findings. It will be helpful to put together a PowerPoint deck or a memo that outlines the efforts, summaries of major changes, and what you have learned about collaborative effectiveness. Then together with a group of stakeholders you can reflect on what the links are among efforts, changes, and the collaborative.

Step 8) Develop Recommendations

Developing recommendations is often part of what we do as evaluators. We do this as part of a systems change evaluation as well, but – using the DE approach – we take a much more partnership-oriented approach to this task than we would with a typical third-party evaluation. You, as the systems change evaluator and learning partner, can work with your learning team to reflect on findings. You and your team can learn together what the findings mean for how the initiative might move forward. Reflection questions can consider the findings with one basic question in mind: **What should we do *next*?** If we apply this question to the systems change framework in this Guide, we come up with these three versions of the one major question:
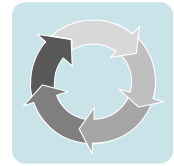
- Given what we have learned about the ways that current pathway capacity and connections make it difficult for clients to succeed, where should the collaborative concentrate its efforts on pathway improvements?

- Given what we have learned about how structural barriers stand in the way of increased capacity and improved connections, what are the collaborative's opportunities to lower structural barriers in ways that will make it easier for system actors to build effective pathways?

- Given what we have learned about how the collaborative is functioning, and about how its functioning affects the initiative's effectiveness, what changes to the collaborative might benefit the systems change initiative?

Conclusion

There are many ways to approach an exploration of systems. This Guide offers one way, focusing explicitly on human services systems, and capitalizing on a range of ways that system actors often think about their work: in terms of programs and pathways; the capacity of sets of programs and how programs interconnect; the policies and funding environment that shape our options; the culture and knowledge that encompass and ground how we collectively move forward; and how we come together in collaboratives to address challenging issues.

The Guide is also meant to support evaluators in grappling with systems and systems change by *thinking sociologically*. The fundamental sociological insight comes from Karl Marx:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.

The client must contend with programs and pathways that are given to her as immutable structures, existing already and transmitted from the past. To the architects of pathways – providers, governments, funders, advocates, intermediaries – pathways are nearly as immutable. But often we come together collaboratively to find ways to shift the pathways, making them easier to navigate, and ultimately allowing for greater client success. As we change the pathways, we change the *system.*

But in seeking to change the pathways, we face another layer of the system: the institutional structures that shape pathways, and that very often stand in the way of efforts to *reconfigure* those pathways. Again we are faced with a structure mostly outside of our individual control – circumstances transmitted from the past. And again we must come together to undertake collective action to change these institutional structures (policy, resources, culture, knowledge). In changing these structures, we can often clear the way for making pathways more effective, and in doing so, lay the groundwork that helps our clients to thrive.

People navigating human services systems, along with those of us looking for ways to make life better for those people – together, we all make history every day. But often the history we make today is very much like the history we made yesterday. To open up our ability to make history in a *new* way: that is the work of systems change. If we can think sociologically about systems, we can see the nature of what we are up against, and what we need to do differently.

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