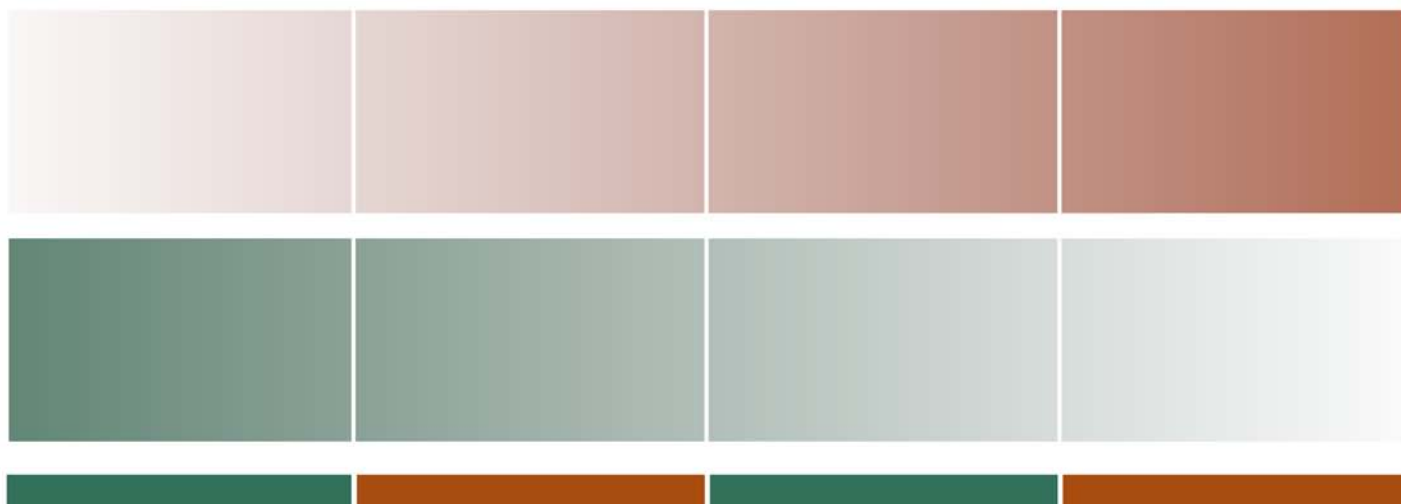


Service Coordination to Achieve Results in Promise Neighborhoods

An Issue Brief



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This issue brief is part of the “Real Time Lessons Learned” Series: a collection of papers that draw on the experience of The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s place-based work, particularly the Making Connections initiative, to share information, strategies, evidence and ideas that can assist the federal government and private sector and philanthropic efforts to improve results for children, youth and families.

For more than 30 years, CSSP has been working with state and federal policymakers and communities across the country. Focused on public policy, research and technical assistance, the nonpartisan Washington, D.C. nonprofit promotes smart policies that improve the lives of children and their families. Using data, extensive community experience and a focus on results, CSSP works to achieve equity for those too often left behind. Through all its work CSSP promotes an even playing field for children of all races, ethnicities and income levels. For more information, visit www.cssp.org.

SERVICE COORDINATION TO ACHIEVE RESULTS IN *PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS*¹

Overview

The *Promise Neighborhoods* initiative is likely to set ambitious goals for communities to assure that children are healthy, succeed in school, graduate from college and live in families that are stable and supportive. Achieving these results for children and families will require the efforts of multiple agencies, organizations and individuals who will each be expected to coordinate their work with multiple partners, a complex challenge faced by community change initiatives.

The long history of community reform efforts that have required integration of services reveals a list of challenges and some lessons for the future. However, chief among the challenges is the strong propensity for form over function where the driving reason for coordinating services, namely improving outcomes for children and families, becomes secondary to the structural arrangements. This focus on the structure (i.e., mandating coordinating bodies and protocols) without a strong focus on shared results or outcomes cannot overcome the multiple challenges to service coordination such as: bureaucratic barriers or turf protection, different philosophies or missions, different performance measures or results; incompatible information management systems; different eligibility requirements; different funding requirements; changes in political support; changes in economic conditions and changes in leadership.

This paper shares several key observations derived from the history and difficulty of coordinating services in past initiatives. First, service coordination that appropriately serves as a means to an end (improved results for children and families, in the case of *Promise Neighborhoods*) should flow from a strong, shared sense of the results to be achieved. Second, this requires an agreed upon set of results developed through a collaborative process that recognizes a shared responsibility and accountability. Third, neighborhoods by themselves are unlikely to be able to achieve results in isolation, without the support and involvement of state and local government and the commitment for parallel work related to policy and resource creation. Finally, there should be an agreement about both the capacity required of communities that undertake this work as well as the support needed by communities to be successful.

Communities should begin with an agreed upon set of results.

Evidence from community change work indicates that the most powerful force for effective coordination of services is a common definition of, commitment to, and accountability around a set of core results². Focusing on the result allows the

¹ This is one of several briefs prepared by the Center for the Study of Social Policy for the Office of Innovation and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education, to assist the OII in its planning for the launch of *Promise Neighborhoods*.

² This is a primary learning from the *Making Connections* initiative, supported by the Annie E. Casey initiative from 1999 through 2010.

community to “start with the end in mind” and work collaboratively to identify the means to get there. A clear focus on results provides an opportunity to avoid the common pitfalls of past service integration efforts which sometimes lead with (and become stalled in) structure as opposed to keeping the focus of attention on what is to be accomplished.

A results approach in *Promise Neighborhoods* should drive a community planning process that produces collective agreement about the results (the desired quality of life) and the selection of indicators (measures of progress). The mix of services needed to achieve these results and the approach to delivering and coordinating appropriate services are most likely to be effective when they flow from a results-focused planning process. This gives the needed legitimacy and direction for community efforts which in turn can help overcome the typical barriers to service coordination.

Consensus is developed through a collaborative planning process.

In order to develop collective agreement on the results to be achieved, communities will need a collaborative approach involving a range of stakeholders including families and youth; schools and the school system; other human service systems such as health, mental health, employment and training, and social services; elected officials; civic leaders such as United Way and local foundations; business; and others. The identification of participants may necessitate an element of local determination combined with guidance from the federal initiative. As part of this process, a series of results-focused questions may prompt the development of the mix of services and supports appropriate to individual communities. Such questions might be:

- Who are the customers/beneficiaries/participants? (Whom are we trying to serve?)
- How will they be better off?
- How can the services and supports work better together to contribute to the likelihood that the customers/beneficiaries/participants will be better off?
- What is the necessary service mix, and how can those services be best organized or connected in order to achieve desired results?

This type of results-based planning is essential to developing coordinated activities that are responsive to the needs of children, families and the community.

Creating the appropriate balance and mixture of services cannot be accomplished at the neighborhood level alone.

Experience from comprehensive community efforts suggests that the blending of services to meet individuals’ and families’ needs must occur within a broader context that includes system improvements, policy innovation and creative financing opportunities. These supports are critical to the success of community level integration efforts. In addition to the “horizontal” integration of services within a community, the capacity of the community to take advantage of the broader context cannot occur

without “vertical” integration (i.e., supports from funders at different levels of government). In order to navigate the challenges of agency policies, funding restrictions, eligibility requirements and other complexities, neighborhood institutions must be connected with city, county, state, and federal agencies, as well as philanthropic and economic institutions operating beyond the neighborhood.

Given the complexity of community change activities, including coordinating services, there should be a shared expectation of the grantee’s capacity and of the assistance needed to develop stronger competencies.

A core set of capacities for grantees should include:

- Developing and using a results framework and a community results process (i.e., building a results culture);
- Collecting and using data to understand the current situation and the "story behind the data", choose strategies, provide feedback to the community, and maintain accountability;
- Mobilizing powerful alliances of partners to achieve the results, such as public and private agencies, funders, parents and residents, business;
- Assuring resident engagement, leadership, "voice", and participation in decision-making
- Using multiple funding streams, including blending streams where necessary; and
- Building public will and maintaining community accountability, through effective communication with multiple audiences.

Specifically related to the multi-faceted challenges of coordinating services, grantees should likely be required to demonstrate the following capacities and experience:

- Capacity to achieve some level of service coordination to make services more coherent;
- Experience dealing with service barriers, through negotiations with city or agencies over changes to services or funding;
- Experience with negotiating changes in funding requirements (both programmatic and administrative) or funding amounts; and
- History of involvement with existing systems, through co-location or linkages.

Technical assistance will be necessary for *Promise Neighborhoods* to achieve the desired results and reach their potential. They will need to be supported by a federal initiative prepared to assist communities with the development of specific competencies and skills. Experience indicates that the following specific examples are important, within the broader framework of capacity outlined above:

- Developing expertise and flexibility in the use of public and private funds from several sources through a variety of funding mechanisms (ability to braid, blend, pool and target funds to achieve results); leveraging or obtaining new funds;

- Providing cross-systems, cross-disciplinary training to front-line staff;
- Utilizing outside resources (professional expertise, champions) to design or implement various strategies, develop financing approaches, collect data, develop public engagement strategies, leverage or obtain new funds, and/or negotiate organizational cultures, missions, eligibility requirements, and infrastructures;
- Simplifying access of residents to benefits, services and systems by negotiating toward more compatible organizational cultures, missions, eligibility requirements, and infrastructures; and
- Connecting with agencies on the city, state and federal levels and with philanthropic and economic institutions.

A final lesson that emerges from the decades of experience with service coordination and integration is that mandates for such coordination can be important (as evidence of leaders' commitment) but are rarely sufficient. More effective coordination and integration – which actually benefits the families and children whose lives are directly affected – is likely to occur when service staff and leaders are themselves the drivers for change, in conjunction with families themselves, because new patterns of service delivery are essential to achieving the results to which they are committed.