
Promoting Collaboration in Little Rock's Workforce Development System



A Plan for the Little Rock Workforce Development Board



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Executive Summary

The Little Rock Workforce Development Board (LRWDB) faces significant obstacles to achieving its goals, particularly its small staff and limited budget. Hence, an important strategy by which the LRWDB might extend its effect on workforce development is to act as an intermediary or “convener” for collaboration across organizations in workforce development in Little Rock. This role would enable the LRWDB to increase effectiveness and efficiency of these agencies and, as a result, better serve the community. This study examines the role that collaboration has in workforce development as well as to study aspects of the Little Rock workforce development system, including what functions organizations are providing and what opportunities for collaboration exist. This study addresses the following research questions:

- What organizations provide workforce development services in Little Rock and what services does each provide?
- What opportunities exist for collaborations in Little Rock’s workforce development system? What barriers exist to collaboration in workforce development in Little Rock?
- What factors promote successful workforce development collaboration within a metropolitan area?
- How should outcomes from workforce development collaboration be measured?

The research team used two approaches to answer these questions: stakeholder analysis and comparative case study design. Stakeholder analysis involved the examination of workforce development organizations located in Little Rock and was used to answer the first two research questions. The comparative case study was used to answer the third and fourth research questions and examines the workforce development systems of five comparison cities that are similar in important ways to Little Rock. Phone interviews were used to collect data for both methods.

This research found that the workforce development system in Little Rock is robust as it provides numerous workforce development functions to a variety of different types of clients. Collaboration was also found to be occurring throughout the Little Rock workforce development system and it is driven by funding rather than by shared goals or opportunities created by complementary staff expertise and talent. Additionally, this study found that significant differences exist between the Little Rock workforce development system and the comparison cities in the amount of collaboration that exists, the strategies used to promote collaboration, as well as the existence and role of a convener agency. Finally, this research found that the

utilization of performance measures by benchmark cities is minimal and largely limited to the use of simple counts.

Based on the findings of this study, the research team makes these recommendations:

1. The LRWDB should continue and expand its role as a convening organization or catalyst for workforce development collaboration in the Little Rock metropolitan region.
2. The LRWDB should consider facilitating the creation of a regional workforce development advisory board, perhaps in partnership with the Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board (CAWDB), in order to facilitate more effective collaboration on workforce development issues in Central Arkansas.
3. The LRWDB should consider elements of the Collective Impact approach to collaborative governance in its role as a facilitator for workforce development collaboration in the Central Arkansas region.

Introduction

The Little Rock Workforce Development Board (LRWDB) aims to develop a skilled workforce that will meet the employment demands of business and organizations in the community. Through its Little Rock Workforce Center (LRWFC), the LRWDB offers services to employers to assist them in finding qualified applicants and it assists job seekers with technical and soft skills training as well as other career services (Little Rock Workforce Development Board, 2017).

At the same time, the LRWDB faces obstacles to achieving its goals, particularly its small staff and limited budget. Hence, an important strategy by which the LRWDB might extend its effect on workforce development is to act as an intermediary or “convener” for collaboration across organizations in workforce development in Little Rock. This role would enable the LRWDB to increase effectiveness and efficiency of these agencies and, as a result, better serve the community. This study will examine how collaborative governance enhances workforce development services across cities in the United States. It will identify best practices through a review of differing approaches to collaborative governance. It will identify organizations that provide workforce services in Little Rock in order to ascertain the full spectrum of services offered to job seekers and employers. Interviews with the leaders of these agencies will assist the team in identifying opportunities for collaboration and illuminate possible convener roles for the LRWDB. We expect that the collaborative approach will be useful to local employers as they seek to fill job vacancies and will provide greater opportunities to job seekers in the form of targeted training and job placement services. Finally, tools for measuring the success of collaborative efforts will be examined and recommendations will be made for next steps in the process of establishing the LRWDB as a leader in developing a citywide workforce services consortium. In accordance with these goals, this study will address the following questions:

- 1) What organizations provide workforce development services in Little Rock and what services does each provide?
- 2) What opportunities exist for collaborations in Little Rock’s workforce development system? What barriers exist to collaboration in workforce development in Little Rock?
- 3) What factors promote successful workforce development collaboration within a metropolitan area?
- 4) How should outcomes from workforce development collaboration be measured?

Defining Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance brings together stakeholders to address public issues that are complex and are difficult to solve individually (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012; Kim & Darnall, 2016). In collaborative governance, stakeholders make and implement decisions about how to address a particular problem together (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Advantages of collaborative governance include the ability to implement policies and solve problems that would not be possible by one agency as well as to increase support of the community through the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders (Kim & Darnall, 2016).

Research has found that collaborative governance can be categorized into five major forms: funder, public-private partnerships, multi-stakeholder initiatives, social sector networks, and Collective Impact initiatives (Kania & Kramer 2011). Funder Collaboratives are made up of funders that are interested in the same issue. They do not develop, initiate and manage programs, but they do provide financial resources to groups to address the issues. Public-Private Partnerships are made up of government and private entities and focus on one narrow goal rather than a broad social problem. Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives involve volunteers who are concerned with a common issue, but do not perform shared measurement or sustain accountability. Social Sector Networks are most often created for information sharing and short-term programs rather than long-term change. Finally, Collective Impact Initiatives involve committed actors from many sectors for long-term action to create social change (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Though collaborative governance might be organized in any of these ways, the Collective Impact approach described by Kania and Kramer (2011) is particularly instructive in identifying key components to successful collaboration on public problems that are both local and complex. Kania and Kramer studied a collaborative effort in Cincinnati known as Strive that brought together members of the educational community to address the issue of poor achievement scores and declining graduation rates. The Strive collaborative was made up of 300 educational leaders, foundations, government officials, parents and nonprofit and advocacy groups, which focused on a “single set of goals, measured in the same way” (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Based on this research, Kania and Kramer identified five key elements to successful collaboration:

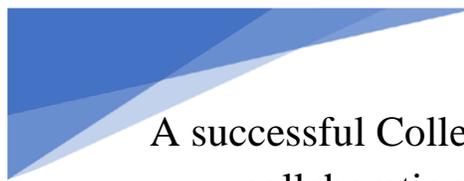
- A shared set of goals
- A common plan for measuring outcomes
- Mutually reinforcing activities
- On-going communication
- A coordinating or “backbone” organization

First, all parties must develop a common agenda, which involves a shared idea and understanding of the issues to be addressed (Kania & Kramer, 2011). According to Jim McKenzie, former director of Metroplan, opportunities for collaboration in metropolitan regions emerge in three ways (Personal communication, September 14, 2017). First, collaboration may be motivated by a “vacuum”, i.e. a problem that is not yet being addressed by any organization and making collaboration easier to coordinate as there are no threats to other groups. A second motivation for collaboration may be a crisis in which it has become necessary to address and solve a problem in a timely manner. Finally, collaboration might stem from directive, i.e. required partnerships that are mandated by a person or organization in power.

Developing a common agenda could take several meetings over the course of several weeks or months (J. McKenzie, personal communication, September 14, 2017). During this time, parties learn to put aside their differences, emerge from their silos and learn to trust one another. In fact, according to McKenzie, trust is crucial to the success of the collaborative. Many Collective Impact activities have been initiated because funding has required it. Still, it is important to ensure the partners have the right motivation to sustain activities past funding and keep the collaborative operating for years (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016)

Developing a shared measurement system is another element needed for successful collaboration. This requires that participants agree on what needs to be measured and how it will be measured. Due to the fact that there may be multiple agencies collecting data, the volume of information can become overwhelming. A common measurement system where results are measured on the same criteria enables the participants to determine the success of programs (Kania & Kramer, 2011). In workforce

development, data and benchmarks often vary by funder and target population, posing a challenge in developing a measurement process that will meet each stakeholder’s needs. The Workforce Data Quality Campaign, the Workforce Benchmarking Project and the State Workforce and Education Alignment Project provide ways of easing this problem for workforce development collaborations (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016).



A successful Collective Impact collaboration must have a backbone organization, or a convener, that manages the group, has staff to devote to the duties of the group and has the trust of the group

A third element of Collective Impact is to have mutually reinforcing activities. Each participant need not conduct the exact same program, but the programs need to be planned so that they are coordinated toward the common goal (Kania & Kramer, 2011). In fact, it is

beneficial that the programs are different because they will enhance each other, addressing different aspects of the problem creating a more holistic solution to complex issues.

Continuous communication is a fourth and equally important element of Collective Impact. The trust that was developed in the initial phases of a collaborative will be vital to communication. Regular meetings and various other ways of communicating must be scheduled so that the group develops a common vocabulary and can make mid-program shifts as necessary. This is also important when developing the shared measurement system (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Finally, a successful Collective Impact collaboration must have a backbone organization, or a convener, that manages the group, has staff to devote to the duties of the group and has the trust of the group. Leadership in this organization must be adaptive, be able to apply pressure to participants when needed, mediate conflict and keep the activities of the group focused on the issues at hand (Kania & Kramer, 2011).



Collaboration in Workforce Development

A workforce development system consists of organizations that prepare people for employment, address the workforce needs of businesses and the community and ensure a skilled workforce (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016; Leung, 2016; Urban Institute, 2016). Stakeholders may include governments, businesses, community colleges, universities, community-based organizations, unions and trade associations, philanthropic organizations, and non-profit organizations (Leung, 2016). Local workforce development systems provide education and training services to job seekers, offer support services such as subsidized child care, support employer’s human resource needs in customized training or job-retention, develop and coordinate workforce policy through advocacy and data analysis, and provide funding and resources and improve job quality and access (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016). Collaboration among organizations within the workforce development system “is often needed to support and deliver effective workforce services”, however being a part of a workforce development system does not mean that these collaborations are occurring (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016, p. 2).



Collaborative governance is a particularly attractive option in workforce development because it provides a way to better leverage scarce resources

Collaborative governance is a particularly attractive option in workforce development because it provides a way to better leverage scarce resources. Most local workforce development systems obtain a significant portion of their funding under the federal government’s Workforce Innovation an Opportunity Act (WIOA), which creates the state and local Workforce Development Board (WDB). It is intended that the WDB coordinate activities across multiple sectors for training, job placement, employer services and other activities including public funded programs such as child care and housing assistance (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016). Some WDBs have developed programs based on two overlapping strategies: the career pathways and the sector strategy. Career pathways align training, education and other programs with high-demand occupations in order to prepare workers for employment. Sector strategies are focused bringing stakeholders from specific industries together to address needs (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016).

Funding for workforce development systems comes from WIOA, which needs to be leveraged with other resources as federal funding is in decline. Employer-funded programs are also on the decline as are department of education budgets (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016). Therefore, this has been and will continue to be a challenge for WDBs in the future.

In addition, collaborative governance is appealing in workforce development systems because of the range of clients they handle. The clients of a workforce development system include youth ages 14 to 24, who are low-income and generally are those who have dropped out of school. Other clients include adults with various barriers to working, such as access to adequate and affordable childcare, substance abuse or incarceration issues, or little to no job experience. Uneducated adults use the programs of a workforce development system and need help with basic skills to become employable. Finally, adults who are dislocated owing to a layoff or who need additional training or education to become re-employed are important workforce development clients (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016). The variation in clients within a local workforce development system often results in fragmentation or “siloeing” across organizations in the clients they serve and the functions they provide. Collaborative approaches to governing workforce development systems may help to solve some of the challenges that this fragmentation creates.

Collaborative governance is particularly important in Arkansas local workforce development systems. In 2011, the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services hired the Kaiser Group, Inc. to conduct an evaluation of Workforce Investment System in Arkansas. The report cited “collaboration as being at the root of the success of the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) initiative as multiple partners have worked with both business customers and job seekers to understand the benefits of work readiness assessment” (Kaiser Group, Inc., 2011, p. 8). The report stated services provided to employers occurs through collaboration in the form of events such as job fairs. Additionally, the report found that individuals working in workforce development organizations viewed collaboration as a “one of the premier strengths of the current system” that allowed them to effectively serve their clients (Kaiser Group, Inc., 2011, p. 8).



Methods of Analysis

While the existing research on collaborative governance and workforce development underscores the significant benefits that may come from collaboration, it does not provide specific guidance for how to promote collaborative governance in Central Arkansas' workforce development system. To address this, the research team carried out two types of analysis: a stakeholder analysis of Little Rock workforce development organizations and a comparative case study of workforce development systems in five other metropolitan regions.

Stakeholder analysis aims to gather information about key players when looking at implementing new processes or making decisions (Varvasovsky and Brugha, 2000). For the stakeholder analysis, the research team interviewed seventeen Little Rock workforce organizations to identify services that are currently provided in the community and to illuminate opportunities for collaboration. This data helps to answer the first two research questions: 1) what organizations provide workforce services in Little Rock and what services does each provide, and 2) what are the issues and opportunities for collaboration?

The second method the research team used, comparative case study, compares workforce development systems in five metropolitan regions that are similar to Little Rock. According to Goodrick (2014), "comparative case studies cover two or more cases in a way that produces more generalizable knowledge about causal questions – how and why particular programmes or policies work or fail to work" (p. 1). For this project, the comparative case study design was used to answer the final two research questions: 3) how should workforce development be organized, what are the models and best practices, and how does the LRWDB change in organizational design and in leadership on the board, and 4) what are the measures of performance, benefits, and drawbacks of successful collaboration? This analysis assisted the research team in developing an in-depth understanding of the collaborative process and how to establish the LRWDB as a leader in this process.

Stakeholder Analysis

The research team identified stakeholder organizations in Little Rock based on a search of workforce development organizations, in consultation with the LRWDB. The team selected organizations to interview based on the following priorities: existing partnerships with the LRWDB, relevance to the study, location of organization, organizational structure, community representation, and coordination of services. While the team did not interview all workforce organizations, it made an effort to make sure the interviewed organizations represented a variety of organizations that provide workforce development, including those from the nonprofit, government, and for-profit sectors, as well as organizations that provide services to job seekers and employers. Organizations that were not included in the study were those that did not fit

these priorities or those that were not identified in the initial search of workforce development organizations in Little Rock. The team interviewed a total of seventeen stakeholder organizations, including education and training providers, non-profit associations, state and local government agencies, and for-profit enterprises.

Table 1: Interview Questions for Little Rock Workforce Development Organizations

<p>1. To start, please tell me about your organization’s mission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What clients do you serve and how do you serve them? ○ What are the biggest issues or problems your organization faces? ○ What are your organization's top 3 goals? ○ How do you measure outcomes for your clients
<p>2. How would you describe your relationship with the LRWDB?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ From your perspective, what role does LRWDB play in coordinating WD activity in Little Rock? ○ What would you like to change, if anything, about your relationship with LRWDB?
<p>3. Has your organization participated in collaborations in the past (or currently)? Tell me about them: successes, failures, challenges, and wins.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What advantages do you see to collaborating with other WD agencies? ○ Is the Collective Impact model relevant to collaboration for your organization? ○ Describe your relationship with other WD organizations
<p>4. How do you see the future of WD in Little Rock?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What future needs do you foresee in workforce development in Little Rock? ○ What is the vacuum in Little Rock (what is missing in WD)?

The research team carried out semi-structured interviews with a representative of each organization, with each interview guided by four interview questions (reported in Table 1). Each interview question included additional follow up questions that the interviewer would use to prompt further response from the respondent. The first interview question focused on the services provided and clients served by stakeholder organizations as well their missions and goals. This question assisted in providing data on the scope of activities and functions provided by organizations in the Little Rock workforce development system. This ultimately helped to identify opportunities for collaboration in workforce development services by determining areas where there is a void in the current level of provided services.

We developed the remaining interview questions to address the second research question regarding issue and opportunities for collaboration. The second interview question asks about perceptions held by stakeholder organizations regarding the LRWDB. We evaluated responses to this question to assess LRWDB’s potential to become a convener and lead collaboration in the

Little Rock workforce development system. Understanding the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the LRWDB will assist in assessing if a convener role is a realistic goal or not, as well as to help in developing a plan to achieve it.

The third interview question provides information for an in-depth examination of existing collaborations by asking about different aspects of past and current collaborations. This information allows the team to examine the complexity and focus of collaboration in the current system and assist to identifying opportunities for collaboration.

The final stakeholder interview question focused on stakeholder's views of the future of workforce in Little Rock and about opinions on the future needs and what is missing in workforce development. The evaluation of answers to these questions will be used to further identify opportunities for collaboration by determining what areas in workforce development need support and where collaboration is not currently being utilized.

The research team conducted the interviews over a four-week period. Most interviews were conducted by phone to ensure the questions were asked correctly and to provide the ability for the interviewer to ask for additional explanation or information as needed. A small number of interviews were conducted via email if the organizations were not available by phone and/or preferred to respond in this manner. The interviewers made three attempts to contact organizations and if no response was obtained the organization was considered a "no contact" and was not included in the study.

The research team followed an interview protocol to ensure the individuals contacted were all asked the same questions and given the opportunity to respond freely. Each interviewer recorded data by taking notes and then compiling the information into a final document. Some of the advantages of using this approach were the ability to document key information during the actual interview. Also, the notes could be referred to during the interview to ensure nothing was left out and that all information was accurately documented. Disadvantages include the possibility that some of the pertinent information could have been left out or not included at the discretion or error of the interviewer.

Comparative Case Study

Researchers use case studies to describe an organization or event and the factors and relationships that affect it (Yin, 1984). Goodrick (2014) describes comparative case studies as involving the "analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal" (p. 1). The research team used a comparative case study approach to answer the last two research questions regarding the organization, models, and best practices in workforce development and how successful collaborations are measured. In order to obtain information needed to answer the key research questions, the research team interviewed representatives from key workforce development organizations in

cities similar to Little Rock. Information gained in these interviews helped the team to assess the role and function of workforce development organizations within each city’s workforce development system. Additionally, the comparative case study approach provided the opportunity to examine the advantages and disadvantages of collaborative governance.

Table 2: Comparison Cities Descriptive Data

	Little Rock, AR	Grand Rapids, MI	Baton Rouge, LA	Memphis, TN	Knoxville, TN	St. Louis, MO
Central City Population Size	190,854	196,445	227,715	652,717	186,239	315,658
Capital City	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Unemployment Rate, 2016	2.8%	3.1%	5.1%	4.9%	4.6%	4.5%
% Metro GDP from Manufacturing	20%	25%	7%	21%	20%	20%
Mid-South City	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Personal Income per capita, 2015	\$41,062	\$45,371	\$43,474	\$42,300	\$40,870	\$48,977

The research team selected five metropolitan regions that are comparable to Little Rock in terms of population size, capital city status, unemployment rates, economy, geography, and personal income per capita (Table 2). The unemployment rate is a key indicator for the number of people in need of workforce services and when paired with population size can affect the size of the workforce system and the demands on those organizations in the system. Economic similarities in terms of the percentage of gross domestic product for manufacturing and personal income per capita allowed for the identification of cities that are similar in terms of economic structure. Similarity in geographic location was used to identify cities with comparable economic conditions as well as similar industries, such as cities that are located on a river and have a port. Finally, personal income per capita was used as an indicator of a city’s wealth, which can affect funding for organizations, involved in workforce development.

Based on these criteria, the research team selected five comparison metropolitan regions: Grand Rapids, Michigan; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Memphis, Tennessee; Knoxville, Tennessee; St. Louis, Missouri. While not an exhaustive list of all similar cities, the five cities selected have important similarities to Little Rock in unemployment rate, economic activity, and personal

income per capita. Cities with larger populations, such as Memphis and St. Louis were selected due to economic and geographic similarities.

The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with respondents from workforce development organizations in each of the comparison cities, guided by a set of four interview questions (see Table 3). The team used internet searches and suggestions from other respondents to identify organizations that are involved in workforce development in each of the comparison cities. Similar to the selection process utilized for the stakeholder interviews, the team selected organizations based on their type and services provided. In addition, the research team particularly sought to identify and interview representatives from each region’s workforce development board and its Chamber of Commerce.

Table 3: Interview Questions – Workforce Development Organizations in Comparison Cities

1. Which would you say are the main organizations that provide WD functions in your metropolitan region?
2. How would you describe the relationships between these organizations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do WD organizations partner in your city to meet their goals? ○ What types of programs or partnerships have been tried? ○ In some cities, WD organizations tend to work independently of each other in meeting their goals and serving their clients. In others, WD organizations coordinate their activities closely and frequently collaborate to meet their goals. Which would you say better describes your city?
3. Is there an organization that you would say acts as a catalyst or convener for WD partnerships in your city? If so, who is it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How is the convening organization perceived by other organizations?
4. Does your organization actively collaborate with other WD organizations in your area? If so, what successes have been experienced through partnership/collaboration? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How did you decide whom the partners would be good to include in a partnership/collaboration? Did you have an example of a best practice you used? Do you have any recommendations for someone who is trying to start a collaborative effort? ○ If no, do you plan to do this? Have you considered doing this? ○ How do you measure success?

The research team posed four questions to respondents in each comparison city. The first interview question identifies the types and numbers of organizations that provide workforce development services in that city. Answers to this question provided information on ways the city’s workforce development system is organized. Collaboration and best practices in workforce development was examined through the use of the second interview question that asked

benchmark city organizations about if collaboration occurs and what does collaboration look like in their system. The third interview question was developed to provide information on the role and characteristics of the convener in benchmark cities, which was used to assess how the LRWDB may change its organizational design and leadership on the board. The fourth interview question provided information regarding the measurement of success and the use of performance indicators by workforce development, which was used to answer the fourth research question regarding the measures of performance for collaboration.

Findings

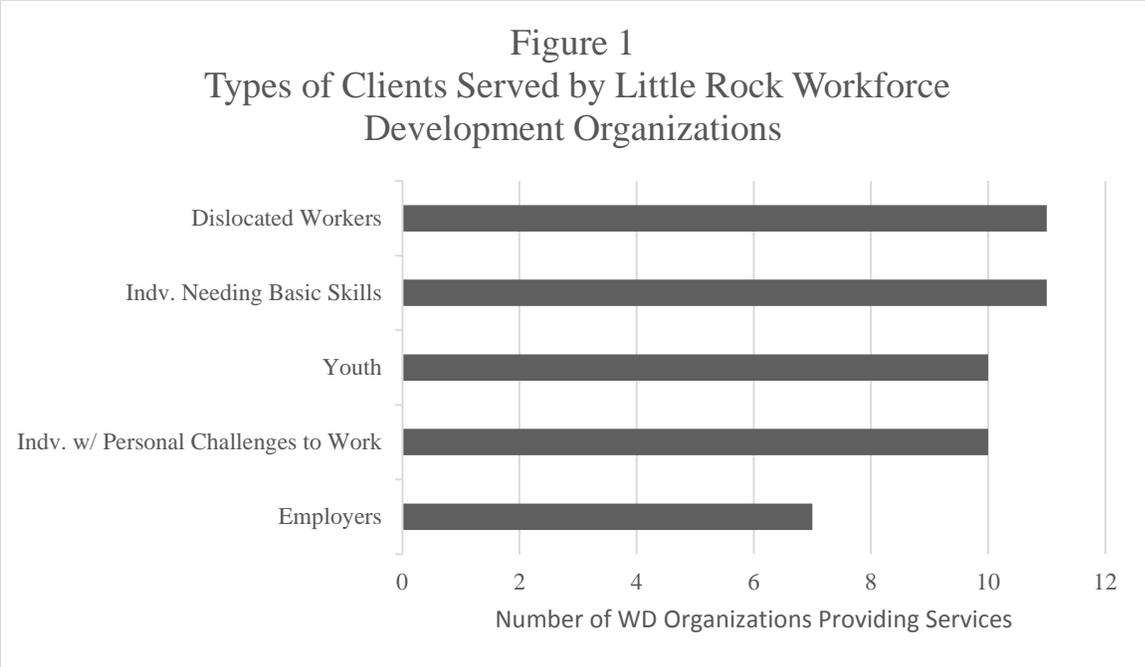
Structure of Little Rock's Workforce Development System

The research team's stakeholder analysis provides insight into the first research question: what organizations provide workforce development services in Little Rock and what services does each provide? The team found that, overall, Little Rock's workforce development system is robust in the sense that it provides numerous types of functions to a wide variety of clients. This analysis also found that employers, as workforce development clients, generally receive fewer services from a smaller number of organizations. Additionally, the majority of organizations in the Little Rock workforce development system are non-profits and for-profit organizations are the least common. Finally, this research found that all types of workforce development functions are provided by numerous organizations and most organizations provide more than one function.



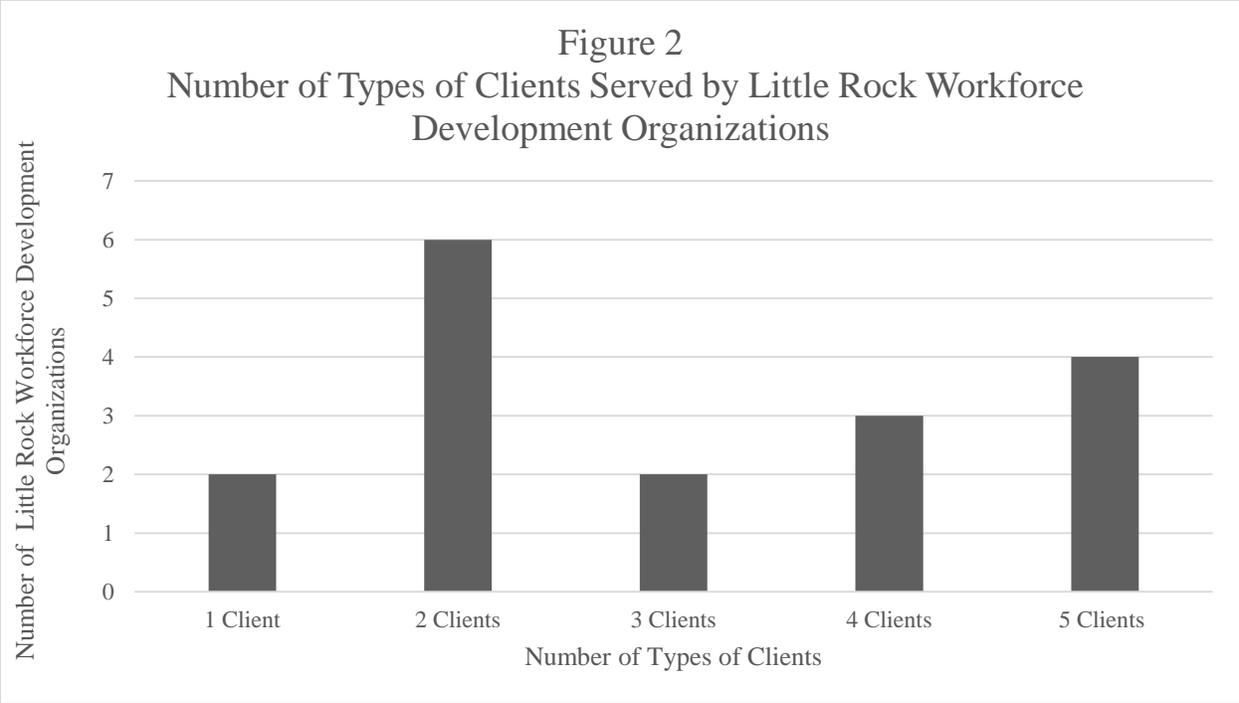
Overall, Little Rock's workforce development system is robust in the sense that it provides numerous types of functions to a wide variety of clients.

To begin, the stakeholder interviews suggest that Little Rock's workforce development system is robust, with multiple organizations serving the needs of each major type of workforce development client. A 2016 report from the Urban Institute groups workforce development clients into four categories - youth, individuals with personal challenges to work, adults in need of basic skills training, and individuals seeking employment transition (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016). The youth category is generally defined to include clients between ages 14-24. Individuals with personal challenges to work include those adults who face obstacles to working such as the ability to afford child care, have a criminal history, or limited job experience. Adults in need of basic skills training includes clients who face limitations to employment and career advancement due to their limited education. The fourth category, adults in employment transition, includes clients who are dislocated owing to layoff and need additional training in order to gain new employment. In addition, our interviews suggest an additional category of client is important in the Little Rock workforce development system, employers. Workforce development organizations frequently serve employers by identifying job-seekers who can fill vacant positions and by training job-seekers in skills that employers anticipate they will need in the near future.

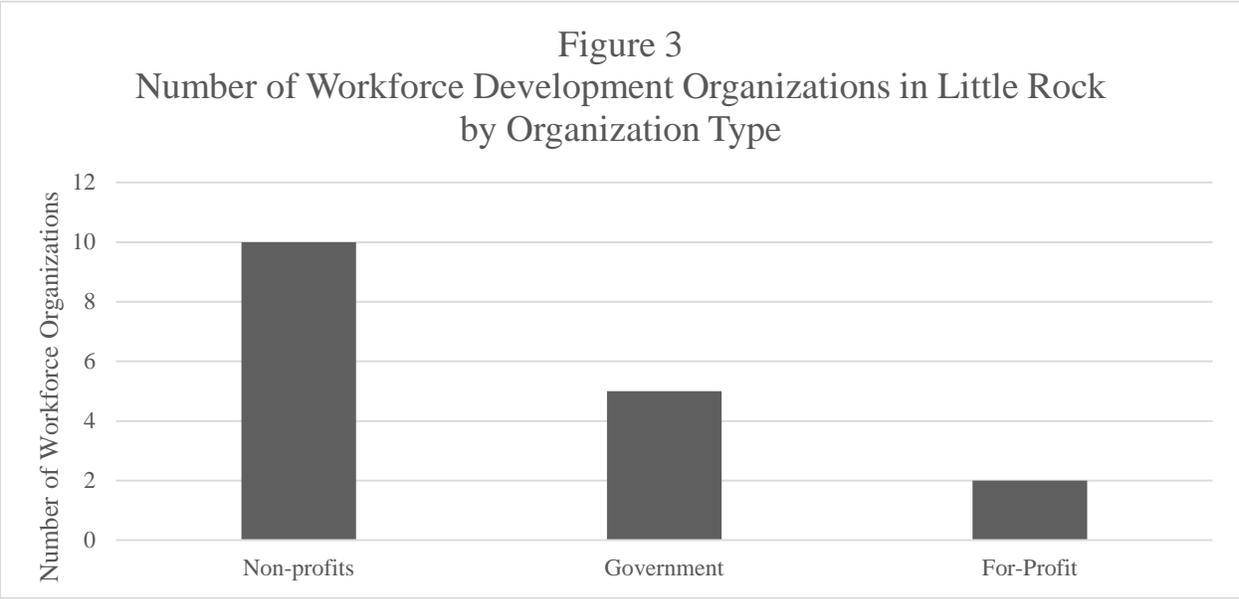


Using the stakeholder interview data, the research team categorized the Little Rock workforce development organizations that responded according to the types of clients each indicated that they served. Figure 1 reports the number of Little Rock workforce development organizations responding to our interviews that serve each type of client. The first thing we note is that each of the five types of clients is served by more than one Little Rock workforce development organization. In particular, at least ten workforce development organizations in Little Rock serve youth, individuals seeking employment transition, individuals in need of basic skills training, and/or individuals with personal challenges to work, with the greatest number of organizations serving the individuals seeking employment transition and individuals in need of basic skills training categories. Employers are somewhat less frequently served in Little Rock’s workforce development system, with only seven of the seventeen organizations indicating employers to be a client. The LRWDB could work to increase the number of workforce development organizations providing services to employers, which could lead to a workforce development system that is better aligned with the job and training needs of the area.

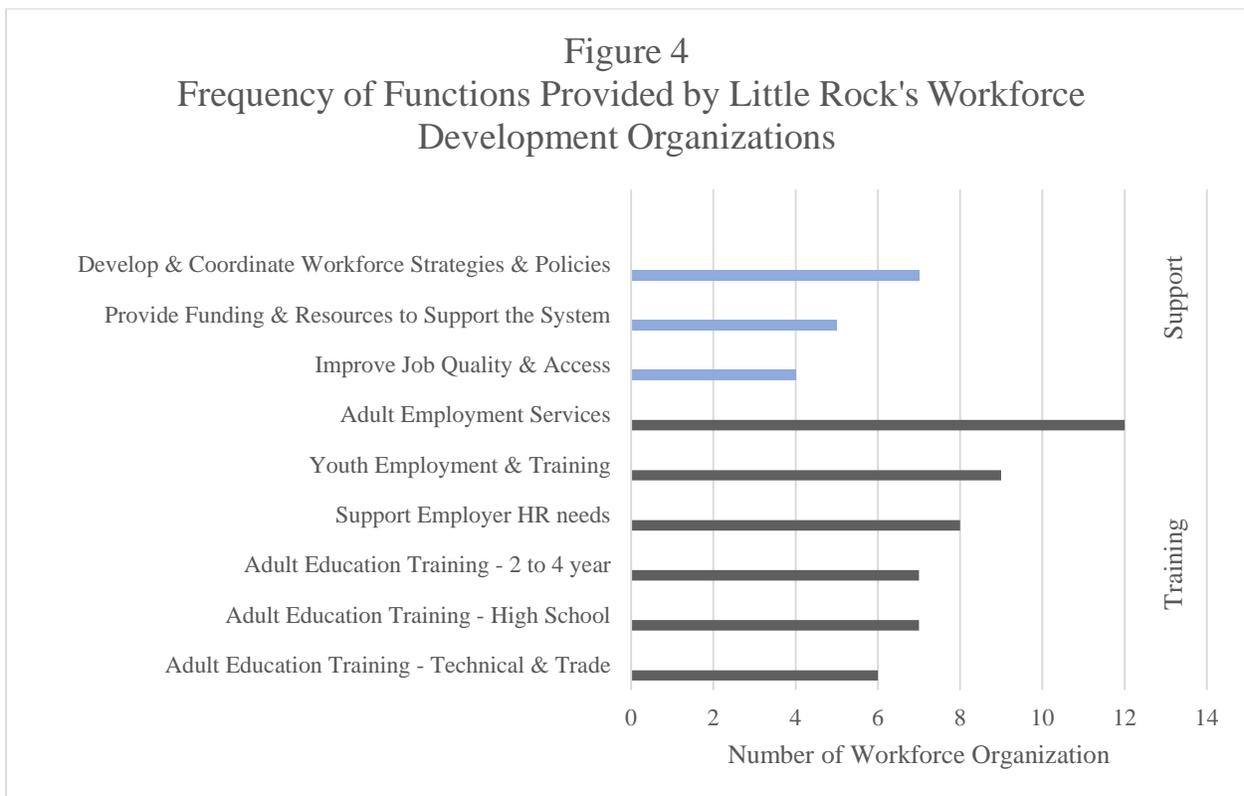
In addition, the data suggest that most Little Rock workforce development organizations serve more than one type of client. Of the seventeen respondents, fifteen organizations serve at least two types of clients, and nine serve three or more types of clients (Figure 2). This finding indicates that the majority of workforce organizations are established and complex enough to provide services to multiple client types.



The stakeholder interview data also makes it possible to categorize Little Rock workforce development organizations according to its form. We found that most organizations working in workforce development in Little Rock are in the nonprofit sector. As shown in Figure 3, ten workforce development organizations are non-profits, compared to five that are government agencies and two that are for-profit. These findings suggest that in Little Rock, as elsewhere, workforce development is not simply a function of government. Rather, it constitutes a system in which nonprofits and some private businesses are vital partners in providing services to clients and in funding and other support functions.



In addition, the research team’s stakeholder analysis suggests that the Little Rock workforce development system is robust with respect to the types of functions it provides. Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron (2016) identify nine functions common to workforce development, which the research team used to categorize the common activities provided by Little Rock workforce development organizations (see Figure 4). The research team further categorized these functions into two groups: “training and employment services” and “workforce development system support”. “Training and employment services” include functions that provide training and education to individuals and organizations and “workforce development support” includes functions that address the needs of stakeholders and support the ability of workforce development organizations to provide services (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016).

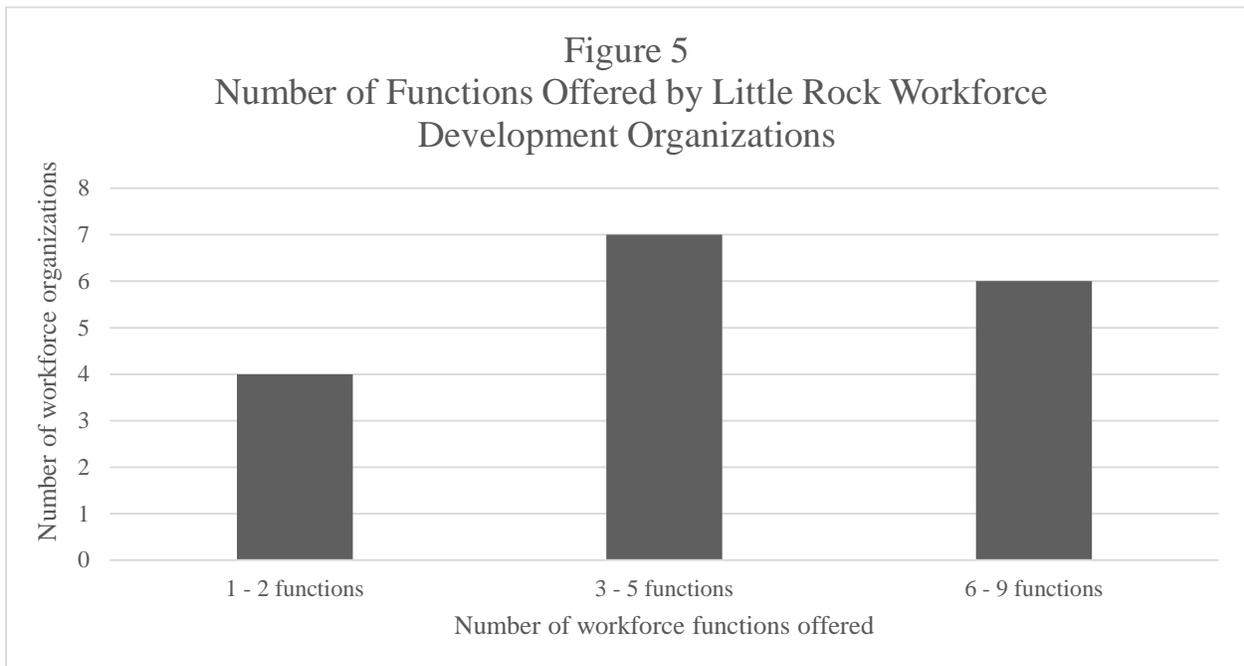


The first three categories listed in Figure 4 are classified as “workforce development support” functions. The first category includes workforce development organizations that coordinate functions amongst workforce development organizations within a system as well as develop suitable policies to support that system. The “improve job quality and access” category includes organizations that work to connect individuals with jobs that provide fair wages and

benefits and that are free from discrimination. The third category listed includes workforce development organizations that initiate the provision of funding and resources beyond federal support.

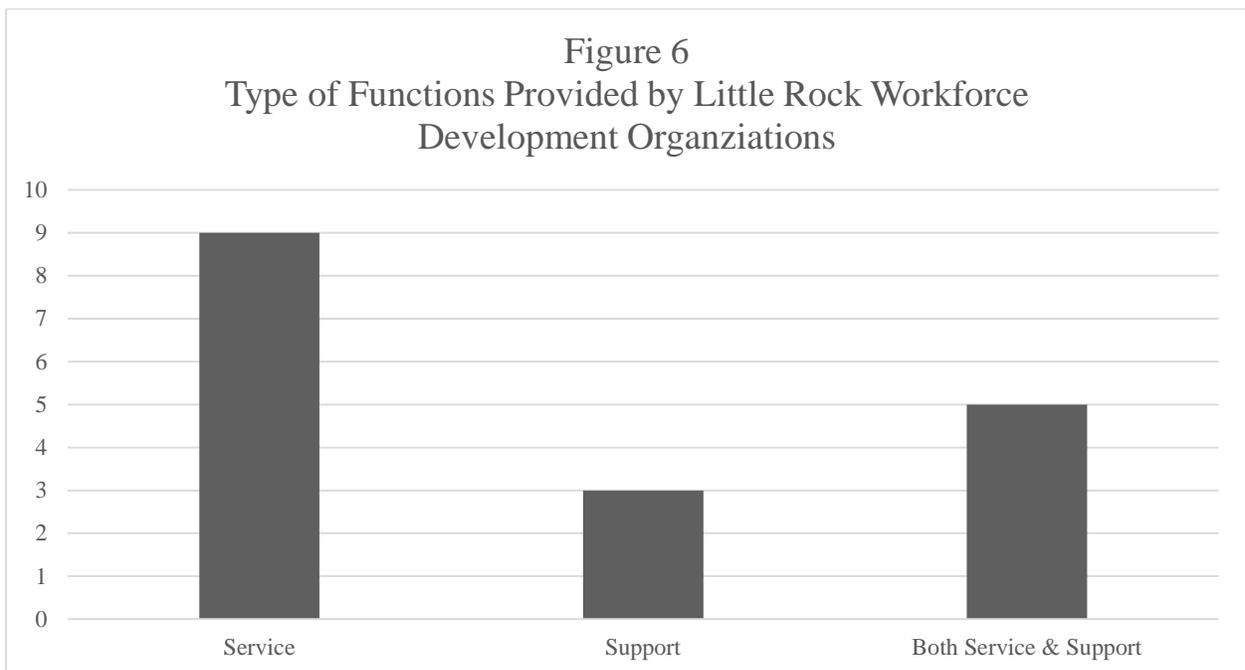
The last five categories listed in Figure 4 are the “training and employment services”. Organizations that provide adult employment services include those that assist individuals in locating jobs as well as providing programs that increase their ability to obtain jobs. Similar types of programs and training can also be provided to youth clients and organizations that provide these are categorized under the youth training and employment category. Organizations that support human resource needs include those that provide services that assist employers in the identification of qualified candidates for job openings. Workforce development organizations can also provide education and training that will prepare individuals for jobs and can be categorized as those that offer assistance in obtaining a high school education, two and four year colleges and universities, and programs that provide training in specific technical areas or trades.

Figure 4 reports the number of Little Rock workforce development organizations providing each of these services or functions. The results indicate that each function or service is provided by at least four organizations, and most are provided by seven or more organizations. This is true of both training and employment services and of workforce development support functions. The largest number of organizations provides adult employment services, while the fewest groups provides services that improve job quality and access as well as funding related functions. This suggests that provision of most services and functions is robust. It also suggests that opportunities for collaboration may exist among organizations providing similar functions.



Moreover, the stakeholder interviews also indicate that most Little Rock workforce development organizations provide more than one service or function. As illustrated in Figure 5, the greatest number of organizations was found to provide between three and five functions. This again suggests that most workforce development organizations are complex and multi-faceted in how they serve the workforce development system.

Although most organizations were found to provide multiple functions, the functions tend to be either all training-related or all support-related. Fewer organizations provide both training and support functions (see Figure 6). This indicates that, though most organizations provide more than one function, some degree of specialization or “siloeing” may occur among training-oriented organizations that limits what they are able to do with respect to strategic planning, policy development and other workforce development system support functions. This raises the possibility that opportunities exist for productive collaborations between training-oriented and support-oriented organizations. Encouraging collaboration between organizations that provide services and those that provide support could lead to a workforce development system that better understands what the needs of the stakeholders in the areas of policymaking and funding which could result in the provision of programs that are more effective and efficient.



Opportunities for Collaboration in Little Rock

The research team's Little Rock stakeholder interviews also provide some answers for the second research question of this study: what are the issues and opportunities that exist for collaboration in Little Rock's workforce development system? Collaboration matters in workforce development because addressing the challenges in the community is often too complex for just one organization to manage. By working together, workforce development organizations can combine expertise and other resources to improve the effectiveness of workforce development programs.

The structure of Little Rock's workforce development system, discussed above, suggest that fruitful ground for collaboration across organizations exists. Workforce development organizations overlap significantly in the clients they serve and in the functions and services they provide. These similarities in goals across organizations may ease collaboration, allowing them to collectively achieve goals that they may not be able to meet individually. The following sections will discuss the issues and opportunities for collaborations in workforce development in Little Rock with specific research

questions to discuss the current state of collaborations in Little Rock, evaluate factors related to LRWDB's role as a convening or "backbone" organization for collaboration, and examine perceptions of the future of workforce development in Little Rock. The analysis found that, while collaboration is already an important part of Little Rock's workforce development system, most collaboration is motivated by funding considerations. This suggests that opportunities for collaboration based on shared goals or on the unique talents or expertise of workforce development staff may be overlooked. Additionally, several stakeholder organizations reported the need for the greater involvement of employers in the workforce development system as well as improvements in the effectiveness of services offered to youth clients.



Opportunities for collaboration based on shared goals or on the unique talents or expertise of workforce development staff may be overlooked.

Frequency of Collaboration

As part of its stakeholder analysis, the research team asked respondent organizations whether each had collaborated with other workforce development organizations in Central Arkansas and if so, the nature of and outcomes from those collaborations. Using responses to these questions, the research team determined the number of organizations that participated in collaborations and summarize this data in Table 4. The research team found that the vast majority of organizations (15 out of 17, or 88%) it interviewed had engaged in some form of

collaboration with another workforce development organization. One organization expressed the importance of forming partnerships because of limited resources as well as assisting in creating a more efficient pool of services that does not duplicate efforts. Respondents discussed collaborations that were simple and occurred with one other agency as well as more complex collaborations that involved multiple organizations. For example, one interviewee discussed a partnership with another workforce organization that allowed for the adults in need of education services to receive them. Another organization reported collaborating with multiple employer agencies in order to maximize opportunities for employment for their clients. Additionally, interviews identified that stakeholder organizations that served multiple types of clients also participated in multiple collaborations. These findings suggest, then, that collaboration among workforce development organizations in Little Rock is already common. This may make it easier to pave the way towards continued collaboration, and more complex collaboration, in the future.

The research team also evaluated responses to the interviews to determine the motivations for collaboration. The results suggest that the overwhelming driving factor for collaboration is the availability of funding (Table 4). In contrast, no respondents indicated that the primary reason for a collaboration with another organization was to share expertise or to address a larger workforce development challenge in the community. This suggests that there may be opportunities for collaboration in Little Rock that are motivated by shared resources, talent, or by a shared agenda, as in Collective Impact initiatives. Collaboration based on the Collective Impact model can allow for improvements to be made in aligning programs, funding, and performance measures amongst organizations, resulting in a more efficient and effective workforce development system (Leung, 2016).

Table 4: Data on Collaboration between Workforce Development Organizations within Little Rock		
	Yes	No
Have Partnerships/Collaborations (n=17)	88%	12%
Collaboration Driven by Funding (n=15)	100%	0%

Perceptions about the Little Rock Workforce Development Board

Research on collaborative governance suggests that the presence of an organization that acts as a “convener”, i.e. assumes responsibility for coordinating between collaborative partners, “is widely seen as a critical ingredient in bringing parties to the table and for steering them through the rough patches of the collaborative process” (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 554). Convening organizations generally take responsibility for communicating the purpose of the collaboration as well as coordinating the participation of appropriate organizations

(Collaborative Leaders Network, n.d.). Without the leadership provided by a convener, collaboration often fails to develop (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

The main role of a convener is bringing stakeholders to the table that can best address the problem that the collaboration is looking to solve. Our research into the literature on collaborative governance suggest that three organizational traits are particularly likely to be important for successful convening: trust, effectiveness and accessibility. Collaboration generally requires that participating organizations be willing to bear significant costs for the sake of the collaboration, while the payoffs from collaboration are uncertain and possibly unequal. Trust in the capacity of the convening organization to treat participants in a collaboration fairly when it comes to making decisions, sharing costs and dividing benefits, then, is generally a necessary condition for successful collaboration (J. McKenzie, personal communication, September 14, 2017). More generally, a significant body of social science theory and evidence on social capital suggests that trust facilitates collaboration (Axelrod, 1984; Putnam, 2000).

Similarly, we should expect that the perceived effectiveness of an organization in carrying out its mission will significantly affect its success at a convening role. In many cases, collaboration involves certain costs but uncertain payoffs. In most cases, some risk exists that a collaboration will not be successful in achieving its goals, in which case the resources invested by participants produce no return. This uncertainty may be mitigated by the technical competence of the participants themselves, and particularly the convening organization. For example, a convening organization might use its technical expertise to creatively adapt a collaboration to unexpected problems as they unfold. Consequently, a convening organization that is respected for its expertise and effectiveness is more likely to succeed in obtaining cooperation from stakeholders with a collaborative effort.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Trust	82%	18%	0%
Effectiveness	59%	18%	23%
Accessibility	71%	29%	0%

An organization’s accessibility is also likely to affect its potential effectiveness as a convening organization. Communication across organizations is key to successful collaboration (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Consequently, an organization that is perceived as one that is responsive to stakeholders is likely to be seen as one that is effective at promoting collaboration. Hence, an organization’s perceived accessibility or skill at communicating and coordinating with stakeholders is likely to affect the success of collaborations that it initiates.

In light of these criteria, the research team investigated the extent to which the Little Rock Workforce Development Board could successfully carry out such a convening role in Little Rock. In particular, the team asked stakeholders to describe its relationship with the LRWDB. Nearly all respondents (16 out of 17, or 94%) indicated that they are familiar with the LRWDB and its mission. The research team further categorized responses to this question in terms of trust in the LRWDB to act as neutral party; the LRWDB’s accessibility; and the LRWDB’s perceived effectiveness. The research team coded a “positive” response as one in which the respondent indicated greater trust, accessibility or effectiveness on the part of the LRWDB, and coded a “negative” response when the respondent indicated distrust or lack of confidence in LRWDB’s effectiveness or accessibility. A “neutral” response was recorded when the interviewee’s answer could not be related as being positive or negative or if trust, effectiveness or accessibility did not come up in the response.

Based on this part of the stakeholder analysis, we can conclude that the LRWDB is generally perceived as trustworthy and accessible by the other stakeholders in the Little Rock workforce development system. Table 5 describes the percentage of Little Rock workforce development organizations whose responses indicated positive, negative and neutral perceptions of the LRWDB in terms of trust, accessibility and effectiveness. Most organizations (82% of those organizations) gave responses indicating trust in the LRWDB as an honest broker in the workforce development arena. Responses regarding the relationship of stakeholder organizations with the LRWDB included having an “excellent relationship”, that they “work closely with the board, and that “other organizations look up to them”. In addition, most (71%) organizations also made positive remarks on the accessibility of staff at the LRWDB. The LRWDB’s accessibility is further indicated by the significant number of respondents who indicated they collaborated with the LRWDB on complex projects involving multiple stakeholders and spanning several years. No

organizations gave a response indicating distrust in or lack of accessibility on the part of LRWDB staff. As discussed above, trust and accessibility are both highly important resources in a convening role and suggest strong potential for LRWDB to play a more active role in organizing collaboration on workforce development in the Little Rock region.



The LRWDB is generally perceived as trustworthy and accessible by the other stakeholders in the Little Rock workforce development system.

A potential barrier to the LRWDB’s convening role is perceptions about its effectiveness. Most respondents (59%) commented positively on the LRWDB’s effectiveness as an organization in addressing workforce development issues. At the same time, a number of

other organizations (23%) provided a response indicating a negative perception of the effectiveness of the LRWDB. Several respondents indicated that the composition of the board for the LRWDB restricts its ability to gain participation of employers in workforce development. Another interviewee indicated they felt that the LRWDB does not effectively use its contacts to establish strong partnerships.

The results of this analysis imply that there is an opportunity for the LRWDB to assume a convener role in the Little Rock workforce development system because it is viewed as trustworthy, accessible, and is recognized within the community. The perception of being ineffective may be viewed by some organizations as a weakness or lack of competence of the LRWDB and may limit the number and type of organizations the LRWDB can bring into a collaboration as a convener. As previously discussed, interviews indicate that the perception of ineffectiveness stems from limitations in the board of the LRWDB, specifically in engaging employers. The LRWDB could address this by giving further consideration to ways of engaging regional employers in its planning process.

Future of Workforce Development in Little Rock

The stakeholder organizations were asked about their expectations about the future of workforce development in Little Rock, specifically what the needs of the city will be and what is currently missing in workforce development in the city. Overall, interviewees expressed a positive view of the future of workforce development. But several organizations expressed the need for improvements in certain areas. Two respondents indicated that greater communication with employers regarding projected job needs, with one stating that “training efforts are often misplaced” as a result. Two additional organizations felt that an increase in general collaboration with employers is needed. Respondents indicated that increased collaboration with employers will not only help develop more effective training programs but also result in increased funding from employers. This viewpoint may be related to the findings from the previous section, where employers were found to be a client for the fewest number of workforce development organizations and for-profit organizations were observed to make up the fewest number of workforce development organizations in the Little Rock system. This finding suggests that collaborative opportunities may exist between workforce development organizations and employers. As a convener, the LRWDB could develop this type of collaboration, which would fill the void in the communication of job needs and allow for improved relationships between workforce development organizations and employers.

Another common theme from the interviews regarding the future of workforce development was related to the area of youth programs. Three stakeholder organizations expressed the need to improve the current programs that transition youth to the workplace. An improvement discussed is the need for additional funding to improve the transition of youth to adult programs. One respondent discussed how funding is often limited to youth 18 and older

and that this creates a gap in services to at risk youth who are between 15 and 18 years of age. Additionally, a respondent discussed the need to improve data collection related to youth clients in the workforce development system. The findings from this analysis imply that there are opportunities for collaboration in addressing the needs of youth clients. In a convening role, the LRWDB could develop partnerships between organizations that are providing services to youth with those that are support oriented in order to develop a way in which to track clients' progress through the system as well as to increase funding to improve services provided to youth.

Workforce Development Collaboration in Other Cities

To address this study's third research question, how an effective metropolitan workforce development system should be organized, the research team conducted interviews with selected workforce development organizations in five cities that are comparable to Little Rock: Baton Rouge, Grand Rapids, Knoxville, Memphis, and St. Louis. The analysis found first that, in spite of the similarities between these cities and Little Rock, significant differences exist in the extent of collaboration among workforce development organizations in these cities; in the extent to

which a central actor coordinates workforce development activity in the city's system; and in the strategies used to promote workforce development. These findings imply that by enhancing its role in convening collaboration, the LRWDB could foster increased collaboration in the Little Rock workforce development system which may result a more effective system overall.



By enhancing its role in convening collaboration, the LRWDB could foster increased collaboration in the Little Rock workforce development system.

Baton Rouge

The research team's interviews with workforce development organizations in Baton Rouge found that some collaboration occurs within its workforce development system, but it is limited to organizations that provide similar functions, such as training and education service providers partnering with one another. Respondents indicated that the state had identified the need to focus on the development of craft and technical skills in the workforce in order to meet the demands of local industries. However, no respondents mentioned a collaborative effort around this common objective or any other agenda. Additionally, no respondents identified a central convener in Baton Rouge and this is a possibly a reason for limited collaboration here.

Grand Rapids

Interviews with workforce development organizations found that Grand Rapids has a history of collaboration that dates back to 1982 with the development of the Essential Needs Task Force whose goal was to align services through the use partnerships and collaboration. Currently, the workforce development system in Grand Rapids is led by Goodwill Industries, which acts as a convening organization. An example of collaboration occurring in Grand Rapids is its Employment Services Collaborative, an initiative led by Goodwill Industries to develop a cohesive strategy across organizations that provide workforce development services.

Knoxville

One Knoxville respondent described collaboration among workforce development organizations as an effort “to serve the most people in the best fashion with limited funding and attempting to avoid duplication of services.” Several respondents agreed that Knoxville’s American Job Center serves as a central convener for workforce development collaboration. The Knoxville workforce development system was also found to collaborate and often this collaboration is centered on a common goal. For example, the Knox Area Employment Consortium was formed to bring workforce development organizations together to improve the employability of disabled individuals.

Memphis

Interviews with Memphis-area workforce development organizations suggest that Memphis has a disjointed workforce development system. In part, this may be attributable to the absence of an organization that clearly acts as a central convening organization for collaboration. Instead, the interviews suggest that two organizations are widely seen as fulfilling the convening role. As a result, little consensus exists on the role these two organizations play in convening workforce development in the city and often the two struggle for position and power. Moreover, some Memphis-area workforce development organizations reported that while they engage in one-on-one partnerships with other organizations, they also do not perceive a common agenda or coordinated effort led by a convening organization aimed at addressing larger regional workforce development issues.

St. Louis

Our interviews with workforce development organizations in St. Louis found evidence for a great deal of collaboration. Moreover, responding organizations recognized St. Louis’ Chamber of Commerce as an important convening organization for St. Louis’ workforce

development system. The St. Louis Chamber of Commerce has lead a collaborative effort with a goal of increasing the number of college degrees obtained within the adult population. Through this effort, the Chamber of Commerce has persuaded over 200 organizations and businesses to commit to working with one another to achieve this goal. Respondents to the interviews also indicated that they have experienced increases in opportunities to collaborate since the Chamber of Commerce has stepped into the convening role.

Characteristics of High-Collaboration Cities

The research team asked respondents in each of the five comparison cities about the relationships between workforce development organizations in their city. The responses made it possible to categorize cities as having a high degree of collaboration (i.e. interview responses indicated that the workforce system had a shared goal that numerous organizations were working together to achieve over a period of time) or low degree of collaboration (i.e. interview responses indicated that collaborations were uncommon or were short-term arrangements). This analysis indicates whether collaboration is being utilized by workforce development systems in other regions and the extent to which it is occurring.

	Extent of Collaboration	Presence of a Central Convener in Workforce Development System
Baton Rouge	Low	No
Grand Rapids	High	Yes
Knoxville	High	Yes
Memphis	Low	No
St. Louis	High	Yes

Of the five cities examined, three were found to have coordinated efforts for meeting goals and serving clients. In Grand Rapids, for example, multiple interviewees referenced the Employment Services Collaborative, which was developed to coordinate workforce development services between eight organizations. In addition, respondent organizations in St. Louis described coordinated efforts to achieve a citywide goal of increasing the number of individuals who earn a college degree. An example of collaboration mentioned by respondents in Knoxville is the development of the Knox Area Employment Consortium which was developed to address workforce needs for disabled individuals.

In contrast, respondents in Baton Rouge and Memphis indicated that workforce development organizations primarily worked independently of each other to achieve goals and serve clients. Interviewees from Baton Rouge and Memphis made no mention of collaborations around a shared goal and the collaborations that were mentioned appeared to be with another organizations of similar type. One of the Baton Rouge respondents described not being aware of other partnerships beyond that of their agency. Responses in the interviews from organizations in Memphis stated that work is done in “silos” and that “collaboration is not happening at all” among workforce development organizations. This analysis indicates that that despite the presence of multiple workforce development organizations present in an area, collaboration is not inherent.

The research team also asked respondent organizations in each comparison city if there was an organization in the city’s workforce development system that acted as a coordinator for collaboration. Information obtained from answers to this question assisted in assessing how workforce development systems in the benchmark cities are organized. Cities where there is a consensus about the presence and identity of a convener are indicated by a “yes” response in Table 6. A “no” designation means the respondents did not recognize a particular organization as acting as a convener, or that the respondents disagreed on which organization most clearly acted as a convener for collaboration.



The presence of a convener in a workforce development system may lead to increased collaboration amongst organizations.

In three of the five examined benchmark cities, interviewees identified a strong, central convener in their workforce development systems (Table 6). In Grand Rapids, respondents described the convener as a “catalyst” for shared workforce development goals that ensured that that these goals were met. All interviewed organizations in the city of St. Louis described the convener as being effective in bringing together numerous groups that work to support a common goal. The two cities in which respondents failed to agree on what organization acted as a central convener were also the two cities that showed low levels of collaboration overall. This implies that the presence of a convener in a workforce development system may lead to increased collaboration amongst organizations. For the workforce development system in Little Rock, these findings indicate that the presence of a central convener could lead to more effective collaboration efforts.

Career Pathway vs. Sector Strategies

A key component of workforce development is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The WIOA provides funding to workforce development boards and promotes partnerships between workforce development organizations by requiring states to develop strategies that align their principal programs and to establish “strategies to meet the needs of local and regional employers” (United States Department of Labor, n.d.). The framework formed by the WIOA has led to many workforce development systems focusing collaboration around two models, “career pathways” and “sector strategies” (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016). Career pathways strategies prepare job-seekers for employment and career advancement in high-demand careers “by aligning the efforts of major education, training, and workforce development programs” and sector strategies promote collaboration related to the “local or regional workforce needs of a particular industry” (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016, p. 4). Understanding the focus of a workforce system is important to ensure that the organizations that are involved are ones that can provide services that will help achieve the goals of the workforce system and make it more effective.

Interviews with benchmark cities included questions aimed at providing information regarding the types of collaborations that have been tried, what organizations are involved in collaborations, and the experience of those organization related to those collaborations. The purpose of these questions is to provide additional information about how workforce development systems are organized as well as what models of collaboration benchmark cities utilizing. The research team used responses to these questions to categorize each benchmark city as “career pathways” or “sector strategies”. Cities that referenced collaboration that is focused on education and training, as well indicated that coordination occurs in those two areas, were categorized under career pathways. Those responses that indicated collaboration was related to aligning the skills of job seekers with that of a certain industry were categorized under sector strategies.

	Career Pathways	Sector Strategies
Baton Rouge		X
Grand Rapids		X
Knoxville	X	
Memphis		X
St. Louis	X	

From the responses, Knoxville and St. Louis appear to follow a career pathways strategy. Responses from organizations in workforce development system of St. Louis referenced a goal for the city to be amongst the top educated cities in its region. To achieve this goal, interviewees

discussed that the convener for this system has formed partnerships with the business community as well as educational organizations such as local community colleges. In Knoxville, organizations interviewed referenced a number of collaborative programs that were focused on education and training. As seen in Table 7, the three remaining benchmark cities seem to follow a sector-oriented strategy. Organizations from Baton Rouge, Grand Rapids, and Memphis all indicated that the focus of some of the collaborative efforts is based on the needs of an industry within that community. For example, one organization in Memphis cited a focus on training related to the medical device sector, as there has been a large amount of growth in this industry in the region. The career pathways and sector strategy collaborative models were observed as being used in workforce development systems in benchmark cities. This implies that having a focus for the workforce development system is a common practice in workforce development and should be considered by the LRWDB when looking for ways in which to create collaborations.

Measuring Outcomes from Collaboration

Measuring program outcomes is vital to ensuring that clients are well-served and that program staff correct problems and adapt to changing conditions. Once a collaborative program has launched, stakeholders need to determine whether their efforts have had the intended effects for clients and the community. It is also important to identify any drawbacks to the collaborative effort that might need to be addressed. Unfortunately, service providers often do not evaluate programs because of financial limitations, inadequate staffing, or time constraints. Additionally, when organizations do evaluate their programs, it is done in a way that only provides a small part of the overall picture of the workforce development landscape.

It is important to measure outcomes of workforce development collaborations, but because of the diverse missions and goals of each organization, it is often difficult to develop consensus on how success will be measured. Often, it is the convening organization in a collaboration that takes the lead in fostering this consensus, which should be based in a common agenda that stakeholders agreed to at the collaboration's beginning. When this is accomplished, outcomes should be evaluated according to the goals of the collaboration so that lessons learned can be incorporated into future endeavors. (Collaboration for Impact, 2015). Such a system will allow the collaborative group to improve data quality, track progress toward pre-determined goals, facilitate coordination and collaboration, become a learning organization and inform next steps (Collaboration for Impact, 2015). Proper implementation of evaluation methods will improve relationships with funders, promote engagement across sectors and participants, improve infrastructure of the collaborative and create a system for organizational learning (Collaboration for Impact, 2015).

Consequently, the fourth and final research question in this study focuses on the measures of successful collaboration. The research team sought to identify best practices used in other

cities in measuring outcomes from collaborative efforts. Prior research on collaborative governance suggests that when a developing consensus in collaborative measurement, organizations should first review the shared programs through intake assessments of participants, which will enhance the likelihood of a comprehensive program approach. Second, the provider organizations must be flexible in many aspects of the operations, the leadership must be active, and engaged and there must be plans for growth even in the event of funding challenges. Third, employers must be engaged in the community, workforce providers must collaborate, a variety of services must be provided and the organizations must be engaged in policy and advocacy (Weigensberg et al., 2012).

As part of the comparative cities analysis, the research team asked workforce development organizations in the comparison cities how each measured program outcomes. We found that thirteen of the sixteen organizations interviewed in the comparison cities carried out some form of program evaluation as part of collaboration. The most common performance measures were simple counts, such as number of clients served, number of degrees or certificates awarded, the number of programs developed and available, or the regularity of meeting attendance. Only one organization indicated that success is measured on a more qualitative level, i.e. “how well we meet our goals as outlined in the collaborative.” Most organizations indicated that performance measurement is largely left to individual organizations rather than becoming a function of the collaboration.



Performance measurement in most of the comparison cities is performed at a superficial level and may miss important aspects of workforce development programs.

Some organizations interviewed discussed measuring success in open-ended terms such as “awareness of the program” or how well they “improve the lives” of their clients or simply if people come to meetings. One respondent said that his organization would consider its programs successful if the city is one of the top ten in the country in workforce development by 2025. Though all of these factors may be worth noting, they do little to quantitatively demonstrate program effectiveness. Additionally, most of the interviewed organizations that do perform measurement reported that they do so according to the individual agency’s goals or plans rather than those of a collaborative. These findings indicate that that performance measurement in most of the comparison cities is performed at a superficial level and may miss important aspects of workforce development programs.

Collecting Workforce Development Data

The research team's interviews found that the most common type of measurement for workforce development outcomes in the comparison cities is count data. Such data include counts of the number of clients use their services, the number of people who complete programs or the number of jobs that are filled. A few organizations also kept data on how many certificates or diplomas were awarded. This type of information indicates the usage rate of a program and as such indicates some measure of success. However, usage rates do not indicate whether the program is effective for the client or has a lasting positive effect over the client's adult working years.

In addition, some organizations use statistical indicators such as unemployment rates, poverty rates and educational attainment rates to assess their impact on workforce development. Such data can be useful in assessing the current condition of workforce development, and changes in these indicators may help to measure the effect of any programs that may have been implemented. But because many factors other than workforce development programming may affect outcomes such as poverty and unemployment, it is usually impossible to attribute changes in these outcomes to adoption of particular workforce development programs or practices.

Surveys are another common program evaluation tool and can be valuable in assessing effectiveness beyond simply recording attendance numbers (Lindsay & Babb, 2015). Though more time consuming to administer and review, surveys can reveal a different set of data than count data and statistical indicators. Issued either before or after a program, or both, surveys can ask participants to give their own assessment of a program, whether they thought it was worthwhile, etc. Surveys can also be used to gather demographics, employment or educational history and elicit recommendations from the participants themselves. Survey questions must be carefully worded and enough participants must cooperate in order for the data to be useful to program planners. Hence, only one comparison city organization interviewed indicated that it had used surveys to help them assess outcomes for employers and job seekers who used their services.

An additional approach to performance measurement is longitudinal studies that enable the adequate measurement of long-term effectiveness and sustainability. Longitudinal studies in workforce development track individual clients or cohorts as they advance from completion of a training program through job placement and career changes. These studies can last several years through decades depending on type of data that is desired. Two organizations among the comparison cities studied claimed to track employee retention rates, which is a beginning step to tracking longitudinal data. Another agency claims to "walk alongside the students for the first year of employment" after completing a workforce development program. Though this is not truly longitudinal, this practice can provide additional support to the client and supplemental data for the individual agency to gauge program effectiveness. Tracking recidivism rates is another long-term measure used by two of the interviewed organizations, which can be expanded

longitudinally. Once again, all of these measures were conducted by individual organizations and not through a collaborative.

The findings of this section imply that performance measures are being used but that they may not be robust enough to measure impact or “the net effect of a program relative to what would have happened” without the program (Tatian, 2016). In order for the system to understand if collaborative efforts leading to the desired outcomes, additional tools should be considered when measuring success.

To determine how workforce development programs are aligning together to achieve a common goal, the State Workforce and Education Alignment Project recommends three tools to provide “high-level, system-wide information” (National Skills Coalition, 2015). These are dashboards, pathway evaluators and supply and demand reports.

- Dashboards display a small number of common metrics to report education and employment outcomes across workforce development programs. They answer policymaker questions: Do program participants earn credentials? Do they get jobs? How much do those jobs pay? State policymakers can use dashboards to identify programs that have strong outcomes and warrant expansion. They can also see which programs have weak outcomes and need improvement.
- Pathway Evaluators show how people use a range of education and training programs to earn credentials and move into jobs. They answer policymaker questions: Do people with different needs have access to the right programs? Are programs creating career pathways to middle- skill jobs? Which pathways work best for which people? With this information in hand, state policymakers can create career pathways that achieve the best employment and earnings outcomes for people with different skill needs.
- Supply and Demand Reports show how the supply of newly credentialed workers compares to the number of workers that employers demand. They answer policymaker questions: What occupations have skill gaps? Are workers being trained with the right skills for those jobs? How many more skilled workers do we need? State policymakers can use supply and demand reports to invest in training programs that will prepare more skilled workers for occupations that have a skill gap. (National Skills Coalition, 2015)

Collaborations can adopt one or more of three tools that can be implemented as they develop workforce strategies. In this way, the organizations involved can be assured of collecting the pertinent data for future assessment.

Motivation to evaluate and measure performance can begin within an organization or come from outside the organization. Two of the comparison city organizations interviewed stated they evaluated programs based on goals outlined in a strategic plan. One of these organizations stated they “have a quality process team that meets on a consistent basis to ensure they are in line with what they said they would do and adjustments are made as needed.” Often the incentive for

program evaluation is provided by sources outside of the agency. One agency stated that success was determined by “meeting the clients’ goals.” More often, outside motivation comes in the form of “metrics pre-determined by grants” or other funders.

Best Practices on Performance Measurement under Collaboration

Evaluation should be incorporated into any workforce development planning process so that an agency can “track advancement toward results” and “deliver objective evidence that change has occurred” (Lindsay & Babb, 2015). To develop a shared measurement system, a collaboration must first design an initiative or program to be evaluated. Next, a shared vision for the broader goals must be developed in the context of the current state of affairs, group governance and organizational structure, and identification of methods of data collection. Once the measurement system is in place, the collaboration can use the information to activate learning and continuous improvement of programs and infrastructure (Collaboration for Impact, 2015).

A logic model is a tool that has been developed for the nonprofit sector and can be used to develop a program with specific outcomes in mind. Though there are many different designs for this graphic organizer, a common example is shown in Figure 7.

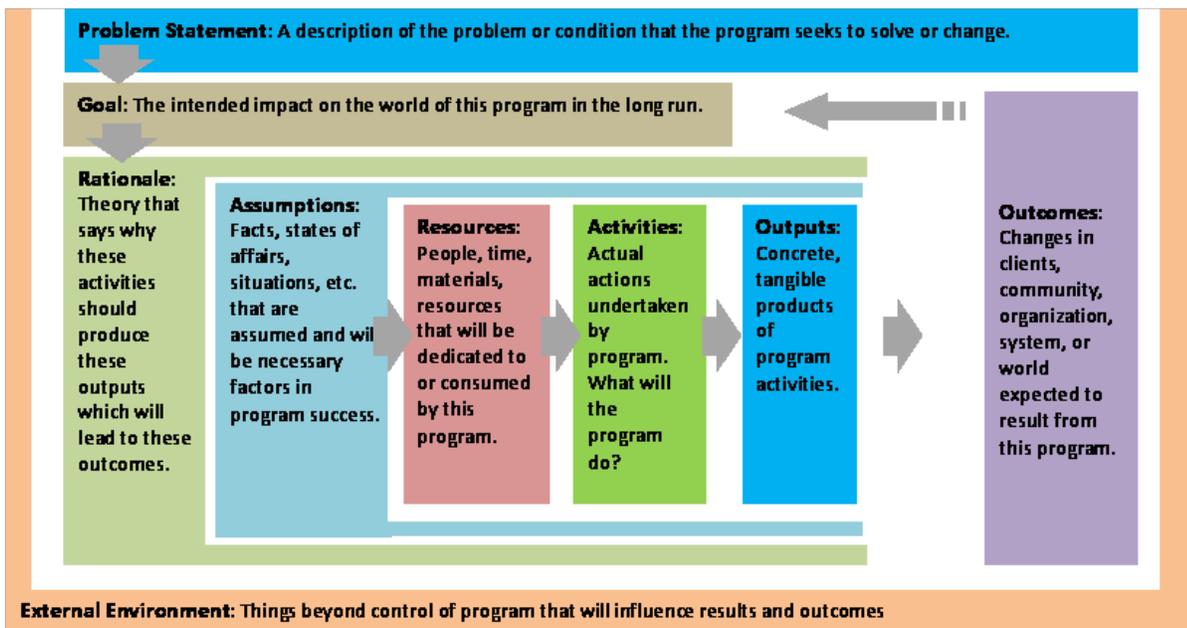


Figure 7: Logic Model Template (Ryan, 2011)

The logic model visually represents the steps necessary for program development while ensuring that evaluation is an integral part of the system. In completing the model, one must first assess the starting point of any program, or make assumptions about the inputs. Next, the

activities are planned and, finally, the desired outcomes, outputs and impacts are named. This process makes the designers think through every detail about the program and plan a method for evaluation. The model can be adapted to be used in a collaborative once a consensus has been reached about the specific issues that need to be addressed.

Researchers at the University of Chicago conducted a study of how several successful workforce development agencies in Chicago collect data and measure the success of workforce development programs. The study recommends that the first step to collaborative measurement is to define a set of common measures across programs that can establish universal standards while allowing flexibility for individual agencies or funders. Ideally, these measures would include longitudinal data on outcomes. Moreover, they recommend that outcomes be measured by race and gender in order to develop risk-adjusted performance expectations. Other factors that should be measured include individual client, program, organization and contextual measures of external engagement (Weigensberg, et al., 2012).

Evaluating workforce development begins with identifying the “business [or organizational] strategy and continues to a set of key workforce strategies, including strategies for workforce development” (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2015). This process is illustrated below and can be reinterpreted in a collaborative setting.

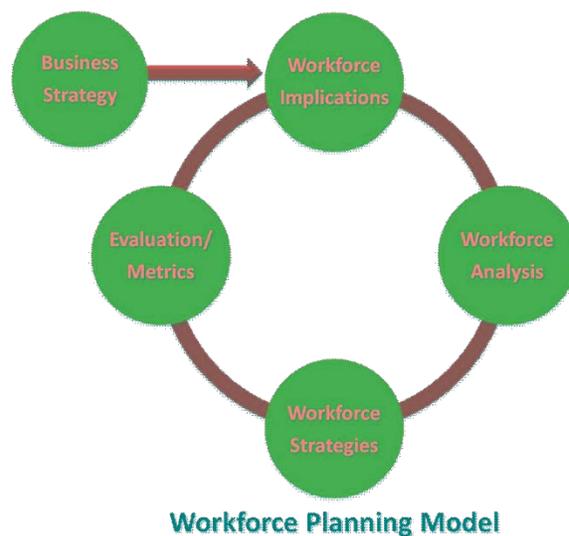


Figure 8: Workforce Planning Model (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2015)

During program development, Lindsay and Babb (2015) recommend that two metrics first be developed: 1) Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that are quantifiable progress toward stated goals and 2) Critical Success Factors (CSF) that indicate practices that should be developed or need to exist to achieve goals (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2015). An agency or company should define each objective and the supporting strategies that are to be measured using these indicators. These are the two primary indicators for workforce

development because, while a program may have good “input or output measurements such as number of certificates awarded, number of curriculum developed, number of teachers trained... [it] can still fail...if those activities do not lead to new or better employment opportunities over the longer term” (Lindsay & Babb, 2015). However, as is evident in the interviews, the CSF is not something most agencies measure.

The Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD) emphasizes that stakeholders from industry, education and training and job seekers should be included in the measurement because they each have a different perspective on the needs and issues of local workforce development. For each sector or agency, the KPIs and CSFs for each stakeholder group must be identified. Once that is accomplished, evaluation tools can be created to gather the appropriate metrics from targeted stakeholders. Data from these tools can be used to create various dashboards for easy reference (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2015).

Weigensberg et.al. (2012) recommend that workforce development agencies work together to create an integrated data system so information can be easily shared and compared. This process must include interfacing the various data systems to reduce repetitive reporting, which will require the collaboration identify and implement a shared management information system. Each agency must collect data on all program participants regardless of funding status or the source of motivation for evaluation. Care must be taken that data collection is consistent and accurate when compiled by several individuals. The results of the measurements must be presented in such a way to facilitate assessment and reporting. If multiple funders are involved, the reporting must be relevant to the needs of each. Finally, the evaluation process must be flexible to meet the diverse needs of various programs (Weigensberg, et al., 2012).

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the research team makes three recommendations for the LRWDB. First, we recommend that the LRWDB continue as the backbone organization in the Little Rock workforce development system, while seeking to become more proactive in this role. Second, we recommend that the LRWDB seek to establish a regional workforce development advisory board. This might be carried out in partnership with the Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board (CAWDB). Third, we recommend that the LRWDB consider elements of the Collective Impact approach to collaboration in guiding its efforts at promoting greater collaboration within Little Rock's workforce development system.

Recommendation #1 --- Continue and Enhance LRWDB's Role as a Convener

Our first recommendation is that the LRWDB continue to serve as a convening organization for collaboration within the Little Rock workforce development system, and to seek to enhance this role. This research found that successful collaborative efforts in the comparison cities are led by a convener or backbone organization. For example, in St. Louis, the Chamber of Commerce serves as a convener of workforce development organizations in the community by coordinating with over 200 employers to support a city-wide education initiative.

With a strong history of collaboration and leadership within the local workforce development community, the LRWDB can easily expand in its convener role. Throughout the stakeholder interviews, numerous Little Rock organizations commented on having past and current collaborations with the LRWDB. One recent example is the partnership with several organizations to create "The Rock City Re-entry Project" with a goal to provide workforce services to recently incarcerated individuals to decrease the rate of recidivism in Arkansas. Additionally, this research found that the LRWDB is well-known within the workforce development community and is perceived positively as trustworthy and accessible, which will assist in its continuing role as a backbone organization.

As previously discussed, a possible obstacle to further extending the LRWDB's role in catalyzing collaboration may be a perception held by some workforce development stakeholders that the LRWDB is less effective at achieving its goals than it could be. It is possible that as the LRWDB works more closely with other organizations in a collaborative setting, this perception may diminish. However, the LRWDB should develop a strategy to address this perception, which will improve its influence in the community and its effectiveness as a convener.

Recommendation #2 --- Establish a Regional Advisory Board

Our second recommendation is that the LRWDB should seek to establish a regional advisory board on workforce development, perhaps in partnership with CAWDB. At the moment, workforce development responsibilities in the Central Arkansas region are split between the LRWDB and the CAWDB. The LRWDB's mandate is to serve workforce development needs in the city boundaries of Little Rock, while the CAWDB oversees workforce development in Pulaski County outside of Little Rock as well as the surrounding counties. But workforce development in each of the comparison cities is regarded as a regional need requiring solutions and services at the level of the metropolitan region. Moreover, most workforce development organizations that serve Little Rock also serve the Central Arkansas region more generally. Hence, a significant need exists in the Central Arkansas region for a coordinated approach to workforce development that includes the City of Little Rock and Central Arkansas jurisdictions outside of Little Rock. A central focus of this advisory board should be to identify and facilitate collaboration across workforce development organizations in the Little Rock metropolitan region as a whole. We suggest that this advisory board be developed in partnership with the CAWDB in order to avoid the fragmentation that we find in metropolitan regions with competing workforce development conveners. For example, in Memphis, two organizations claimed to be a convener in the area without any formal recognition by the other organization. As a result, the workforce system in Memphis experiences "siloeing" and only limited collaboration.



A central focus of this advisory board should be to identify and facilitate collaboration across workforce development organizations in the Little Rock metropolitan region as a whole.

Despite high degrees of collaboration that already characterize the Little Rock workforce development system, the research team found evidence of "siloeing" occurring within youth services as well as with organizations that offer training and employment services and those that are support focused. Hence, we suggest that this advisory board play a role in cultivating collaboration that will better integrate youth services and workforce development support organizations into the system. An example of regional collaboration was observed in the benchmark city of Grand Rapids where Goodwill Industries leads the Employment Services Collaborative (ESC), which provides coordinated employment services and, as a result, discourages the siloeing of individual organizations.

This advisory board could be composed of organizations that provide training and employer services as well as include workforce organizations that provide support functions. It might also allow leaders in both LRWDB and CAWDB to build a board outside of the regulatory

restrictions of WIOA and thereby including additional organizations and leaders in the collaboration. Additionally, efforts should be made to include employers in this collaboration or organizations with strong ties to employers to increase communication of needs within that area. Bringing these types of organizations together would help to address the issues of siloing.

Recommendation #3 --- Adopt Elements of Collective Impact

The final recommendation by the research team is that the LRWDB utilize elements of Collective Impact approaches to facilitate effective collaboration. Two elements of this approach may be particularly helpful: 1) commitment to shared goals and 2) commitment to performance measurement. This study found that while collaboration is already well-integrated into the Little Rock workforce development system, nearly all collaboration is motivated by incentives created by funding opportunities that are only available through collaboration. Many opportunities for collaboration may exist based on shared goals or staff expertise, but go unrealized. Collaboration that is driven by a common agenda or goal may help to identify some of these opportunities. Collaboration based on a shared agenda is common in some of the comparison cities we evaluated. In Knoxville, for example, the Knox Area Employment Consortium was developed to coordinate the efforts of workforce service providers and employers with the goal of improving the ability of disabled job seekers to find employment. Since a number of organizations in the Little Rock workforce development system viewed a need for improvement in youth services, this may be a suitable shared agenda to initiate collaboration.

As discussed above, a shared measurement system is important when operating under the Collective Impact model to effectively monitor outcomes and the collaboration's effectiveness. In no comparison city was there an indication of the use of robust performance measures outside of simple counts. When implementing the Collective Impact model of collaboration, the LRWDB should utilize tools that can measure the outcomes of the unified efforts. As previously discussed, dashboards, pathway evaluators, surveys, statistical indicators and supply and demand reports are among the tools that can be utilized to track progress. As convener, the LRWDB should ensure that indicators and tools are agreed upon, shared, published, and used by all organizations involved in the collaboration. The outcome measurements should be used to improve further program iterations, thereby improving service to the community.

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