# Power in Partnerships:
## How City-County Collaborations Advance Economic Mobility

March 2022

**RESULTS FOR AMERICA**

# CONTENTS

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Growing economic inequality and disparities of opportunity are among the great challenges of our time. Addressing these systemic challenges requires new and innovative solutions. Cities and counties have an important role to play: individually they oversee most of the services that residents interact with on a day to day basis. Working together, they have the power to significantly improve the lives of residents and address inequality by compounding their own jurisdictional authorities and finances, and finding efficiencies in ways that can expand any individual impact they could have. Results for America carried out research that identifies best practices for city–county collaborations, developed six case studies of interjurisdictional collaboration, and highlighted how local governments can work together to advance economic mobility.

## Areas of opportunity

Many policy, infrastructure, and program areas that cross jurisdictional boundaries lend themselves to more regional solutions and thus require collaboration. Some of these areas include: childcare and early childhood education; affordable housing and homelessness; workforce development; digital inclusion and broadband access; transportation; and disaster response and planning. City and county leaders should communicate and align efforts around these areas as they seek to address inequities and improve the lives of residents.

## Establishing and sustaining a city-county collaboration

We identify three steps that all city and county partners should take before creating a collaborative. First, staff should assess the nature of the current relationship between prospective partners. Then, a city and county must develop a holistic understanding of the issues they seek to address. Finally, partners should develop representative community leadership to ensure the joint effort builds on prior work and includes those who will benefit.

Once a collaboration is underway there are a consistent set of tools and practices that sustain successful efforts:

1. Shared commitment and goal(s)
2. Trust and open communication
3. Strong champions and leaders — elected officials must be among these leaders
4. Dedicated staff time
5. Dedicated funding and material resources
6. Clear processes and accountability structures
7. Strong data systems

## Key findings

**Most collaborations go beyond just a city and a county.** They are often sustained by third-party intermediaries. This includes community-based partners present at the beginning of the work or brought in as sustaining partners.

**The nature of collaboration changes over time.** The tools needed at the beginning are different from those needed to sustain and expand.

**People have to work together for organizations to collaborate.** This process teaches individuals how other entities operate, revealing future partnership opportunities.

**Cities and counties often fail to capture best practices and tools**, limiting the ability to replicate successes elsewhere or in other policy areas.

**Many city-county collaborations involve a third party** that acts as a bridge, contributing ideas, human resources, and specific skills (e.g., project management) to the initiative. These intermediaries can be integral to sustaining successful collaborations in part because they can help overcome various barriers that often prevent or inhibit city-county collaborations.

**Common barriers** that often prevent or inhibit city-county collaborations include competing priorities and interests; competition to attain funding; political tensions; and a lack of staff capacity.

**Incentives** that can facilitate collaboration between cities and counties include state and federal mandates, grant-based incentives, constituent demand, and crises (such as COVID-19).

**Internal forces can inspire collaborative initiatives,** such as budgetary constraints, a desire for greater effectiveness, and strong support from elected officials.

In the face of significant barriers, city and county staff and elected leaders, as well as community-based organizations, are coming together to increase the economic mobility of residents. The reason is simple: Local governments and communities recognize that they can power greater change by working together.

# 2. THE POWER OF CITY-COUNTY COLLABORATION

The American Dream is built around the ideal of opportunity—that all people can improve their lives through hard work. But this dream has become harder to realize over the last 40 years. Data shows that younger Americans' chances of earning more than their parents are declining. Significant barriers to climbing the economic ladder exist based on the neighborhoods in which people live. **Furthermore, American wealth has become highly concentrated—the wealthiest are overwhelmingly white, while the poorest are overwhelmingly Black, Latino, and Native American.**[1]
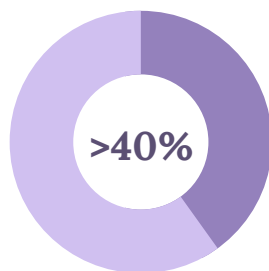
**>40%** of children raised in the bottom quintile of the income ladder remain stuck there as adults.
**Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012**
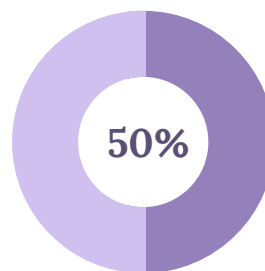
**50%** Today, only half of children grow up to earn more than their parents.
**Chetty et al., 2016**

Reversing growing economic inequality in the U.S. will require major reforms at the state and federal levels. No single policy area can improve economic mobility on its own. Dramatically improving the status quo will require investment and reform in every area of policy that touches the lives of low-income children and families. That said, **cities and counties can improve the lives of residents by working together, and especially by leveraging federal, state, and regional funding opportunities.**[2]

Collaboration is crucial because the systemic nature of poverty and inequality, and the interconnectedness of regional economies, makes siloed efforts less effective. Furthermore, by working together, cities and counties are able to identify financial efficiencies and solve problems more effectively together, than alone. By partnering to advance the economic mobility of residents, and centering data and equity in policies and programs, cities and counties can power greater change.

While there are well documented best practices for supporting intergovernmental collaboration, there is a dearth of research specifically about city-county collaboration. Therefore, this research seeks to identify essential elements that make these collaborations successful, as well as common barriers to success. It aims to provide guidance about how to leverage city-county collaborations to advance economic mobility and realize the full potential of local governments to meet this challenge. In this time of rising income inequality, we must find and amplify effective local strategies for renewing the promise of the American Dream.

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1.  *What Works Cities. (2020). Boosting Economic Mobility: The Great Challenge of Our Time. https://medium.com/what-works-cities-economic-mobility-initiative/boosting-economic-mobility-the-great-challenge-of-our-time-9d2e47a01674*

2.  *Results for America. (n.d.). About the Economic Mobility Catalog. https://catalog.results4america.org/about*

## Defining collaboration

For the purposes of this study, successful city–county collaborations involve the following:

- At least one county and one city within that county's jurisdiction work together to solve a public problem or provide a public service through shared services or shared investment.
- Both the city and the county incur costs (e.g., time, resources, money) and share benefits related to their efforts.
- Positive outcomes occur (something gets done) that would otherwise not occur with a single organization.

## Key questions

This report seeks to answer the following questions about city–county collaborations:

- What are the levers that make them possible?
- How do these local governments work together?
- What are the best practices?
- What are the barriers and challenges?
- Are there any specific policy areas ripe for collaboration?

# 3. CITIES AND COUNTIES' ROLES



City and county governments are the two most common forms of local government in the United States. There are over 3,000 counties and approximately 19,500 municipal governments in the country. [3]

Both city and county governments have the power to enact policies, create or administer programs, and enter into partnerships or interlocal agreements with other local governments or community partners. While the different functions of cities and counties across the U.S. vary by location, some common roles of cities and counties are summarized in the table below. In general, counties oversee major infrastructure projects, education, public health, and social services programs, while cities oversee zoning and land use, operate parks and recreation facilities, and manage other local services. Cities and counties may also have some of the same functions[4]; for example, both typically have their own law enforcement and court systems.

## Common structures and functions of counties and cities [5,6,7]

| | COUNTY | CITY (aka "Municipal") |
|---|---|---|
| GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES | • Commission System<br>• Council–Administrator System<br>• Council–Elected Executive System | • Mayor–Council system<br>  Council–Manager system |
| COMMISSION SYSTEM | Property tax revenue, a portion of sales tax receipts, and funds from intergovernmental transfers by way of federal or state grants | • Property tax revenue<br>• User fees from trash collection and the provision of water and sewer services, a portion of sales tax, and taxes on business |
| COMMON FUNCTIONS | • County Courts and Jails<br>• Voter Registration and elections<br>• Healthcare facilities (public hospitals, clinics)<br>• Health systems (mental health, public health, etc.)<br>• Human services/social assistance (includes homeless services, early childhood, elder care)<br>• Major infrastructure (roads and bridges)<br>• Transportation systems<br>• Emergency response<br>• Workforce development | • Municipal courts<br>• Utilities (water, sewer, solid waste)<br>• Parks and recreation<br>• Community development<br>• Building, zoning, and land use<br>• Police and fire services<br>• City economic development<br>• Public transportation |

*Please note that these are not exhaustive, but rather the most common. There are many different structures and functions of both cities and counties.*
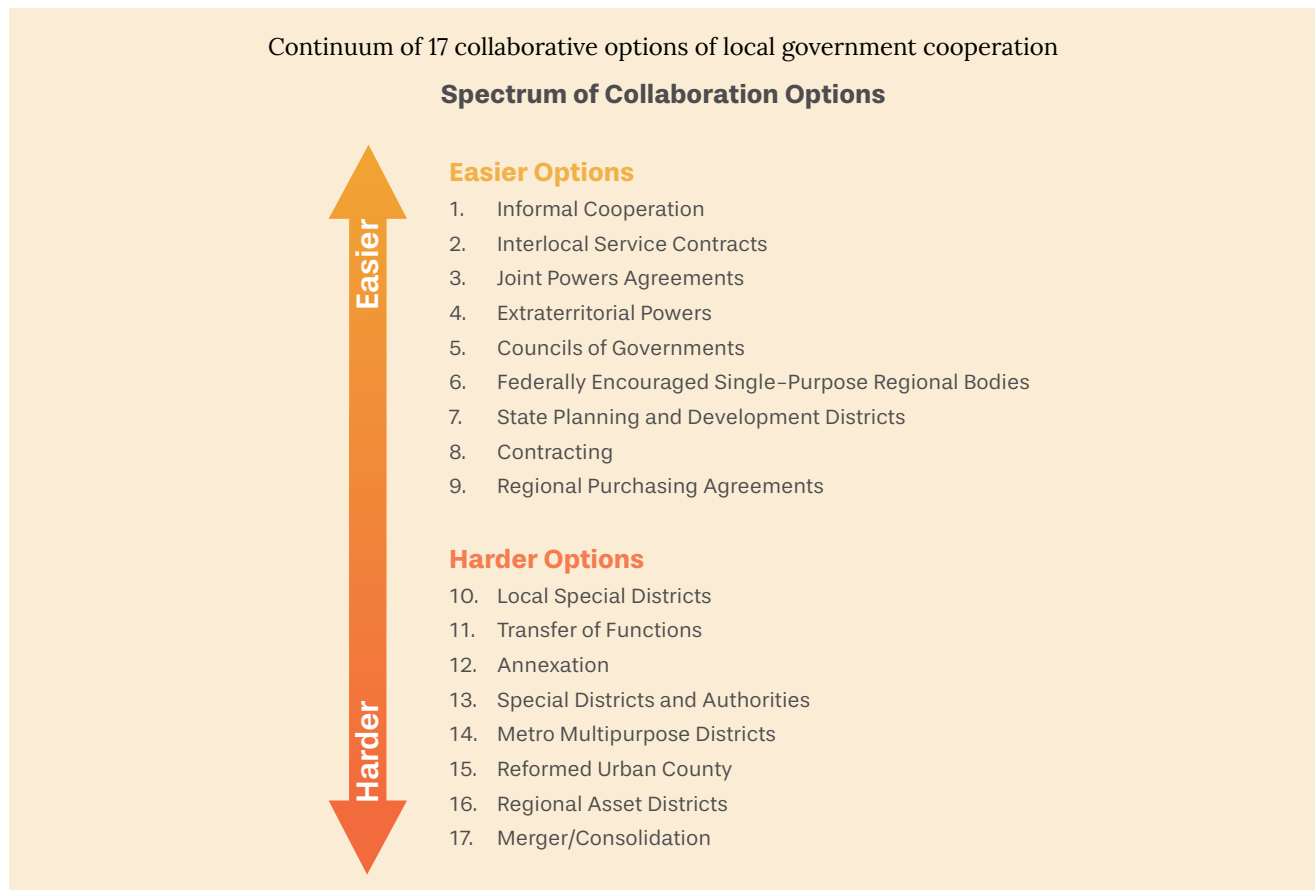
3. *OpenStax & Lumen Learning. (n.d.). American Government: County and City Government. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/amgovernment/chapter/county-and-city-government/*

4. *City Hall Fellows (n.d.) Who Does What? Cities versus Counties. https://cityhallfellows.org/who-does-what-cities-vs-counties/*

5. *OpenStax & Lumen Learning. (n.d.). American Government: County and City Government.https://courses.lumenlearning.com/amgovernment/chapter/county-and-city-government/*

6. *NC Early Childhood Financing Tools. (n.d.). Local Government 101 - Basics of Local Government. https://financingtools.ncearlychildhoodfoundation.org/local-government/basics/*

7. *City of San Luis Obisbo, CA. (n.d.) Roles of Federal, State, County & City Governments. https://www.slocity.org/government/roles-of-federal-state-county-city-governments*

# 4. A RANGE OF POSSIBLE APPROACHES

When it comes to city-county collaborations, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. There are many different ways collaborations between cities and counties can be developed and structured. Moveover, the unique aspects of and variables in every city and county add another layer of complexity, creating a range of possible factors that impact the collaboration process.

David Walker's Continuum of 17 Collaborative Options of Local Government Cooperation[8] outlines a broad spectrum of potential collaboration options ranging from simple to complex and from informal to formal.[9] For example, the two legislative bodies may decide to develop a collaboration between one aligned department from both the city and county. Or, they may decide to develop a massive economic mobility initiative across seven county agencies and five city departments.

This tool can be used by government entities seeking a menu of possibilities:

Continuum of 17 collaborative options of local government cooperation

## Spectrum of Collaboration Options

**Easier**

### Easier Options
1. Informal Cooperation
2. Interlocal Service Contracts
3. Joint Powers Agreements
4. Extraterritorial Powers
5. Councils of Governments
6. Federally Encouraged Single-Purpose Regional Bodies
7. State Planning and Development Districts
8. Contracting
9. Regional Purchasing Agreements

### Harder Options
10. Local Special Districts
11. Transfer of Functions
12. Annexation
13. Special Districts and Authorities
14. Metro Multipurpose Districts
15. Reformed Urban County
16. Regional Asset Districts
17. Merger/Consolidation

**Harder**

Importantly, **there is no direct correlation between how easy or hard a collaboration is and the regional impact or outcomes that collaboration produces**. Many counties and cities have been able to make their greatest impact through informal agreements wherein both parties align on a shared goal but never develop any formal structures. Others may consolidate entire departments and agencies and achieve lesser results.

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8. *Parr, J., et al. (2006). Guide to Successful Local Government Collaboration in America's Regions. National League of Cities. https://icma.org/documents/guide-successful-local-government-collaboration-americas-regions*

9. *Gerber, E. and Loh, C. (2014). Spacial Dynamics of Vertical and Horizontal Intergovernmental Collaboration. Journal of Urban Affairs. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1111/juaf.12139*

# 5. AREAS RIPE FOR COLLABORATIONS

Some policy and program areas are more ripe for city–county collaboration than others. This is because certain areas lend themselves to more regionalized solutions or are more effective when funding can be combined. Further, city and county governments tend to have certain areas of expertise and capabilities due to their respective functions noted above.

**Policy and program areas ripe for collaboration include:**

Affordable housing

Serving transient populations (e.g., Transition-Age Youth, justice-involved individuals, individuals experiencing homelessness)

Workforce development (specifically, equitable access to services across a region)

Digital inclusion and broadband access

Childcare and early childhood education

Transportation (active transportation, equitable access)

Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Infrastructure development (on city and county property)

Procurement (specifically, diverse procurement via SBE, WBE, DBE, DVBE, LGBTBE)

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) of 2021 presents an unprecedented opportunity to support these policy and program areas through local collaborations. The legislation directs a total of $350 billion to state, local, and tribal governments, representing the largest-ever direct infusion of federal funds to local governments. To enhance the effectiveness of these dollars, funds can be transferable between neighboring local governments. For example, counties may consider sending funding to cities within their jurisdictions to address homelessness or provide food. City and county leaders should communicate and align efforts to most efficiently improve the lives of city and county residents.

More broadly, across the country the COVID-19 pandemic has created a culture of city–county collaboration in response to the crisis. According to a recent survey by ICMA, in the wake of COVID-19, local governments are more likely to be interested in alternative service delivery models, including intergovernmental partnerships.[10] Governments now have the opportunity to leverage and build upon existing relationships to catalyze new collaborations to address inequality and boost economic mobility.

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10.   ICMA. (n.d.) (2021). *Service Delivery Alternatives in the Age of COVID-19 Summary Report. https://icma.org/documents/service-delivery-alterna-tives-age-covid-19-summary-report*

# 6. BEST PRACTICES: FIRST STEPS, ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS, AND SUSTAINING STRATEGIES

This section seeks to provide detailed guidance relative to planning, launching, and sustaining city–county collaborations, as well as the crucial role third parties can play in their success. The best practices presented are divided into four areas:
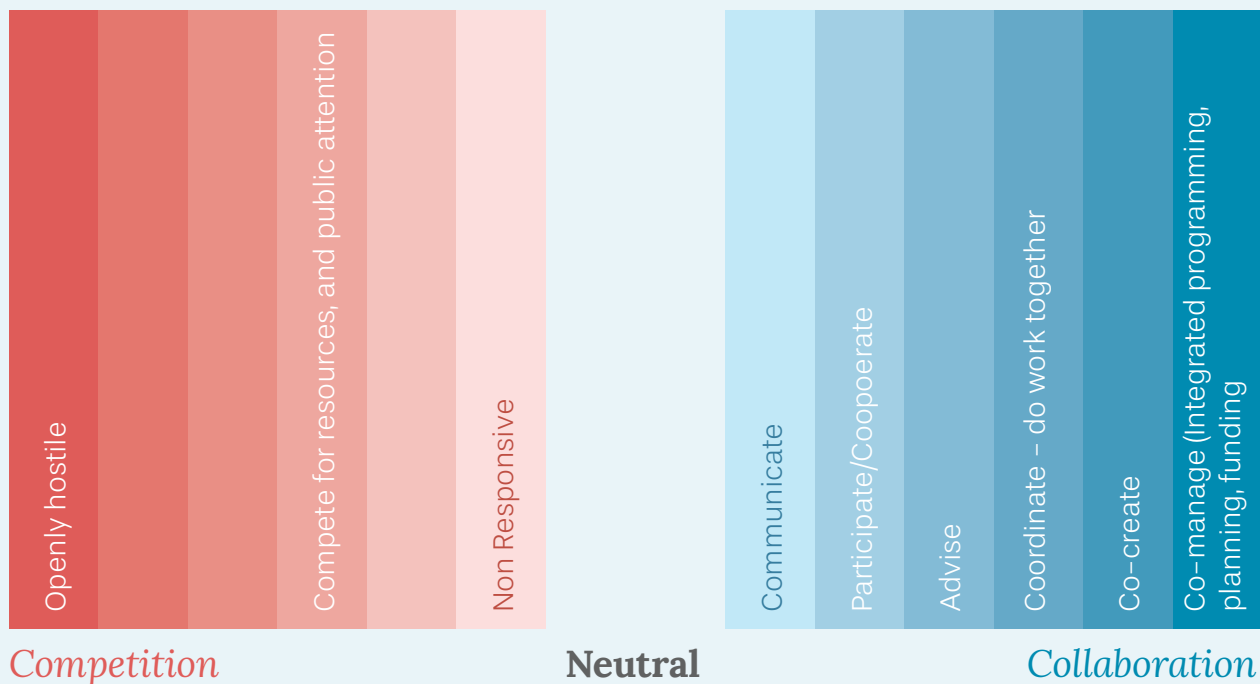
- Pre-work: First steps
- Essential elements of effective city–county collaborations
- Strategies to sustain long-term collaborations
- The valuable role of third-party intermediaries

## Pre-work: First steps

Before getting started, partners should evaluate the dynamics of their current relationship and develop a deeper understanding of the issues they seek to address. Additionally, as the collaboration takes shape, to the extent possible, the leadership should be representative of the community and incorporate community input throughout the design process. These initial steps set the stage for success by ensuring that collaborations are built on prior efforts and include those who stand to benefit from the effort.

1. **Evaluate the dynamics of the current relationship, as collaborations build on a foundation of existing relationships. Cities and counties' relationships** with each other range from openly hostile and competitive, to highly integrated and collaborative. Furthermore, dynamics exist between institutions as a whole and individually between staff within institutions – both should be considered and evaluated. Prior to engaging, potential and aspiring collaborators should recognize the status of their current relationship.

## City-county relationship continuum

| Competition | | | | | | Neutral | Collaboration | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Openly hostile | | | Compete for resources, and public attention | | Non Responsive | | Communicate | Participate/Coopoerate | Advise | Coordinate – do work together | Co-create | Co-manage (Integrated programming, planning, funding |

2. **Understand the challenge and limitations.** Economic mobility is complex and has different challenges at different levels of government, within the community, and across policy areas. Deepen your knowledge of the challenge you are attempting to address, such as understanding the legal and technological limitations, policy hurdles, and prior attempts to address the issue. It is also important to involve and listen to the people who are already doing the work.

3. **Seek and incorporate representative community input to inform the strategy.** Any effort to increase economic mobility should include the people who stand to benefit from such a strategy. If city and county officials do not include individuals and groups who have firsthand knowledge of the issues they are seeking to address, they may unintentionally not consider root causes. Furthermore, strategies to support upward mobility often need buy-in from the community. If the community is not meaningfully engaged and included in the project, it may organize against the initiative later on, causing it to fail. Thus every collaborative should put the community at the center and ensure resident feedback is heard and included at every phase.

## Essential elements of effective city–county collaborations

Based on observations from a range of city–county collaborations, there is a consistent set of tools and practices seen in successful collaboration efforts. These seven elements are nearly always present:

**1. Shared commitment and goal(s)**

**2. Trust and open communication**

**3. Strong champions and leaders**

**4. Dedicated staff**

**5. Dedicated funding and material resources**

**6. Clear processes and accountability structures**

**7. Strong data systems**

## 1. Shared Commitment and Goal(s)

Partners have a shared commitment to the collaboration's ultimate objective and understand why it is important. They co-develop goals and rally around a shared vision and compelling purpose.

### Key strategies:

- Engage in joint goal setting. Convene key partners to align on a shared goal and be sure to include members of the community (e.g., nonprofits, businesses, people with lived experience).
- Develop SMART goals—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—and track progress toward them.
- Codify shared goals into a formal written document or strategic plan.
- Bring staff along in the vision. When line-level staff understands why the collaboration is taking place, implementation is easier. Ensure these stakeholders are part of the planning and strategy phases.

### Advanced tactics to take a collaboration to the next level:

- Align all or elements of city and county strategic plans to ensure the commitment is a joint priority.
- Institutionalize collaboration by passing joint ordinances, motions, etc.
- Renew commitments at regular intervals to sustain collaboration.

## Shared commitment and goals in action

- The **City of Seattle, WA** and **King County's** partnership to distribute COVID-19 vaccines was centered around shared **Principles for Equitable Vaccine Delivery:**

    - Remove barriers that deter access.
    - Create an inclusive process.
    - Be intentionally anti-racist and accountable to BIPOC communities.

- The **City of San Jose, CA** and **Santa Clara County's** partnership to end homelessness was centered around a set of shared goals outlined in their Community Plan to End Homelessness.

- The **City of Los Angeles, CA** and **Los Angeles County** developed a vision and mission for how to collaborate to better serve opportunity youth.

- **Vision:** All disconnected youth in Los Angeles will secure quality education, training, and employment opportunities.

## 2. Trust and Open Communication

There is trust among key staff and stakeholders due to open communication, transparency, and shared processes. Trust can and should be developed over time.

### Key strategies:

- **Identify shared norms for working together.** Essential norms include always trying to frame things positively; establishing a process for healthy differences in opinion; addressing issues as they arise; dealing immediately with distrust and skepticism.
- **Establish a regular cadence of meetings** to maintain constant, open communication.
- **Align city and county staff counterparts.** Connect city and county leaders/staff who have complementary roles or work in complementary departments so they can build camaraderie and streamline workflows.
- **Develop transparent processes.** Provide visibility across multiple stakeholders in order to gain credibility.
- **Start with a small, easy project** to get people on board and build trusting relationships. This will help develop the interpersonal tools necessary for tougher, more systemic work. These quick wins can also boost morale, build infrastructure, and prove the potential for impact. [11]

### Advanced tactics to take a collaboration to the next level:

- **Invest in expert facilitation** to create a safe space for engagement and mediate tensions or concerns. An excellent facilitator acts as a neutral party to ensure all partners do not feel like they are losing ground.
- **Invest in relationship-building** (e.g., team lunches, multi-day retreats, site visits).
- **Leverage technology** to establish open communication channels, such as Slack or Teams.
- **Provide a sense of equal (proportional) contributions.** Collaboratives often erode when one of the parties feels that the costs and benefits of working together do not align. [12]
- **Share data** to establish common metrics and baselines for progress.

11.  Parr, J., et al. (2006). *Guide to Successful Local Government Collaboration in America's Regions.* https://icma.org/documents/guide-successful-local-government-collabora-tion-americas-regions

12.  *Ibid.*

## 3. Strong Champions and Leaders

The collaboration should include leaders who can catalyze, convene, and encourage others to solve problems together. This looks like a boundary-spanning leader (or leaders) who can convene a cross-section of stakeholders. This is often in addition to sustained buy-in from elected leadership.

**Boundary-spanning leaders** to get people to the table, increase the visibility of the issue, advocate for the work, and increase momentum. They help to galvanize movements and are often critical to getting initiatives off the ground.

**Sustained buy-In from elected officials** signals that decision-makers approve and are committed to making it work. Their public commitment builds legitimacy, sustains the process through difficult decisions, and helps attain buy-in across the ranks.[13] Elected leadership is also often needed to ensure sufficient resources to support the process.

### Key strategies:

- **Recruit high-level, visible leaders and elected officials** to build momentum.
- **Keep elected officials informed and engaged.** Not all officials will be leaders in the collaborative, but it is critical to keep them all informed and engaged. Successful coalitions introduce themselves to elected officials and staff to explain: 1) why the issue is important to the community; and 2) how they can get involved and support.
- **Bring new elected officials and staff up to speed to secure buy-in and support.**

### Advanced tactics to take a collaboration to the next level:

- **Recognize leaders publicly to garner goodwill and additional support and investment** (e.g., nominate them for awards, ask them to attend a press conference, etc.)
- **Maintain visibility through regular reporting of project progress in media and government channels** (e.g., government briefings, news coverage, blogs, press releases, etc.)
- **Leverage data to tell the story and secure commitments.** Use data from state, county, city, and nonprofit entities to identify current challenges and create clear metrics for improvement. Use that data to support committed leaders in how the initiative is going and what each side is gaining from the partnership.

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13.   Zeemering, E. S., & Delabbio, D. (2013). A County Manager's Guide to Shared Services in Local Government. https://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/A%20County%20 Managers%20Guide%20to%20Shared%20Services.pdf

## CASE STUDY: *Collaborating to End Homelessness*

**City of Cincinnati & Hamilton County, OH**

**Helping families achieve economic mobility through access to flexible funding**

**About the partnership:** The Cincinnati, OH Mayor's Office and Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) leverage public and private funding to alleviate poverty and racial disparities in the community.

**The problem:** High rates of poverty and income inequality between white and Black residents are a persistent challenge in Cincinnati and Hamilton County. In 2018, 74% of Black children under six were living in poverty compared to 52% of white children. The median household income for Black residents was $24,272, compared to $57,481 in white households.

**The solution:** In 2019, the City and County, along with the business community and community-based partners, launched Project Lift, an innovative private-public partnership providing flexible funding to local families living in poverty to pay for things not covered by other social supports. Strong community champions were critical to getting Project Lift off the ground:

- Mayor John Cranley brought key stakeholders to the collaborative table. The Mayor developed and met with the steering committee weekly for three years before formally launching Project Lift in 2019.

- Moira Weir, former director of JFS, championed the project for the County and leveraged her knowledge to attain a state waiver to use the County's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars flexibly.

**Impact:** 1,000 households have been served by Project Lift since April 2019.

## 4. Dedicated Staff

There are dedicated people with committed time to ensure progress is made. These can be staff from city and county departments, individuals hired specifically for the collaboration, or people from third parties providing support.

### Key strategies:

- **Ensure both city and county leadership is represented.** This builds a sense of shared ownership.
- **Give agency to those most involved.** Staff involved in the day-to-day operations of the collaboration must have decision-making authority, lest the collaboration be stalled by bureaucratic bottlenecks. Decision-makers should be present during regular meetings in order to make swift decisions.
- **Engage staff at all levels, including frontline staff and data teams.** This will build buy-in for the collaborative effort at all levels of the relevant city and county departments, helping to ensure plans can be realistically implemented.
- **Provide staff with the time and tools to sustain collaboration.** Staff can only collaborate if time is made in their schedules to accommodate the added workload. Further, they may need access to project management, data analysis, and communication tools in order to work together.

### Advanced tactics to take a collaboration to the next level:

- **Support from a third-party convener.** Leverage outside support or secure technical assistance from nonprofits, foundations, and consultants to increase capacity and reduce city or county staff workloads.
- **Provide professional development to ensure staff have the skills and capacity to sustain the collaboration.** Many effective collaborations are led by staff with extensive project management skills who have managed large-scale projects and understand how to facilitate collaboration.[14]
- **Celebrate interim successes** to boost morale and prove that the collaboration is working. Focus on what has been accomplished to engage and motivate members.

14. Jolin, M., Schmitz, P., & Seldon, W. (2012). *Needle-Moving Community Collaboratives: A Promising Approach to Addressing America's Biggest Challenges.* https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/needle-moving-community-collaboratives/needle-moving-community-collaboratives.pdf

## 5. Dedicated Funding and Material Resources

There are adequate resources to develop and sustain collaboratives—time, tools, and funding.

### Key strategies:

- **Shared commitment of sufficient resources.** Identify the full costs, including staff time, to execute the project, and then pool resources to share the burden. Given the difference in staff size and funding between cities and counties, the individual costs can be right-sized as appropriate.
- **Talk about costs and agree on a funding structure.** Facilitate conversations that would allocate costs fairly and ensure all collaborating entities know what those cost and revenue streams include.[15]
- **Develop lasting systems and infrastructure to sustain collaboration.** Formalize the collaborative by creating systems and processes that can withstand changes in staff, leadership, and funding (e.g., earmark funding, develop a commission).
- **Document and share the impact story.** Marketing is important to demonstrate success and obtain the buy-in and funding necessary to scale. This can also work to report back to the public on how funding was utilized to further community priorities. Dedicate communications resources to the initiative.

### Advanced tactics to take a collaboration to the next level:

- **Combine funding sources** to realize economies of scale.
- **Develop new revenue and funding streams** (e.g., joint grant funding, bonds, public/private partnerships).

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15.   Warm, D. (2011). *Local Government Collaboration for a New Decade: Risk, Trust, and Effectiveness.* https://www.jstor.org/stable/41303175

**CASE STUDY:**
*Pre-K for All*

**City of Memphis & Shelby County, TN**

**Improving and expanding pre-K programming through outcomes-based funding**

**About the partnership:** The City of Memphis and Shelby County partnered to ensure all four-year olds in the region have access to high-impact pre-K programs in order to improve school readiness and life outcomes. Memphis and Shelby County made substantial commitments and adopted an outcomes-based funding structure to create and sustain the Pre-K for All program.

**The problem:** Loss of funding for preschool seats, coupled with low third-grade literacy rates in the City and County, signaled the need for improvements in the local early childhood education system.

**The solution:** After many transparent conversations about what it would take to pay for an expansion of pre-K programming, the City and the County Mayors' Offices made **substantial investments from their respective general budgets** to support the Pre-K For All program.

- Over the first three years of the program, the County committed $8 million and the City committed $13.5 million.
- The City and County adopted an innovative outcomes-based funding structure (sometimes referred to as 'Pay for Success') where City and County funds are placed in escrow and are only released to the school district and program operators once they achieve success metrics including quality standards, attendance, and literacy.

**Impact:** In the first year of the program (2019-2020 school year), 1,402 four-year olds were enrolled in 67 pre-K classrooms. 76% of students were reading at grade level or on track to be reading at grade level by March 2020.

## CASE STUDY:
### Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) Initiative for Disconnected Youth

**City of Los Angeles & Los Angeles County, CA**

**Creating a regional service delivery system to improve the education, employment, housing, and physical/mental well-being of opportunity youth**

**About the partnership:** In 2015, the City of Los Angeles' Economic and Workforce Development Department was selected by the U.S. Department of Labor as a Performance Partnership Pilot for Disconnected Youth (P3) site. As part of its P3 initiative, the City galvanized a large cross-section of organizations, including the County of Los Angeles, to streamline and enhance regional service delivery systems to improve outcomes for disconnected youth.

**The problem:** In 2018, 170,000 youth aged 16–24 (1 in 6) in the County could be classified as "disconnected": either experiencing homelessness, in foster care, pregnant, parenting, justice system-involved, unemployed, or at risk of dropping out of school.

**The solution:** The P3 pilot involved coordinating multiple layers of City and County services for disconnected youth through colocation of services, data-sharing agreements, and collaborative regional meetings. The City and County passed formal commitment motions to the project and developed key structures and processes.

- Multiple working groups were developed to accommodate simultaneous workflows.
- Monthly meetings were held in seven regions to bring line-level staff together to brainstorm and collaborate.

**Impact:** This process fostered new data-sharing agreements, new policies and programs, and regional meetings that continue to this day. Youth participants were three times as likely to complete a secondary education degree or certificate, and almost two times as likely to be employed at the end of the program.

## 6. Clear Processes and Accountability Structures

Processes are in place to continue momentum and stay on track to achieve goals. Good processes are a crucial way to navigate the range of expectations and needs that partners bring to the table.[16]

### Key strategies:

- **Establish clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations for each partner.**[17] Identify the strengths of each and develop ways to lean into them to attain efficiencies.
- **Establish a formal working group** or other formal group structure (e.g., commission, task force, steering committee) to lead or oversee the effort.
- **Formalize roles and processes through written agreements** (e.g., MOUs, Joint Service Agreements, Revenue-sharing agreements).
- **Use SMART goals and interim milestones** to align and prioritize workflows across teams and measure success.

### Advanced tactics to take a collaboration to the next level:

- **Colocate services** to streamline service provision, increase collaboration, and enhance communication.
- **Generate interim reports** to track progress toward shared goals and maintain accountability.
- **Utilize agile methodologies, including an objectives and key results (OKR) framework,** to align and prioritize workflows across teams and measure success.

16.    *Ibid.*

17.    *U.S. Government Accountability Office. Leading Practices in Collaboration Across Governments, Nonprofits, and the Private Sector. https://www.gao.gov/leading-practices-collaboration-across-governments%2C-nonprofits%2C-and-private-sector*

## 7. Strong Data Systems

Stakeholders use data to set the agenda, build accountability, jointly make decisions, and track success in the short and long term.

**Key strategies:**

- **Pool data to identify the policy challenge and develop shared metrics** to track goals.
- **Monitor progress on metrics at regular intervals and use it to support decision-making.** Focus on milestones and incremental wins in addition to the overall success to keep people engaged.
- **Adopt a formal data-sharing agreement.**
- **Create a live data dashboard** available to all stakeholders that displays data in real-time to track incremental progress toward goals. Tableau and PowerBI are common tools used to develop interactive data dashboards.

**Advanced tactics to take a collaboration to the next level:**

- **Leverage data to build buy-in and share impact.** Use data from state, county, city, and nonprofit entities to identify current challenges and create clear metrics for improvement.
- **Align metrics with existing city, county, state, federal, or international metrics.**
- **Develop a shared data system** to centralize information. One partner can manage and host the data system, or have a third-party nonprofit host the data.

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## CASE STUDY: COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

**City of Seattle & King County, WA**

**Providing equitable access to vaccines through a collaborative effort**

**About the partnership:** In late 2020, the City of Seattle and King County partnered to distribute COVID-19 vaccines to residents. The County developed a centralized COVID Vaccine Distribution dashboard that the City and other partnering agencies use to track progress of efforts, including monitoring for equitable distribution.

**The problem:** Individuals in the highest-need populations faced unique challenges to vaccine access, especially due to initial scarcity of COVID vaccines.

**The solution:** The public-facing data dashboard provided transparency and gave partners access to real-time outcomes data on the status of distribution efforts.

- Agencies leveraged data to identify gaps and adjust vaccine distribution activities in order to ensure equitable access across race, ethnicity, age, and geography.
- The user-friendly dashboard is on the County Public Health website.

**Impact:** As of July 2021, over 80% of residents have been fully vaccinated, surpassing the goal of 70%.

## Strategies to sustain long-term collaborations

Most successful city–county collaborations take years to accomplish what they set out to achieve. Moreover, collaboratives often do not have a clear endpoint, as partners realize that through continued collaboration they can achieve greater impacts. Along with the seven essential elements of collaboration detailed above, these strategies help sustain the viability of long-term partnerships:

- **Make annual commitment and recommitment:** As time passes, it is essential for leadership to regularly evaluate the ongoing usefulness of the work, and as appropriate, recommit resources.
- **Set new goals to address new developments:** Raise the bar and set higher goals. As initial goals are achieved, if there is more work to be done, set new, more ambitious goals to continue the momentum.
- **Continuously build relationships:** In addition to meetings to move work forward, there should be opportunities for gathering that facilitate ongoing relationship and trust building between staff.
- **Do work:** Action and work keeps people engaged. Keeping up the momentum can help sustain leadership, staff, and the public's support.
- **Celebrate success:** Track and celebrate interim successes and milestones. Many projects will take years, if not decades, to see resident-level outcomes – be sure to identify what short-term success looks like and celebrate it.
- **Provide value:** Participating in the collaborative should provide value to key stakeholders – be clear about what that value looks like and measure it wherever possible. This might include serving a broader constituency, efficiencies across systems, and more economical approaches.
- **Keep the issue visible:** Storytelling is essential to keeping the issue in the spotlight and thus ensuring it remains a priority. It can also add transparency and encourage deeper buy-in.

## The valuable role of third-party intermediaries

Many city–county collaborations involve a third party that acts as a bridge. By contributing ideas, staff, and specific skills (e.g., project management) to the initiative, intermediaries are often integral to the success and maintenance of the collaboration. The third party could be a nonprofit organization, a chamber of commerce, or a contractor selected to administer the joint initiative. Some intermediaries might be invited to the collaborative table, while others might invite or coerce the city and county to the table. Others might be asked to project manage and implement collective efforts.

Sometimes, initiatives that begin as city–county collaboratives become a program of one external organization rather than a city–county collaborative. This can signal an expansion or a contraction of the collaborative's impact depending on how the intermediary operates.

Given the prevalence of third-party intermediaries, here are best practices related to how they can play a successful project management and implementation role:

- **Ensure joint ownership by city and county.** A leadership advisory group that includes both the city and county should exist so that ownership, responsibility, and accountability remain in the hands of these entities. The intermediary should not take over, lest the initiative become an external project.
- **Develop clear accountability measures** for any third party to maintain participation and ownership.
- **Use nonprofit 501(c)3 intermediaries to raise private dollars** to supplement and sustain the initiative.

- **Consultants should help build internal capacity.** If consultants are brought in for support, be sure they train government staff on how to maintain the work so their efforts can be sustained after their departure.
- **Be open and transparent to feedback and process** to ensure that the collaborative is a coalition effort that is managed by an intermediary.

# 7. WHAT SPARKS COLLABORATIONS

There are a host of internal and external forces and levers that influence cities' and counties' decisions to collaborate and their motivation to do so. These levers can facilitate communication, which often leads to collaboration. They can also directly incentivize or even require collaboration.

## INTERNAL FORCES

- **Shared priorities and values:** Individuals or departments may have shared priorities that can catalyze collaboration.

- **Financial advantage/budgetary constraints:** Cities and counties often develop joint programs, consolidated agencies, and combine funding sources to reduce costs and/ or achieve economies of scale.

- **Desire for greater effectiveness within service provision:** Cities and counties sometimes do not have the services or the power to holistically provide services without collaboration (e.g., eviction prevention).

- **Past failures:** If one jurisdiction has already unsuccessfully attempted to address an important issue alone, it is more likely that it will purse collaborative efforts in the future.

- **Secure resources one entity cannot otherwise obtain:** A collaboration may provide access to funding or staffing that the other entity has readily available.

- **Strong support from local officials:** Elected officials may vocally advocate for collaboration or mandate it, causing departments, agencies, and staff to work together.

- **A change in political climate to a unified majority party across cities/counties:** This change in political environment can create opportunities for increased coordination across jurisdictions.

- **Self-interest of elected officials:** Officials may develop collaborations to gain public approval and visibility.

- **Leadership embraces collaborative ideals:** Leaders (whether elected or not) can catalyze, convene, energize, and facilitate others to create collaborative visions and problem-solving approaches.

- **Infrastructure needs that cannot be effectively carried out alone:** Some projects require coordination across jurisdictions (e.g., broadband).

## EXTERNAL FORCES

- **State and federal mandates:** Local governments will partner if required to do so by law.

- **Reduced federal and state funding:** Increases the need for jurisdictions to coordinate services to make dollars go further.

- **Boundary-spanning problems:** Issues that extend beyond jurisdictions of single governments, or issues too complex or vast for one entity to address.

- **Grant-based incentives:** State, federal, and philanthropic grants often bring partners together through the application process.

- **Emergencies/crises:** Natural disasters, pandemics (COVID-19), economic downturns, and other major events often force communication and collaboration.

- **Third-party involvement and oversight:** Entities such as nonprofits, coalitions, or chambers of commerce may push for coordination, bringing a city and county to the same table.

- **Resident demand and pressure:** Public leaders are responsive to resident demands; strong calls for results may require coordination and can lead to collaboration.

- **Business involvement:** With growing political involvement and influence, businesses often have the ability to pressure governments to collaborate on issues of interest.

# 8. CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

There are many challenges that limit and prevent collaboration. One of the most prominent is that cities and counties are designed to exist in silos and address problems in silos.

## Fragmented local government

- **Competing priorities and interests:** City and county staff get their orders from leadership and the priorities are often different.
  - Counties must focus regionally while cities must be responsive to city residents. This can put each into a competitive stance.
  - A county's larger base can force it to make decisions about scarce resource allocation across its jurisdiction, given differences in need across cities in the county.
- **Different geographies and different core services:**
  - Cities and counties often provide different services; for example, counties generally provide social services and public health, while cities provide infrastructure. Thus, it is possible to coexist without coordination if there is no structure in place to support collaboration.
- **No entity exists whose job it is to bring city and county governments together:** This work is often built by those in the city and county who go beyond their immediate job responsibilities to try and collaborate effectively. Outside funding, nonprofits, or place–based partnerships can play a critical role to incentivize this behavior.

## Challenging political environment

Leaders often do not have the interest, institutional knowledge, political support, time, or skills to engage in collaborative efforts.[18]

- **Lack of leadership and/or community support:** When elected leaders are not involved, it sends a message to staff that the effort is not a priority.
- **Change of elected leadership:** Too often, efforts fizzle when new elected officials arrive who do not know the history of an issue or the need for a joint effort.
- **Political tensions and egos** often prohibit collaboration or feed duplication rather than collaboration.
  - Competing interests among local officials and other key stakeholders.
  - Desire to preserve local identity and maintain local control.
  - Lack of trust due to past political rivalries.
  - Fear of resident backlash.

## Lack of representation or engagement from key groups

When key stakeholder groups are left out, they can slow down the process by creating parallel workflows, competing priorities, or even organizing against the effort.

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18.    Warm, D. (2011). *Local Government Collaboration for a New Decade: Risk, Trust, and Effectiveness.* https://www.jstor.org/stable/41303175

## Limiting policy environment

- **State mandates and policy often limit city authority.**[19] Municipal governments do not have the authority to take action on many of the central issues important to their constituents without fear of state intervention. As Neil Kleinman, professor of urban policy at New York University's Wagner School of Public Service states, "COVID-19 has shone a bright spotlight on this dynamic as cities everywhere are scrambling to address issues of public health, safety, and budget blowouts with little flexibility or authority."[20]

## Limiting funding landscape

- Federal funding often channels through a single layer of government, usually the state or county, which reinforces siloed service delivery and competition to attain funding.
- Competition for resources among local governments, combined with a lack of funding or incentive to work together, means that the hard work of collaboration often does not happen.

## Lack of capacity or resources

- **Limited maintenance funding:** Cities and counties struggle to get the funding they need to build and maintain collaborative environments. They often receive funding for programmatic work and then incorporate such items into their budgets, but they do not fund things such as food for meetings, expert facilitation, and ongoing staff time.
- **Lack of internal skill to facilitate and manage:** Developing collaborations requires staff with specific cross-cutting skills and project management expertise. Many public-sector employees are not taught these skills. Thus collaboration fails or does not start due to a lack of processes, procedures, and infrastructure.
- **Most counties and cities do not have the skills, knowledge, or tools to effectively collect and use data:** In rural counties, this limitation is often more pronounced.
- **Time-intensive nature:** Collaborations involve an enormous time and resource commitment that can be difficult to sustain.

## Societal divisions

Increasing societal divisions (e.g., racial tensions, suburban-urban tensions, urban-rural tensions) and conflicting values can make it difficult to establish a sense of shared responsibility and find common-ground solutions. This can be especially pronounced in relationships between large urban cities, situated in more rural counties.

## Bureaucratic systems

- **Paperwork and outdated processes** can place the focus on activity and outputs versus outcomes and impact.
- **Civil servants do not have the motivation to innovate because they are not rewarded for doing so:** A head-down, do-work mentality can dominate. Staff may have a lack of agency to look beyond their direct sphere of influence due to bureaucratic infrastructure and government silos.
- **There is no reward/risk ratio:** Government systems are structured to fund a specific set of services in a specific way, with many oversight provisions in place that can stifle innovation.

19.  Hawkins, C. V. (2009). *Prospects for and Barriers to Local Government Joint Ventures. State and Local Government Review.* https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0160323X0904100204

20.  Kleiman, N. (2020). *Remaking Federalism: How States Can Realign and Rebuild a Stronger and Healthier Union. Kresge Foundation & NYU Wagner Innovation Labs.* Accessed at: https://wagner.nyu.edu/innovation-labs/current/remaking-federalism

# 9. CONCLUSION

In the face of policies, politics, infrastructure, and funding systems that create obstacles across the nation, city and county staff and elected leaders, as well as community–based organizations, have come together to address one of the great challenges of our time: increasing economic mobility. The specific reason for each collaboration, as well as how policies and programs are designed and the tools with which they are implemented, vary by location. But all collaborating cities and counties do so for a simple reason: **There is power in partnerships.**

The economic mobility for all is central to the American Dream and can only be realized through the development of strong programs and policies that address the underlying structural barriers that prevent individuals from low–income communities, which disproportionately comprise people of color, from moving up. Access to good healthcare, education, housing, jobs, and financial literacy resources, coupled with a fair justice system that upholds the rights of everyone equally, are the keys to ensuring upward mobility for all Americans.

Cities and counties have authority and influence in each of these policy areas. As seen in the six collaboration case studies presented within this report, they can grow their impact when they combine their respective powers, resources, and capabilities.

## Unprecedented opportunity — and untapped potential

In the wake of the COVID–19 pandemic, and with the infusion of ARP funds from the federal government, cities and counties face an unprecedented opportunity for collaboration. Local governments owe it to their residents to work together to bolster existing regional systems to better support those from low–income communities to achieve economic stability and upward mobility. **City and county collaboration during this time has the potential to help tens of millions of people attain the American Dream**.

# 10. APPENDIX

## Methodology

A variety of research methods were employed to understand how cities and counties collaborate, and how strong collaboration can advance economic mobility. Methods included a literature review and one-on-one interviews. Six case studies of exemplary collaborations were created.

## Research methods

### Literature review
We conducted a robust scan of academic literature and self-published reports to identify existing research on best practices specifically related to city-county collaborations. Although there was limited research on the topic, over 40 useful reports were identified related to intergovernmental collaboration more broadly, informing our understanding and approach.

### Interviews
Interviews were conducted with city, county, and third-party nonprofit intermediary leadership and staff, as well as subject matter experts, to identify real-world applicable best practices, challenges, and innovative approaches to city-county collaboration.
- Nine subject-matter expert interviews.
- 31 city, county, and intermediary representatives interviews.

### Case studies
Six case studies were created from across the U.S. to exemplify and detail city-county collaborations that improved economic mobility. The following cities and counties were selected:
- City of San Jose & Santa Clara County, CA: Collaborating to End Homelessness
- City of Cincinnati & Hamilton County, OH: Child Poverty Collaborative & Project LIFT
- City of Savannah & Chatham County, GA: The Front Porch, Alternative to Justice System Involvement
- City of Memphis and Shelby County, TN: Pre-K for All
- City of Los Angeles and LA County, CA: Performance Partner Pilot (P3) Initiative for Disconnected Youth
- City of Seattle and King County, WA: COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

## Challenges conducting research

**1) Lack of rigorous research and empirical data about city-county collaboration.** While there have been many case studies and reports written about various intergovernmental collaborations, most of the research has not measured the successful outcomes of the collaboratives.

There is a lot of adjacent and related research on cross-jurisdictional collaboration, collaboration in general, collective impact, and public-private partnerships. However, this material is not directly applicable to city-county collaboration. "Our knowledge of local government to local government collaborations remains in its early stages of development," [21] one group of researchers stated. Another study found that research in this field is "limited to case studies with limited empirical

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21. Hoornbeek, J., Beechey, T., and Pascarella, T. (2016). *Fostering Local Government Collaboration: An Empirical Analysis of Case Studies in Ohio.* https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1111/juaf.12204

analysis." One analysis of 137 case studies of collaborative governance found "a lack of common language, missing data, very few evaluations of outcomes, and no comparisons with outcomes from other forms of governance."[22] A lack of empirical data leaves a gap in knowledge for those who may want to incentivize city–county collaboration by funding proven practices.

**2) Lack of standardized vocabulary** for how to refer to a collaboration between a city and county government. "Local government collaboration" or "regional collaboration" are more commonly used, but do not always refer to city and county collaborations.

**3) Unique city and county characteristics.** Cities and counties have unique governance structures, organizational hierarchies, and localized challenges and needs. While we have done our best to distill a list of general best practices, cities and counties should adapt these recommendations to their unique individual context.

Some noteworthy differences that may require more nuanced consideration include:

- **Governing authority:** The majority of counties have two key types of governing authority granted by their respective states: Dillon's Rule and Home Rule.
  - Under Dillon's Rule, counties only have powers granted by the state.
  - Under Home Rule, counties define their own powers, through constitutions or statutes.
- **Governance structure:** City councils, commissions, and other forms of governance impact how governments collaborate.
- **Size, population, and influence:** Small cities or counties with thousands of residents versus large cities or counties with millions of residents, may have different needs when it comes to collaboration. Additionally, size impacts local budgets, meaning that certain cities and counties may have access to more staff and resources than others.
- **County and city size relative to each other:** A large city in a small county may have different collaboration needs than a large city in a large county or a small city in a large county.
- **Level of urbanism:** Rural, urban, and suburban cities and counties have unique needs.

**4) Collaboration efforts in small or rural counties and cities are difficult to identify.** Many of the collaborative efforts identified in this research are between larger and/or metropolitan cities and counties. This is due to the availability and accessibility of information and research on areas that have higher populations and usually have higher rates of economic mobility challenges (and more media outlets). More research needs to be conducted on the ways in which rural governments collaborate to achieve outcomes in economic mobility in the regions they serve.

**5) Understanding on-the-ground realities requires gathering qualitative data from interviewees, which was performed for the six case studies included in this report.** Many projects and collaboratives may sound good on paper, but without outcome data and interviews with city and county staff to evaluate what collaboration actually took place/is taking place, best practices cannot be established.

22.  U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2015). *Evidence Matters: Strategies for Regional Collaboration.*  https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/fall15/highlight2.html

## The seven essential elements of city-county collaboration

| Element | Potential Barriers | Best Practices | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Key Strategies | ADVANCED TACTICS to take a collaborative to the next level |
| **1. Shared Commitment & Goals**<br><br>Stakeholders have a shared understanding of the end goal of the collaboration. They develop clear, shared values and rally around joint vision/compelling purpose. | • Competing priorities<br>• Inability to achieve consensus<br>• Lack of adherence to commitments once made<br>• Restrictive state or federal policies | • **Engage in joint goal setting:** Convene key partners to align on a shared goal<br>• **Develop SMART goals** that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound<br>• **Codify shared goals** into a formal written document or strategic plan<br>• **Bring staff and contractors along in the vision.** | • **Align city and county strategic plans or elements of city and county strategy** to ensure the commitment is a joint priority.<br>• **Pass joint ordinances, motions, etc.** to institutionalize collaboration.<br>• **Renew commitments at regular intervals** to sustain collaboration. |
| **2. Trust & Open Communication**<br><br>Stakeholders build and sustain strong, trusting relationships with each other and engage in open communication. | • History of distrust<br>• Political tensions<br>• Egos<br>• Change in elected leadership<br>• Staff turnover<br>• Lack of relationships<br>• Lack of equal representation | • **Identify shared norms** for working together<br>• **Establish a regular cadence of meetings** to maintain constant, open communication<br>• **Align city/county counterparts.** Connect leaders/staff who have complementary roles to build camaraderie and streamline workflows.<br>• **Develop transparent processes.** Provide public visibility to efforts across multiple stakeholders in order to gain credibility.<br>• **Start small/start with an easy project** in order to build trusting relationships and collaborative infrastructure. | • **Invest in expert facilitation** to create a safe-space for engagement and mediate tensions or concerns.<br>• **Invest in relationship-building** (e.g., team lunches, retreats)<br>• **Leverage technology** to establish open communication channels (e.g., Microsoft Teams chat, Slack channel)<br>• **Proportional contributions.** Partners must feel good about each other's contributions.<br>• **Share data** to establish common metrics and baselines for progress. |
| **3. Strong Champions & Leaders**<br><br>**There are boundary-spanning leaders** to get people to the table, maintain focus, and increase visibility of the issue. **There is sustained buy-in from elected officials** to build legitimacy and attain support across the ranks. | • Political tensions<br>• Competing priorities<br>• Fragmented government<br>• Change of elected leadership<br>• Staff turnover<br>• Lack of buy-in from elected leaders | • **Recruit high-level, visible public leaders and elected officials** to build momentum around the collaborative effort.<br>• **Keep elected officials informed and engaged through constant communication.** Electeds wield a lot of power. All should be informed about the efforts.<br>• **Bring new elected officials and staff up to speed to secure their buy-in and support.** | • **Recognize leaders publicly** to garner goodwill and additional support and investment in the work.<br>• **Maintain visibility through regular reporting of project progress in media and government channels** (e.g., government briefings, news coverage, blogs, press releases) |
| **4. Dedicated Staff**<br><br>There are dedicated people who have committed time to the collaborative effort to ensure progress is made. These can be staff from city and county departments, individuals hired specifically for the collaboration, or third-party staff. | • Lack of capacity<br>• Lack of skills<br>• Burnout/fatigue<br>• Competing priorities<br>• Lack of buy-in | • **City and county leadership should be represented.**<br>• **Give agency to those most involved,** including decision-making power.<br>• **Engage staff at all levels, including frontline staff and data team,** to build buy-in and support implementation.<br>• **Develop appropriate structures to support and sustain staff collaboration,** including dedicated time and work tools. | • **Support from a third-party convener** Leverage outside support/secure technical assistance to increase capacity and reduce workloads.<br>• **Provide professional development** to ensure staff have the skills and capacity to sustain the collaboration.<br>• **Celebrate interim successes** to boost morale and prove the collaboration is working. |

| Element | Potential Barriers | Best Practices | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | **Key Strategies** | **ADVANCED TACTICS to take a collaborative to the next level** |
| **5. Dedicated Funding & Material Resources**<br><br>Adequate resources are allocated to develop and sustain the collaborative (e.g., time, tools, and funding). | • Competition for resources<br>• Lack of resources for project management<br>• Feelings of unfair cost distribution<br>• Slow-moving bureaucratic systems | • Shared commitment of sufficient resources. Pool adequate resources for the initiative to succeed.<br>• Agree to a funding structure. Allocate costs fairly and ensure all collaborating entities know what cost and revenue streams include.<br>• Develop lasting systems and infrastructure that can withstand change to support and sustain collaboration (e.g., earmark funding, develop a commission)<br>• Document and share the impact story. Communications resources must be dedicated to the initiative. | • Combine funding to realize economies of scale and fund for specific purposes or populations.<br>• Develop new revenue and funding streams (e.g., joint grant funding, bonds, public/private partnerships) |
| **6. Clear Processes & Accountability Structures**<br><br>Processes are in place to ensure that the collaboration does not lose momentum and that stakeholders are on track to achieve their goals. | • Lack of communication among partners<br>• Loss of momentum over time<br>• Resistance to a formalization of collaboratives<br>• Not having the tools or resources to track success | • **Establish a formal working group** or other formal group structure (commission, task force, steering committee) to lead or oversee the collaborative effort.<br>• **Establish clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations for each partner.** Identify strengths of each partner and develop ways to lean into them to attain economies of scale or efficiencies of scale.<br>• **Formalize roles and processes through written agreements** (e.g., MOUs, Joint Service Agreements)<br>• **Use SMART goals and interim milestones** to align and prioritize workflows across teams and measure success. | • **Colocate services** to streamline service provision, increase collaboration, and enhance communication.<br>• **Generate interim reports** to track progress towards shared goals and maintain accountability.<br>• **Utilize agile methodologies, including objectives and key results (OKR) framework,** to align and prioritize workflows across teams and measure success. |
| **7. Strong Data Systems**<br><br>Stakeholders use data to set the agenda, build accountability, collaboratively make decisions, and track success of the initiative in the short and long term.<br>. | • Fragmented government<br>• Bureaucratic systems<br>• Misunderstanding data-sharing rules<br>• Data privacy/ sharing issues<br>• Staff capacity to use data tools | • **Pool data to identify the policy challenge and develop shared metrics.**<br>• **Monitor progress on metrics** at regular intervals and use it to support decision-making.<br>• **Develop a shared data system** to centralize information.<br>• **Adopt a formal data-sharing agreement.** | • **Create a live data dashboard** available to all stakeholders for monitoring and analysis.<br>• **Leverage data to build buy-in and share impact.** Use data across stakeholders to identify the current challenges and create clear metrics for improvement.<br>• **Align metrics** with existing city, county, state, federal, or international metrics. |

# Case studies

The six city–county case studies referenced above and included alongside the report directly informed the central findings. These case studies were carefully selected from dozens of city–county collaborations due to their exemplary collaboration and impact on economic mobility. Furthermore, researchers interviewed at least one, and up to as many as five, people involved in each collaboration to ensure the veracity of findings.

The case studies from across the country represent different geographic areas, policy areas, and strategies to achieve success. It is important to note that these case studies overrepresent large urban municipalities and do not represent rural communities. This is likely due to limited news coverage of rural projects. Even so, further research should be conducted to assess if this overrepresentation is due to news coverage or specific levers that make collaboration among cities and counties more likely when a municipality is large and wields greater power.

## Criteria used to select case studies

| Criteria | Definition / Guiding Question(s) |
|---|---|
| **Supported economic mobility** | Did this collaboration focus on (or include some aspect of) economic mobility? |
| **On-the-round credibility** | Did researchers speak to someone from the city or county to validate the collaboration and impact? |
| **City and county as active partners** | Did this collaboration feature a city and a county partner? |
| **Recent (2011–2021)** | Did this collaboration occur within the last decade? |
| **Data sharing** | Did this collaboration include a data element (data–sharing agreement, new data system, etc.)? |
| **Shared goals identified** | Did city and county partners develop shared goals and desired outcomes? |
| **Formalized partnership** | Did this collaboration include a formal agreement (e.g., MOU, legal agreement, entity development, etc.)? |
| **Replicable** | Does this collaboration provide learnings that may be replicated elsewhere? |
| **Regular cadence of meetings** | Did the city and county partners meet regularly during the collaboration? |
| **Outcomes data availability** | Did this collaboration track metrics and produce outcomes data? |
| **Success/effectiveness** | Did this collaboration achieve shared goals? Did this collaboration increase economic mobility in the region? |
| **Sustainability** | Does this collaboration still exist and/or does it have a plan to continue? |

# Acknowledgments

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- Tanya Washington, Senior Associate, Annie E. Casey Foundation. Related Case Study:  Savannah/Chatham County (GA) The Front Porch
- Moira Weir, CEO, United Way of Greater Cincinnati. Related Case Study: Cincinnati/Hamilton County (OH) Child Poverty Collaborative and Project Lift
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Research was conducted in partnership with Cause Impacts.

RESULTS
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