ARISE

Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies

A Regional Multistate Collaboration Toolkit

Appalachian Regional Commission

AIR®

Contents

Introduction

Background and Purpose

The Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE) is intended to support economic, workforce, and community development projects through partnerships across states in the Appalachian Region with planning and implementation grants funded under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. To support the development of the ARISE effort, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to gather input from key leaders and partners on the design and implementation of the new initiative. This information has been used to inform the development of the request for proposals for the ARISE program, as well as to understand areas of concern and where regional partners have questions related to this work.

Building on that work, AIR gathered additional information from existing multistate project practitioners, both within and outside of the ARC region, to help potential applicants understand the impacts, challenges, solutions, and critical factors involved in building, growing, and sustaining successful multistate initiatives. This toolkit synthesizes this information and provides case study examples of successful regional multistate partnerships, and offers more detailed information regarding partnership building, grant operations, challenges, and best practices involved in building a successful multistate initiative. It is important to note that while the approaches described here reflect the input established multistate partnerships shared with AIR, there are certainly other models and practices for organizing and operating multistate projects. ARC, understanding the complexities involved in multistate partnerships, hopes this toolkit will provide information helpful to building and sustaining successful initiatives. Following this introduction, the toolkit includes the following three primary sections:

- Case Studies
- Insights and Takeaways from Practitioners
- Resources

Interviews and Focus Group with Multistate Practitioners

AIR met with multiple multistate partner groups to discuss their experiences creating, growing, and sustaining multistate initiatives. These initiatives ranged from funding organizations to economic development projects to tourism initiatives, and included the following groups:

- Appalachian Funders Network
- BioConnects New England

- Central Appalachian Network
- Great Allegheny Passage Conservancy
- Invest Appalachia
- Midwest Collaborative Data Partnership
- Southeast Tennessee Development and Driving Regional Innovation in Vehicular Engines (DRIVE)
- Thrive Regional Partnership
- Tri-State Shale Coalition, with IN-2-Market and Tri-State Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Consortium

AIR also conducted a focus group with Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) grantees to discuss their experiences and the mechanics of their operations under ARC POWER grants. POWER projects in this focus group included:

- Appalachian Angel Investor Network
- Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education
- Center for Rural Entrepreneurship
- Export Promotion for the Mining Equipment Supply Chain
- Natural Capital Investment Fund
- Energy Storage Roadmap for Appalachian Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia

Both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group explored topics related to the benefits and challenges specific to regional multistate initiatives, governance and funding structures, practical grant management and mechanics considerations, strategies that drive impact and performance outcomes, trust building across partners and communities, communication strategies, and lessons learned along the way.

Practitioner Takeaways Summary

While no two initiatives are alike and there are differences related to approaches, structures, and models, common themes did emerge throughout each of the practitioner conversations. Below is a list of these themes, which are detailed later in the section titled Insights and Takeaways from Practitioners.

Case Studies

The section that follows includes case studies from AIR's interviews with four existing regional multistate partnerships, three of whom are past or current recipients of ARC funding. The case studies feature information about the regional multistate initiatives' partnerships, funding, critical success factors, impacts, and other areas.

Thrive Regional Partnership

www.thriveregionalpartnership.org

AT A GLANCE

Thrive focuses on supporting responsible regional growth through three impact areas:

- Community Prosperity
- Natural Treasures
- Transportation and Infrastructure

Thrive's footprint covers a 16-county region across three states.

"Progress moves at the speed of trust."

- Bridget Massengill
President & CEO

Collaboration Development

The tri-state Chattanooga region recognized its need to increase regional planning when a large auto manufacturer announced its plans to open a plant in the area, bringing with it challenges and opportunities related to infrastructure, workforce, and suppliers moving to the area. Building on regional work started by the Southeast Tennessee Development District and others, partners began collaborating on regional planning, and four years later, Thrive Regional Partnership (Thrive) was launched to facilitate responsible regional growth. Before organizing as a standalone nonprofit, one organization acted as the fiduciary for the partnership, but all partners had an equal say in decision making, including hiring and overseeing the executive director. Even after launching, Thrive's initial structure was somewhat informal and, over time, the collaborative added additional structure as necessary, including a board of directors, staff, and formal agreements.

Partnership

Thrive's commitment to equity and responsible growth has resulted in a large list of partners, including chambers of commerce, county and city government, community-based organizations, private sector employers, economic developers, and colleges and universities. The board of trustees consists of economic developers, private employers, and representatives of chambers of commerce and nonprofit organizations. As Thrive first convened their network, they initially relied on organizations they were connected to, such as chambers of commerce, to bridge to other collaborators in their local communities and continued to invite partners to invite their own contacts into Thrive's expanding network. During the initial stages of organization, Thrive also created a separate elected officials advisory committee. Both the board of trustees and the advisory committee represent all three states.

Funding & Sustainability

Thrive recognizes that real, sustainable change happens over time. Since its launch in 2012, when it hired its first executive director, the organization has continued to add staff each year as both the funding and the work continue to grow. The partnership works to identify diverse funding and would rather have small to midsize grants and gifts from many funders versus a large grant from a single source so they will not be reliant on a single source for their future sustainability. Thrive is funded by a diverse array of private, public, and philanthropic investors.

Thrive Regional Partnership

www.thriveregionalpartnership.org

Challenges

Like all collaborations, Thrive has had its share of challenges. Early on, communities and constituents had misperceptions about what Thrive was trying to accomplish and questioned how any one organization's work would benefit the entire region. Thrive also wanted to build the trust of elected officials at a city, county, and state level. Thrive met both concerns by building relationships. Throughout their first year, Thrive listened to regional residents and organizations through community meetings and one-on-one conversations in nearly every community impacted by their work. Because regional work across state lines is particularly challenging, Thrive met one-on-one with elected officials at every level of government to build awareness and garner support. Additionally, Thrive continued to do the work they set out to do in a reliable manner, communicating to individual communities how the regional work that was happening was a benefit to them locally.

As Thrive has built trust and shown evidence of their work, today's challenges are different than those they faced initially, though today's challenges continue to relate to issues of equity. The deeper Thrive gets into their work, the more important it is to hear every voice, and the more they have come to realize the difficulty in finding and elevating voices that have traditionally been marginalized. Today, two of Thrive's top challenges are building trust and finding the right inroad with every part of every community.

Critical Success Factors

Though it is difficult to identify the "secret sauce" of an organization like Thrive, they have identified some keys to their success:

- Make the partnership independent. No matter who is at the table, to truly build capacity, there needs to be an entity whose job it is to wake up every day and care about how to make it work.
- Share leadership. Democratizing decision making and governance across partners and geography is critical to building trust and ensuring buy-in from all collaborators.
- Take time—sometimes a lot of time—to listen to people, restate what they said, and then listen some more. Listening to learn is critical to creating a shared vision and partnership, and it continues to be key to Thrive's ongoing work.
- Discover tools and methods that can scale community engagement, collaborative leadership, and human-centered strategies.

IMPACTS

- Convened non-traditional freight partnerships across state lines.
- Created a unified front for landscape conversation across the tri-state region.
- Funded and equipped 15 rural communities for asset-based economic development.

Tri-State Shale Coalition with TEAM and IN-2-Market

www.connect2team.org
www.in2market.org

AT A GLANCE

The Tri-State Shale Coalition was developed as a response to an emerging natural gas industry. The Coalition joined forces with an existing multistate partnership, Tri-State Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (TEAM), to focus on its workforce development strategies, and another multistate partnership, IN-2-Market, has evolved to advance commercialization and research related to advanced manufacturing and energy. These interconnected partnerships illustrate the potential long-term impacts of multistate partnerships.

Project Development

The Tri-State Shale Coalition (TSSC) was formed around a shared goal of adding value to the natural gas and natural gas liquids industry located in the Appalachian Basin region shared by Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. As this business boomed in the Northern Appalachian region, it was clear that a coordinated regional response was needed to support the emerging multi-billion-dollar industry. Driven by the private sector and a number of regional economic development partners, the three states recognized the economic benefits each would receive through collaboration.

TSSC is an example of a private-public partnership: the private sector presented its needs, and the public sector organized to respond. Regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and economic development partners led the bottom-up development of a detailed agreement, and states were invited to support the effort, adding capacity and leveraging federal grant management expertise. Having an explicit demonstration of state support sent a strong message to the market and laid the foundation for partnership. TSSC developed a Regional Cooperation Agreement that identified four key areas of cooperation: marketing and promotion; workforce development; transportation and infrastructure; and resources and innovation.

TSSC began in 2015 and established a formal Memorandum of Understanding, allowing for interstate collaboration on infrastructure, workforce development, and marketing efforts. The Coalition's work included an annual summit to promote best practice sharing across government, education, and industry leaders. As a neutral convener, TSSC coordinated and facilitated meetings, events, and planning efforts supported by state partners.

Partnerships

In addition to its partnerships with private industry, state government, and economic development, TSSC connected with a pre-existing multistate effort, the Tri-State Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (TEAM), who acted as the workforce development arm of the Coalition, allowing them to focus on efforts that were not as well developed in the Tri-State region. Additionally, out of the relationships created by TSSC, another multistate partnership, IN-2-Market, is emerging to advance the commercialization and research for advanced manufacturing and energy. Though TSSC no longer has a formal agreement, these partnerships continue to serve the Tri-State area.

Tri-State Shale Coalition with TEAM and IN-2-Market

www.connect2team.org
www.in2market.org

"Working within the consortium allows partners to increase their potential impact."

- Elizabeth McIntyre
  Director
  TEAM Consortium

Challenges

TSSC needed to overcome the traditional culture of competition between states and develop a perspective of collaboration among partners for shared investment in growing and supporting a new industry and its resulting economic opportunities. As the work progressed across the four cooperative areas of the Coalition, progress varied based on differing degrees of traction and momentum among collaborators, so the Coalition had to find ways to continue to energize each focus area. Disruptions in the market due to COVID-19 have put a hold on the work; the Coalition did not extend the MOU a second time as they determine what the right next steps are for their effort.

Critical Success Factors

- Efforts were industry-driven and ground-up. Since the industry and opportunities for economic growth are regional, an industry-driven approach supports regional collaboration to overcome a culture of competition among state partners.
- TSSC began with a collective understanding that no single entity could bring about the growth of a new industrial ecosystem and that working together was the best way to leverage economic development and business opportunities that span political boundaries.
- TSSC built on strengths that already existed, including TEAM. Partnering with a pre-existing organization who was connected to the work saved duplication of effort and created greater impacts.

Connection and Evolution

Though TSSC's formal agreement was not extended beyond 2021, the impact of the Coalition's partnerships has evolved into ongoing efforts made possible by relationships created through TSSC, including an emerging partnership called IN-2-Market and the pre-existing Tri-State Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (TEAM).

IMPACT SPOTLIGHT: IN-2-Market

The IN-2-Market network is focused on becoming a catalyst for new and unique collaborations between industrial companies and the Tri-State Region's research and innovation ecosystem and is a partnership that evolved from the Tri-State Shale Coalition's research working arm. IN-2-Market facilitated the creation of the Appalachian Energy Future, a coalition of major companies in the manufacturing, advanced materials, and energy sectors, to bring innovation to the challenge of decarbonization and low-carbon industrial production.

IN-2-Market has identified the challenge of compliance across state lines, such as licensing and state approval processes. In the role of neutral facilitator, the network has an established credibility of understanding regional issues and is not viewed as a competitor for funding. IN-2-Market is a nonprofit with a diverse funding structure including foundation funding, POWER and DOD grants, AIM, and network member fees.

Tri-State Shale Coalition with TEAM and IN-2-Market

www.connect2team.org
www.in2market.org

IMPACT SPOTLIGHT: Tri-State Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (TEAM)

The pre-existing Tri-State Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (TEAM) was adopted as the workforce development arm of the Tri-State Shale Coalition. TEAM supports the workforce development pipeline across the education continuum, including traditional workforce development into post-secondary, adult learning, and incumbent worker training. The TEAM Consortium connects partners from industry, higher education, and workforce and economic development to build clear and accessible pathways to energy and manufacturing jobs in the region.

- **Partners:** TEAM supports local workforce development efforts by identifying key local system partners and developing a network marked by a culture of collaborative communication. This ground-up approach positions the consortium to fill gaps in expertise and capacity that is responsive to emerging industry needs. The consortium works across five affinity working group areas: education pathways; state partners (OH/PA/WV); workforce development and economic development; marketing and communications; and private sector industry partners.

- **Funding and Sustainability:** From the beginning, TEAM was envisioned and designed to be scalable. Each partner has a clear understanding of their own role, and activities are codified so they can be picked up and used in other regions. Through regional positioning, the consortium can raise more money and garner more resources than partners can alone or in small groups. The network model is scalable and replicable, giving confidence to partners and potential funders. The TEAM Consortium had an initial $150K in funding and raised other public-private sector funds (including POWER grants) to exceed $2.4M. One community college serves in the role of fiscal agent. TEAM's diversified funding structure leverages the public-private partnership model as well as other grants and resources.

- **Challenges:** TEAM works through compliance challenges across state lines by hiring one project manager per state to leverage the advantages of working in specific state teams.

- **Impacts:** TEAM's initial two-state, 27-county area has grown to encompass 40 counties across three states, including every community college in those counties, along with several universities and 16 workforce boards. TEAM's work includes the development of defined career pathways by expanding the Department of Labor's stackable credential model to incorporate work-based learning opportunities and offers a website of 47 relevant occupations with referrals to network partner colleges. These colleges offer a set of common courses/curricula so credits can be transferred from college to college and across state lines. Network partners conduct outreach and training to school guidance counselors to promote industry and career pathway awareness in the region.

  Read more about TEAM's work here.

Great Allegheny Passage

www.gaptrail.org
www.gaphistory.org

AT A GLANCE

The GAP is an economic development and tourism project with 150 miles of trail across five counties and two states. The trail began with a 27-mile section and was completed over the next 35 years. There are 13 individual trail section owners, who collaborate through the GAP Conservancy. Over a million people visit the GAP Trail each year.

"The sustainability of the trail is more important than the sustainability of the organization."

- Bryan Perry
  Executive Director
  GAP Conservancy

Project Development

The first mile of the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) was laid in 1978 in Western Pennsylvania. From there, rail trail groups formed along the corridor, and the idea was born that it may be possible to connect these sections to create one continuous trail from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Cumberland, Maryland, which connects to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath, operated by the National Park Service. As individual trail owners began working on their own sections and seeking funding to support the work, they recognized a need for greater coordination and created the Allegheny Trail Alliance, known today as the GAP Conservancy. The final section was completed in 2013.

The Conservancy was initially created to assist trail construction completion across multiple owners and jurisdictions by helping with funding efforts, large infrastructure projects such as tunnels and bridges, and public awareness and marketing of the trail. Though efforts have shifted from construction to sustainability, the Conservancy still works on coordinating the individual trail owners to support branding and marketing, funding, and shared policies and projects, such as consistent wayfinding strategies. Individual owners continue to maintain and operate their own sections while the Conservancy works to further the brand.

Partners

The Conservancy works as the neutral organization, responsible for branding, marketing, and coordinating the trail section owners, who are public and nonprofit organizations, such as counties, state parks, nonprofits, cities, and private owners. Each trail owner is responsible for the upkeep of their section, and each has signed an MOU with the Conservancy outlining who is responsible for things like maintenance, as well as agreement on practices like wayfinding systems. In addition to the MOUs, there is written policy regarding logo use, branding guidelines, "trail town" designations, and trail signage. The Conservancy is staffed by an executive director, who answers to the board, which includes seven trail owners, trail volunteer group representatives, and other advocates for the trail from across the two states.

Funding & Sustainability

The construction of the trail itself was funded through a variety of local, state, federal, private, and foundation funds, while regular maintenance of the trail is generally handled by individual trail owners. When funding is needed for a major project, the partnership has been able to attract funding that individual owners would not have been able to, and the Conservancy has money set aside for emergency maintenance issues as they arise. Initially, there was no

Great Allegheny Passage

www.gaptrail.org
www.gaphistory.org

state-to-state transfer of funds; each state would only support projects within their own state. However, as residents and politicians began to understand that the sum of the trail is greater than each of its parts and that everyone benefits from the whole trail, they began to think differently about this, and today, grants and other funding for large projects on the trail are often matched by state funds from both states. The Conservancy itself is funded through foundations and other private donations, as well as earned revenue from businesses who promote their services on its website. It also produces the official TrailGuide, which yields funding for the organization and for emergency trail maintenance. The Conservancy has created an endowment at a local community foundation, which is designated for special projects along the trail. While the Conservancy was at one time volunteer-only, it now employs an executive director whose job is, in part, to secure additional funds.

Challenges

As with most collaboratives, the GAP Conservancy faces the normal collaboration challenges of juggling multiple partners and navigating the individual needs of each partner. In the first three decades, the mission of completing the trail gave them a shared goal and sense of purpose. Taking elected officials and private funders on tours to see firsthand what the trail could one day be helped solve the early challenge of convincing potential partners that connecting the trail across two states was a benefit to everyone.

Today, one of the challenges of the mature collaborative is finding ways to keep that cooperative spirit and shared sense of purpose alive. Of course, one of the trail's greatest challenges is ongoing funding, as its greatest asset and its greatest challenge is the same thing: the trail is free. It generates revenue for surrounding businesses and the region, but not to the trail itself or for the Conservancy, and today, resources are fewer, and everything costs more. The Conservancy is exploring new ways, like merchandising and licensing fees, to generate funds to support the trail.

Critical Success Factors

GAP attributes their long-term success to the following practices:

- Mission must drive action; the sustainability of the trail is first priority, and it drives the collaboration.
- Built on the back of the promise that the trail would spur economic revitalization and development, the Conservancy proved out the promise by producing economic impact studies.
- The states understand that the trail's value is based on its length and destinations and have created shared messaging to attract people from outside their states.
- The Conservancy has built a genuine community of trail section owners, entrepreneurs, and business owners along the trail, which is key to the trail's long-term funding and sustainability.

IMPACTS

- The GAP generates $800,000 in economic impact per mile annually.
- The trail sees $121 million in total economic impact annually.
- It supports 1,393 jobs with an estimated average annual wage of $38K.

BioConnects New England

www.bioconnectsne.com

AT A GLANCE

BioConnects New England is a multistate coalition that connects hubs in Massachusetts, Maine, and Rhode Island to support existing, and establish new, biomanufacturing infrastructure as a pathway to increase employment and educational opportunities for underserved regions and populations.

"Working in coalition, vs. 'going it alone,' increases the opportunity for impact."

- Jared Auclair, Ph.D.
  BCNE Executive Director
  Northeastern University

Project Development

BioConnects New England (BCNE) is a coalition of partners in Massachusetts, Maine, and Rhode Island that seeks to connect resources and talent across New England to advance the biotechnology industry, expand and localize biomanufacturing, and further workforce and economic opportunity, particularly in disadvantaged areas and for marginalized populations. BCNE has four project areas, described in further detail here. Partners came together in a formal coalition in 2021 in response to the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Build Back Better Regional Challenge, for which BCNE received Phase 1 planning funds. BCNE is currently a finalist for Phase 2 implementation funding. BCNE's long-term goal is to continue to grow the funding base and partnerships to expand biotech hubs in additional New England states, throughout the Eastern Seaboard, and eventually west across the country.

Partners

Northeastern University's Biopharmaceutical Analysis Training Laboratory serves as the "backbone" organization for BCNE and leverages the university's fiscal, legal, and other resources to support the partnership. BCNE partners were networked to varying degrees prior to the EDA funding opportunity; the grant competition provided the impetus for aligning organizations and formalizing partnerships. Core project partners include Northeastern's Roux Institute in Portland, Maine; the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center; the Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute; Worcester Polytechnic Institute; the I-195 Design and Innovation District in Providence, Rhode Island; Rhode Island Commerce; the University of Rhode Island; and FocusMaine. Core BCNE partners have memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Northeastern and most receive funding for their work on the initiative through contractual agreements with the university. All BCNE partners are listed here. BCNE also has a 15-member external Advisory Board that lends its expertise to the work.

Funding & Sustainability

In addition to the EDA funding, BCNE is supported through leveraged funding (e.g., state funds) and in-kind contributions (e.g., staff time, equipment discounts) from partners. Northeastern University serves as the fiscal agent; all grant funds funnel through the university and are dispersed through contracts with partners. The university was intentional about this fiduciary approach, which supports a true coalition model with

accountability to the full partnership, in contrast to providing separate sub-awards to individual states. BCNE has a plan for sustaining its work regardless of whether it receives EDA Phase 2 implementation funding. The coalition is seeking additional federal funding, and partners are committed to continuing to invest their time and resources in BCNE. The coalition is also exploring other sustainability strategies, such as charging companies lab usage fees, engaging mentors from BCNE start-up companies, and securing employer co-investment in earn-and-learn training programs.

Challenges

Like other multistate collaboratives, BCNE has had to navigate the challenge that cross-state projects can be complex and less familiar to partners more experienced with single-state funding and projects. State and local government partners, for example, may have questions about collaborating on work that benefits neighboring jurisdictions. Ensuring that all collaborators' voices and needs are heard and acknowledged requires a significant investment of effort, and sometimes difficult conversations, but is essential. Finally, multistate initiatives require dedicated and substantial time and resources for partnership development and coordination, oversight and management, communications, and other areas. As the backbone organization, Northeastern lends university capacity for this support.

Critical Success Factors

BCNE cites several elements that have been essential to the coalition's progress to date:

- Partners must be committed to a collective vision, goals, and identity for the work.
- Building trust is the foundation for effective partnerships. Doing so often requires many one-on-one conversations with potential partners before convening larger group discussions.
- Championship from passionate leaders is important, but so is grassroots community engagement to gather input, shape direction, and build relationships with "boots on the ground" organizations.
- Multistate collaboratives must engage and benefit all partners, particularly those representing marginalized communities, meaningfully and equitably.
- Building upon partners' past successes, challenges, and lessons learned accelerates progress.
- Robust communication with all coalition partners is critical.
- Formalizing a strategic approach and structure for partnership meetings is valuable. In BCNE's case, this includes meetings of the core partners, working groups, and the external Advisory Board.

GOALS

- Catalyze regional capacity for drug product development.
- Create 40,000+ new jobs, including sub-baccalaureate jobs, in New England.
- Mitigate economic distress and unemployment in the region's urban centers, "gateway" cities, and rural areas.
- Create career pathways and economic opportunity for underserved populations.
- Increase workforce diversity.

Insights and Takeaways from Practitioners

AIR's conversations with a wide range of regional multistate initiatives underscored the collective expertise, capacity, and resources that can be mobilized for significant impact when partners work together in collaboratives across jurisdictional lines. The ARISE program's regional multistate design offers partners in the Appalachian Region an exciting opportunity to expand cooperative efforts in support of the region's economies and businesses, workforce systems, infrastructure, cultural and natural landscapes, and capacity.

To be sure, regional multistate work is not without its challenges, and the collaboratives that AIR interviewed were very candid in discussing these. First, it's a reality that states compete with one another, and they often find it more natural to compete than to collaborate. Furthermore, funding and projects are typically bound by state or other jurisdictional lines, as are elected officials; thinking regionally, particularly across state lines, may be a new or even initially uncomfortable concept for some. As experienced practitioners shared, regional multistate collaboration takes a lot of work—work that requires intention, time, resources, persistence, and grit.

But as real as these challenges can be, experienced regional multistate partnerships emphasize that the benefits and impacts of collaborating across state lines are more powerful. This section of the toolkit highlights the key lessons shared by established regional multistate partnerships, including how they anticipated and addressed challenges, the strategies and practices that worked best for them, and the crucial tips and advice they would share with other regional collaboratives looking to pursue multistate work.

Communicate the Value and Impacts of Regional Multistate Partnerships

A foundational component of effective multistate partnerships is a shared understanding of their value, importance, and impacts. Building buy-in and trust around regional approaches requires compelling answers to the question, "Why regional?" that help potential partners understand how working as a collaborative will benefit them and achieve greater outcomes. Established regional multistate partnerships shared several common perspectives on this question:

- **Understand What Constitutes the Region:** A key rationale for pursuing regional work is the reality that economic, labor shed, geographical, and cultural regions very often cross municipal and state jurisdictional boundaries. Chattanooga, Tennessee, for example, is part of an ecosystem that includes northeast Alabama and northwest Georgia and has more in common with these areas of its two state neighbors than it does with its own capital city, Nashville. Building understanding of what constitutes "the region" in economic and other terms helps potential partners see the value of collaborating with jurisdictions outside of their own.

- **Recognize the Mobility of Regional Resources:** In a related vein, nearly all the regional multistate partnerships interviewed noted that dollars, other resources, and visitors don't, in practical terms, know where state lines are or stop moving when they meet them. Money earned by a worker in Huntington, West Virginia might be spent on groceries in that worker's hometown of Ashland, Kentucky. Cyclists on the Great Allegheny Passage don't stop their journeys at the Pennsylvania/Maryland line; they cross jurisdictions, bringing their resources with them. The mobility of resources and people across municipal and state lines generates investment and benefit across individual jurisdictions, which can be persuasive for potential regional partners.

- **Regional Collaboration Lifts All Boats:** A compelling rationale for regional collaboration, shared by nearly all interviewed multistate partnerships, was a variation on the adage that "a rising tide lifts all boats." Multiple partnerships noted that regions rise and fall together. Economic decline in one county very likely also exists in a neighboring county across the state line, precisely because of regional interdependence. By the same token, investment and growth in individual jurisdictions typically generate similar effects in bordering jurisdictions, and opportunities—economic, employment, recreational—expand across the area. Established partnerships noted that the dynamics of regional interconnectivity make a strong case for working as a region, rather than "going it alone" as individual jurisdictions. Regional collaborations advance the work of and outcomes for all partners in involved communities.

- **Regional Collaborations Expand Resources and Capacity:** Multistate partners interviewed frequently cited resource and capacity expansion as a compelling reason for, and important benefit of, working regionally. First, leveraging and aligning expertise and resources, financial and otherwise, across jurisdictions increases capacity and strengthens the position of all partners to achieve their goals, whether those are winning grants, attracting employers, creating workforce training programs, or expanding outdoor recreation opportunities. To put it simply, coming together regionally means increasing available assets and capability to help partners win, obtain, or create what they want. In an interview,

one regional multistate partnership described this effect as coming together to "grow the pie." Typically, individual jurisdictions compete with one another for small slices of the pie. Through regional collaboration, the pie is made larger. Individual jurisdictions will always, to some degree, compete for slices of the pie. But pooling resources and capacity to grow the pie regionally means that when they do compete, they'll be competing for larger slices.

Work to Build Trust and Buy-In

Perhaps the most resounding insights shared by multistate partnerships are that effective partnerships are built on trust, and that progress moves at the speed of trust. Multistate partnerships must be intentional and strategic about developing trust and buy-in. They should invest significantly in building awareness, listening deeply to community members and potential partners, growing relationships, and addressing questions and concerns. Regional multistate partners shared the following key take-aways from their experiences in this area:

- **Community Engagement Is Critical:** Community engagement is essential to regional partnership work. Several multistate partnerships shared that they devoted significant time—in some cases, many months or more—to community/resident listening sessions to solicit their input around needs, challenges, concerns, questions, and ideas. Partners emphasized the importance of hearing directly from community members about the opportunities they see for people in all communities in the region, and of reflecting back what is heard to ensure full understanding. Regional goals and strategies should be designed in collaboration with impacted communities and constituents, not designed in a vacuum and done "to" them. From a practical perspective, some of the interviewed multistate partnerships obtained consulting support to facilitate community conversations; they found it helpful to have a neutral outside party in this role. Others mentioned that they used human-centered design or "design thinking" processes for engaging community members and gathering their input.

> **Identify local champions who know the other local players and can help get them to the table. Let them act as a mouthpiece for the partnership to achieve local buy-in.**

- **Pursue Multiple Avenues to Build Trust:** In addition to engaging directly with communities, regional multistate collaboratives shared other insights around building trust and buy-in with partners and potential partners. Several partnerships interviewed noted that facilitating more loosely structured face-to-face time and networking opportunities helps make introductions, grow relationships, and build trust over time. Others emphasized the importance of being willing to have, rather than shying away from, difficult and sometimes uncomfortable conversations, and of creating "safe spaces" for people to share their questions and concerns. The willingness to have such conversations ensures partners and collaborators are heard and helps build trust in the long run. Another insight that surfaced in interviews is that you must give trust to get trust. For example, freely sharing information, expertise, best practices, and resources with other organizations builds the trust necessary for those organizations to see the value in doing the same for your own organization.

> **While it's not always possible (like in the middle of a pandemic), practitioners recommend spending the time and resources necessary to be together in the same place as often as possible, especially up front. Great work can absolutely be done virtually, but trust and relationship building are definitely harder to do digitally.**

- **Be Intentional about Engaging Elected Officials:** Several partnerships interviewed suggested specific promising practices for building trust and engagement around regional multistate initiatives with elected officials. Understandably, elected officials feel accountable to the needs of communities and constituents in their jurisdictions. As such, it is often important to have targeted conversations with elected officials around the question of "Why regional?" to help define needs and explain the value proposition for elected officials' participation. This outreach may involve one-on-one relationship-building meetings where multistate project champions give elected officials the space to voice their concerns and ask questions privately. Hosting networking activities for elected officials that do not involve work is another strategy for getting these partners comfortable with one another; these settings can help surface interests and issues that participating elected officials share. Then multistate partners can start bringing elected officials together in small groups to grow their level of comfort with one another, and into larger groups where everyone involved in the initiative is coming together. Multistate partnerships may also find that holding a planning retreat for elected officials in the targeted region is a helpful strategy for building engagement, trust, and buy-in. Finally, multistate partnerships interviewed emphasized the importance of

understanding who the relevant elected officials are and what they are responsible for, as well as which officials are one "level" above the jurisdictions of focus. Demonstrating familiarity with elected officials' landscapes and realms of responsibility can further trust and relationship development.

- **Go for Small Early Wins:** Finally, but importantly, small wins early in the process help build trust and can accelerate momentum in developing and expanding regional multistate relationships. These early small wins can help establish credibility and draw new partners into the effort.

Consider a "Backbone" Organization

Most of the regional multistate partnerships interviewed have a designated backbone (or convening or facilitating) organization that plays multiple important roles in leadership, project management, coordination, outreach, and support. In the partnerships profiled in this toolkit, the backbone organization also plays the role of the single fiscal agent for the project. However, there are multiple options for the role or roles of the backbone organization, including convener and facilitator, project manager, champion, partnership builder, etc. Regional multistate partnerships that include a backbone organization indicated that this role is critical to the operations and success of their initiatives, and shared the following insights:

- **The Backbone Organization Must Understand the Landscape:** The backbone organization needs to be one that knows and understands the involved communities, community members, and potential partners. This role requires a strong sense of, and appreciation for, community cultures, values, goals, and potential concerns. The backbone organization's familiarity with the region positions them to understand how to engage all the relevant parties and bring them into the conversation.

- **The Backbone Organization Must Be Trusted:** As important, the backbone organization in a regional multistate initiative must be a trusted organization. Having the trust of involved communities and partners does not necessarily mean that the organization needs to be seen as neutral. However, the organization must be trusted to have the partnership's goals at heart, more than the goals of their own organization.

- **The Backbone Organization Is Accountable for the Vision:** Typically, the backbone organization is responsible for casting the vision, or leading its development, and then seeing through the process for attaining the vision. This is

the backbone organization's primary charge. Several multistate partnerships interviewed noted that while all involved partners must be committed and contributing to the vision through their identified roles and work, it is important for the backbone organization to have "ownership" responsibility and accountability for the vision.

- **The Backbone Organization May Serve as the Fiscal Agent:** In some cases, the backbone organization for a regional multistate partnership also serves as the single fiscal agent or fiduciary entity for the initiative. As the fiduciary, the organization disperses funds to other partner organizations through mechanisms such as sub-awards, contracts, or other agreements. Interviewed projects that use this single fiduciary model find that it supports a unified, aligned, and accountable partnership across state lines. However, other multistate partnerships successfully use different models for fund disbursement and fiscal management, including project partners receiving individual grants and thus acting as their own fiscal agents. In this model, the backbone organization's role is more focused on convening partners and organizing and managing the partnership and its work, rather than managing the funding.

Devote Time and Resources to Building Regional Multistate Relationships and Partnerships

In interviews, multistate partners emphasized that the work of building relationships and strong partnerships takes time and dedicated support. It frequently requires individual outreach and conversations and must be authentic and ongoing, not a one-time, "check the box" exercise. Insights from this aspect of multistate partnership work include the following:

Experienced practitioners recommend that if you are starting from scratch, you should allow up to a year to build relationships, create work plans, and refine ideas.

- **Staff the Work of Partnership Development:** Resources must be devoted to staffing the work of conducting outreach, developing relationships, and building partnerships. Nearly every multistate initiative interviewed emphasized that someone needs to own this work and be responsible for it.

- **Build upon Existing Relationships and Collaborations:** Most of the regional multistate partnerships interviewed were not formed from scratch. Rather, they built upon the activities and accomplishments of prior initiatives and efforts and expanded from that foundation. Many established multistate partnerships were

built by leveraging and growing from collaborations and relationships that already existed. Seek out partnerships with organizations and individuals that you already know or have worked with in the past. If you aren't already working with some of the partners that need to be engaged, use your existing partner relationships as bridges to other necessary partners. Ask the partners you already have on board to make introductions to those that you don't know.

- **Outreach and Engagement Must Be Ongoing:** It takes a range of outreach strategies and multiple conversations and meetings to build strong relationships and partnerships, and these need to continue over the lifetime of the partnership. Regional multistate initiatives interviewed noted that at the beginning of their efforts, they spent entire days, for weeks or more, in conversation with potential partners, community organizations, and community members. Ongoing outreach and engagement work over the course of multistate initiatives has attracted additional partners into efforts over time. Face-to-face conversations, networking events, and working groups are all helpful mechanisms for building and growing relationships over the course of the initiative.

- **Relationships Must Be Sustained and Accountable:** In a related vein, established regional multistate partnerships stress the importance of building authentic, consistent, and accountable relationships with partners and involved communities. A pitfall of this work, in the words of one multistate partnership interviewed, is "flying in, using a person or organization, and flying back out." The success and sustainability of multistate initiatives depend in large measure upon the level of commitment to engage with partners meaningfully, responsibility, and for the long term.

Even when you have agreement on your plan, make sure to leave plenty of time to execute formal agreements, contracts, or MOUs.

Ensure Equitable Representation in Regional Multistate Projects

Nearly all the regional multistate initiatives interviewed emphasized the importance of equitable representation in projects and noted its connection to ensuring region-wide, equitable benefits. They shared the following insights from their work:

- **Ensure Diverse Representation and Participation:** It is important to think expansively about diverse and equitable representation in regional multistate projects, to include geography, demographics, urban vs. rural communities, and

other considerations. Successful multistate partnerships seek to ensure that the breadth of the region's communities, people, and assets are well represented and truly engaged in the initiative.

- **Engage Partners "Boardroom to Mailroom":** Many regional multistate initiatives interviewed also emphasized being inclusive about the range and types of organizations and individuals engaged, from the senior leadership level to the grassroots level. There is a strong sense that multistate partnerships truly need everyone in order to succeed.

- **Listen to Understand:** It is critical in regional multistate partnership work to listen to the voices at the table, rather than assuming that the issues are already fully understood. Over time, partners will very likely surface new or evolving needs, gaps and challenges that need to be addressed, and partners or communities that need to be brought into the conversation. Remaining open to this input, and responding accordingly, over the course of regional multistate projects fosters agility and relevance and strengthens relationships.

- **Be Strategic about Organizing Partnership Work:** From a more practical perspective, most regional multistate initiatives employ a strategy for different "levels" of representation. For example, the large group of partners may designate representatives who participate via smaller subgroups of the full partnership, which themselves may break into even smaller groups to focus on key areas. This cascading approach to partnership work can help ensure diverse and inclusive representation and participation while also keeping the work manageable and moving progress forward. In this model, project partners may participate in different ways depending upon needs and objectives, from large community meetings to advisory or oversight teams to small work groups.

Ensure That Partnership Is a Two-Way Street with Equitable Benefits

Multistate partnerships interviewed emphasized the importance of creating authentic partnerships in which all involved organizations are respected collaborators, have meaningful roles, and receive tangible benefits. Takeaways in this area include the following:

Take time to vet potential partners with whom you have not yet worked. Make sure they have the expertise available within their organization to handle grant funding and fiscal and reporting requirements.

- **Define Partners' Roles and Responsibilities in Formal Agreements:** Multistate partnerships vary in terms of how they define partners' roles, responsibilities, and intended outcomes. Some take a structured approach from the beginning of their efforts, establishing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or contracts with partners at the outset. Other partnerships begin and evolve more organically and develop partner agreements over time. No matter the process or timing, multistate partnerships interviewed felt that partner agreements should be formalized and include defined roles, responsibilities, expectations, outcomes, deliverables, and leveraged resource commitments. At the same time, it is important to note that true partner relationships won't be created through MOUs; ongoing efforts to grow relationships are just as important as formal partner agreements.

- **Consider Different Levels of Partner Commitments and Benefits:** As organizations think through how they will formalize agreements with partners, they may want to consider the different levels of commitment partners may make and how that translates into outcomes and benefits for all involved. For example, a letter of support from an organization is not the same as a commitment from an organization to contribute significant staff time to a multistate effort. Outcomes and level of benefit for partners should align with their level of effort and investment. Some multistate initiatives have incorporated different levels of partnership agreements to address these variances and ensure equitable benefit relative to investment, such as having core or founding partners (significant investors), wider network partners (moderate investors), and supportive partners (letter of support organizations), for example.

- **Ensure Equitable Benefit for Rural Communities:** An important consideration in regional multistate projects is ensuring equitable benefit for both rural and urban communities in the region. It's important that rural areas have an equal seat at the table and that their needs and interests are not drowned out by those of larger urban areas. Successful regional multistate initiatives take care to make

rural areas comfortable and ensure equitable benefit for both rural and urban communities.

- **Engage Marginalized Communities Meaningfully:** Regional multistate initiatives should be particularly thoughtful in their collaborations with marginalized and underrepresented communities and organizations representing marginalized people. Many of these communities and organizations have been added to proposals in the past in an attempt to make the proposal more competitive or have been added to projects to make the project appear more inclusive, but the organizations have not been meaningfully engaged in actual project design and implementation or received tangible benefits from projects. If regional multistate partners are looking to include historically marginalized groups in their work, they need to engage them as full and equal partners and ensure real benefits for them in project activities.
- **Provide Partners with Capacity-Building Support:** Several multistate initiatives interviewed shared how they helped project partners and involved communities by providing capacity-building support, such as training or assistance from consultants. Providing this kind of support is a strategy for enhancing benefits for participating partners and supporting organizations and increasing their longer-term capacity, which can have positive impacts on sustainability of efforts.

Some of your partners may be small organizations without much ready cash on hand. Consider allowing for frequent reimbursements to help with potential cashflow issues.

Let the Shared Vision and Mission Drive the Work

Regional multistate partnerships interviewed were emphatic that partners must embrace and be aligned around a shared vision and mission for the work. The shared vision and mission—not individual organizational goals or objectives—must be the main drivers for the work of the partnership. Partnerships shared the following major takeaways in this area:

- **Find Partners That Share the Vision:** In the early stages of building partnerships, it's important and helpful to identify organizations and individuals that already care about the planned work and are even doing it or working in closely related areas. This includes engaging the practitioners who really know the work well; leadership buy-in is essential, but so is the input of people who are on the ground, doing the work. Identifying like-minded organizations and individuals who are passionate about the planned work of the initiative greatly facilitates aligning partners around a shared vision and mission.

> **If your collaboration's mission is unclear, consider asset mapping to discover gaps in your region; your organizations can coalesce around these areas of need.**

- **Ensure That the Vision Drives Partnership Development:** Most regional multistate partnerships interviewed stressed that a shared vision and mission, not a funding opportunity, should drive partnership development and project strategies. While there are certainly examples of regional multistate initiatives that formalized formerly loosely networked relationships in response to a funding opportunity, success is more likely when partnerships are not organized solely because of and in response to funding. As one multistate partnership put it, "Don't let the tail [the funding] wag the dog [the vision and mission]."

- **Consider the Value of Industry Leadership:** Depending on the project type, some regional multistate partnerships have found that having industry lead and drive the work has helped to keep the focus on the shared vision and mission. Industry representatives are typically very comfortable working across state lines, with their multistate supply chains, production and shipping operations, and talent sourcing practices. Their leadership creates credibility and can help address perception and hesitation challenges that may arise among jurisdictional partners.

- **Funding Should Follow the Work:** In terms of regional multistate project funding, established partnerships advise letting the money follow the work, not the organization. Project funding should go to where the work needs to get done, and to the organizations that can best do that work, in support of the overall project vision and mission. One organization interviewed, which serves as the fiscal agent for their multistate project, emphasized that their organization isn't interested in holding onto or getting credit for having the grant they received. Rather, their objective is to get the funding out to the organizations that are best positioned to do the work and benefit the communities in their multistate region.

- **Check Egos at the Door:** A key component of successful regional multistate initiatives is partners' willingness to set egos aside and not be invested in getting individual credit. When multistate partners are truly committed to a shared vision and mission, they recognize that the success of the work will reflect well upon all involved organizations. Creating this culture of shared investment in the success of the overall initiative, vs. competition among involved organizations, also helps to attract additional partners to the table and therefore increase the potential impacts of the work.

- **Leverage Lessons Learned, but Don't Be Afraid to Fail Fast:** Established regional multistate partners also shared helpful advice for advancing the work, progress, and momentum of multistate initiatives in support of the vision and mission. First, leverage the expertise of project partners: Take their past mistakes and challenges, lessons learned, and successes and build upon them in the multistate work. Second, don't let perfection be the enemy of good. At some point, you must move from planning to acting, so try things out, fail fast if you fail, refine and iterate your approach, and try again. Finally, celebrate wins along the way, both small and big, and include all partners and collaborators in these celebrations.

Use Data, Both to Plan and to Measure Success

Multistate partnerships interviewed use data in a variety of ways and emphasize the important role data plays in designing projects, tracking and measuring success, and documenting outcomes. Key insights in these areas include:

- **Use a Range of Data:** Consider the range of data that will be useful to the regional multistate effort. Some may be quantitative, while some may be qualitative, anecdotal, or community sourced. Depending on project focus, important data may include that related to workforce, health, economic dynamics, community and human wellbeing, commuting patterns, education, environment, business development and growth, community capacity, and other areas.

- **Use Data to Define the Need:** Use available data to define and understand the need or problem you're trying to address. Solid data, explored and validated with partners, can help make the case for the regional multistate initiative and incentivize support from collaborators.

- **Define Outcomes and Measurement Plans:** Begin with the end in mind and set goals at the outset of the project. It is important to define desired outcomes early and have clear plans for tracking and measuring progress against those outcomes.

- **Consider Economic Impact or Similar Studies:** Many regional multistate partners advocate for devoting resources to economic impact studies or their equivalent, depending on the nature of the project. Such studies document larger and more systemic initiative impacts in ways that more process-focused measures, like number of people served, do not. Impact studies help multistate partnerships prove the results of their collaborations, which enables them to better sustain the work, attract additional investment, and expand outcomes.

- **Document the Value of Partner Collaboration:** Established regional multistate initiatives also encourage others to document the tangible outputs from their collaborations. Being able to demonstrate how coming together for collaborative work benefits individual partners as well as the initiative (and region) makes partnering on future efforts easier and can seed spin-off or new projects.

Establish Formal (but Flexible) Structures

Regional multistate projects can be complex, with multiple partners, areas of focus, and strands of work. Successful initiatives emphasize the importance of formally structuring project work and operations, while also allowing some level of flexibility to adapt as needs change and lessons are learned over the course of the project. Takeaways from established multistate partnerships in this area include the following:

- **Designate Project Managers/Single Points of Contact:** Many successful regional multistate initiatives use a designated project manager/single point of contact model. In this model, the backbone organization appoints a single project manager who serves as the main point of contact for all partners, so they know exactly who to go to with questions, problems, and ideas. Likewise, each partner organization also appoints a single point of contact to speak and act on behalf of the organization, so that the backbone organization project manager knows exactly who to communicate with in each partner organization.

- **Establish Clear Performance Expectations:** Establish clear performance expectations for project partners. Each partner should have performance

expectations, outlined up front in their agreement, that feed into the overall regional multistate partnership performance expectations. Details on performance reporting requirements should be included in agreements, and partnerships may also want to consider tying funding disbursements to meeting performance requirements. Ensuring transparency and clarity on performance expectations from the outset will minimize confusion and "double work" later.

- **Define Meeting Structures and Expectations:** Define and communicate clear meeting structures at all levels of the project (e.g., leadership team meetings, workgroup meetings) that include who meets when, where, and how often. This helps partners and other collaborators understand expectations and level of commitment and increases accountability.

- **Tie Project Work to the Vision and to Metrics:** Clearly articulate how all subgroups of the overall regional multistate partnership, such as advisory groups and work groups, are charged with advancing the overall project vision and mission. Identify metrics for each subgroup of the full partnership.

- **Create Standard Templates for Partners:** As much as possible, create standard templates for project partner organizations. Documentation requirements, reports, and reimbursement requests should have templates so that each partner knows exactly what is expected of them up front and all partners are following the same process; this saves time for the backbone organization/fiscal agent and helps create better project performance reports. Additionally, experienced regional multistate projects advise collecting backup documentation with all reporting and reimbursement requests; that way, it's all together in one place for later, when it comes time for an audit.

- **Establish a Communication Plan:** Frequent, ongoing, and transparent communication with project partners, especially (but not only) during the partnership development and early implementation phases, is essential. Develop an internal communication plan at the outset of the project to outline processes and accountability expectations. Consider using communication tools like Slack/Slack channels and define how project documents will be shared, e.g., email, SharePoint, or Google Drive. Some regional multistate projects also budget for contracting with a communication consultant to manage internal and/or external project communications.

- **Create Feedback Loops:** Put feedback loops in place for regional multistate partners and collaborators to provide input and share challenges and insights. As important, put processes in place to ensure that feedback is regularly reviewed, discussed, and addressed.

Resources

Though regional multistate partnerships are complex, existing tools and resources may make the work of interested partners in the ARC region more efficient and effective. The resources listed below are the ones that were most often mentioned by established regional multistate initiatives interviewed for this toolkit.

Data Collaboratives

Responding to the need to use timely data to better understand regional labor markets, labor market outcomes, racial and geographic disparities, and interventions that work, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), the State Higher Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), the Coleridge Initiative, a number of funders, and state agencies across the country are partnering to support the emergence and sustainability of multistate data collaboratives. Multistate data collaboratives are coalitions of state workforce, education, human services, and other agencies working in partnership with each other and regional university partners to produce data products that policymakers, practitioners, and citizens can use to answer questions critical to society. Multistate data collaboratives seek to close data gaps by establishing regional initiatives grounded in producing value and focused on using evidence to improve education, training, and workforce outcomes. Over 25 states are active in at least one collaborative in the Midwest, South, and East, with levels of engagement ranging from informing founding discussions up to leading development of shared products. To learn more about multistate data collaboratives, and how you might explore partnering with them, email Ms. Yvette Chocolaad, Director of Workforce Policy and Research at NASWA, at ychocolaad@naswa.org.

Collective Impact Model

When building or expanding new partnerships, it may be beneficial to look to existing, proven methods to think about how to organize the work and how it gets done. One such model is the Collective Impact Model. Collective Impact was first put forward by John Kania and Mark Kramer in 2011 with the idea that many organizations working together on a social problem can have a much greater impact than any single organization working on its own, and they provided a framework for doing so. The framework includes five characteristics:

1. Partners need to have a common vision and goal they are working toward;
2. Partners must agree to measure the same outcomes in the same way;
3. There is a backbone organization that helps to organize the work;

4. All partners' activities are mutually reinforcing, or integrated with one another; and
5. There is defined and ongoing communication between all partners.

There are many free resources available to help collaboratives understand and implement the Collective Impact Model, including the Collective Impact Forum, the Tamarack Institute, and Community Toolbox. There are also many practitioners and consultants who are practiced at guiding others through the creation of Collective Impact collaboratives if this is something your collaborative may be interested in pursuing.

Community Engagement

Though Collective Impact is a well-known and widely-used model for multi-partner collaborations, one of the criticisms of the model is that it does not put enough emphasis on community engagement and receiving and implementing input from those impacted by a collaborative's work. Whether or not your collaborative uses a Collective Impact model, your work will be strengthened by the inclusion of intentional community engagement, as evidenced by the experience of other multistate practitioners in the previous section. There are many helpful resources available from Community Toolbox and Tamarack Institute.

Human-Centered Design

Human-centered design (HCD) is an approach to complex problem solving that may benefit regional multistate initiatives. First developed by the Stanford University Design School, it is a process that has been used to design many creative solutions. The key to HCD is its focus on the people for whom the solution is designed. It requires the team to first develop empathy and understanding for the people you are designing for. It provides a standard framework for defining and understanding the problems your group is trying to solve, and it encourages brainstorming many creative solutions and testing those solutions to ensure your team is designing the most effective plan, not just the easiest one. HCD principles have been used by some of the practitioners interviewed for this toolkit, and the framework provides an approach for many of the takeaways gleaned from practitioners, including building trust, listening to and including those impacted by the initiative, and coalescing around a shared—and understood—vision and mission of the collaborative. Some of the many available resources include tools from IDEO and Stanford d.school.