



FIELD  
STUDY

# The Role of the Public Sector in Cradle-to-Career Place-Based Partnerships

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## About EdRedesign

Founded in 2014 by Paul Reville, Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, EdRedesign provides catalytic support to the cradle-to-career place-based partnership field to drive systems-level change and open personalized pathways to well-being, educational attainment, civic engagement, and upward mobility. To support this growing field to effect transformational change that serves the needs and talents of individual children and youth, our work focuses on talent development, actionable research, our Institute for Success Planning, and our By All Means initiatives. Our mission is to ensure the social, emotional, physical, and academic development and well-being of all children and youth, especially those affected by racism and poverty.

## About the Author

Charles C. Davis, Jr. is the Chief Comprehensive Services and Data Officer for Evolve502, a community-focused organization committed to creating a path to education for Louisville, Kentucky's youth. Evolve 502 acts as a cradle-to-career connector, ensuring children are prepared for productive lives by linking young people to resources geared to promoting academic success and by giving them access and funding to pursue a post-secondary education. In this role, Charles is responsible for developing community-wide supports to impact students and families along the cradle-to-career pipeline. This work is accomplished by regularly convening partners from the public, private, and philanthropic sectors. Charles currently also serves as a consultant at EdRedesign.

A Dayton, Ohio native, Charles earned his bachelor's degree in history from Eastern Michigan University, his Master of Education degree from Antioch University McGregor and his Doctorate in Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development from the University of Louisville. Charles also holds graduate certificates from the University of Pennsylvania, the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy, and the Northwestern University Kellogg Center of Executive Education, and is a nationally certified Diversity Professional.

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## Introduction

Communities need to work together, across sectors, to create coordinated systems of support and opportunity for all children and youth.

Cradle-to-career place-based partnerships bring together people and organizations from a range of sectors to collaborate in a targeted geography to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families through a common agenda and shared system of accountability. Throughout the country, there are hundreds of these partnerships, and thousands of additional cross-sector initiatives such as community schools, cradle-to-career intermediaries, and models of integrated support for children and families.

Place-based cross-sector collaboration amplifies the impact of local governmental and non-governmental systems and programs serving children. Backbone organizations provide the staffing and organizational support to effectively sustain collaborative action efforts and realize the systems-level transformations they seek. The backbone organization provides critical support to a community's place-based partnership or other collaborative action initiative. The backbone organization of any particular collaborative action effort may take different forms depending on the local context, such as a Children's Cabinet or community-based organization.



Rebecca Grainger, Senior Advisor for Youth and Schools for Boston Mayor Michelle Wu and EdRedesign Boston Community Lead, at the 2023 By All Means Convening.

**The Collective Impact Forum identifies six essential functions of a backbone organization, whatever its form:**

1. *Guiding vision and strategy*
2. *Supporting aligned activities*
3. *Establishing shared measurement practices*
4. *Cultivating community engagement and ownership*
5. *Advancing policy*
6. *Mobilizing resources*

Place-based collaborative action initiatives have multiplied across the country, bringing together the people, organizations, and sectors needed to improve the lived experiences and outcomes of young people and families in historically underserved neighborhoods, communities, cities, and counties.



The [EdRedesign Lab \(EdRedesign\)](#) at Harvard Graduate School of Education has been exploring the role of the public sector in cradle-to-career place-based collaborative action since the launch of its By All Means community of practice in 2016. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the “public sector” as local (city/county) governments, their related agencies, and their public school districts.

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## Study Questions

**In exploring the role of the public sector in cradle-to-career place-based partnerships, this field study sought to answer the following questions:**

1. What is the current state of public sector engagement in efforts to support collaborative action in communities to support youth and families?
2. What are the challenges in engaging the public sector in these efforts?
3. What are potential effective roles and relationships between the public sector and cradle-to-career place-based partnerships?
4. What additional supports are needed to catalyze public-sector engagement in cradle-to-career place-based partnerships?

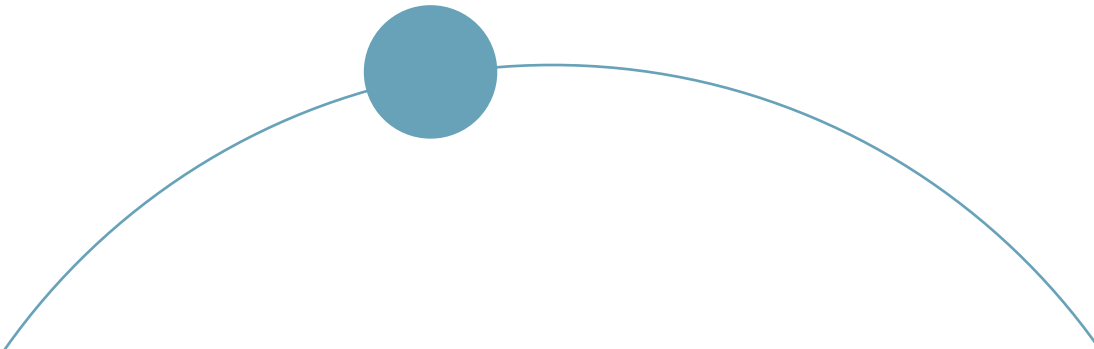


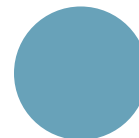
Dr. Almi Abeyta,  
Superintendent of  
Chelsea Public Schools,  
at EdRedesign's 2023  
By All Means Convening.

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## Methodology

To glean perspectives about the role of the public sector in cross-sector collaborative efforts to support education and youth development, a series of 12 interviews were conducted in 2023 to gather insights from those most closely engaged in the work. Respondents included leaders at national intermediary organizations who support networks of place-based partnerships, leaders of cradle-to-career place-based partnerships, leaders of philanthropies that support the work, and public-sector actors (see [Appendix A](#) for a complete list of interviewees; see [Appendix B](#) for sample interview questions). Note that respondents are identified throughout this Field Study by their role at the time of the interviews, and that some respondents have transitioned from the organizations with which they were affiliated at that time.





## Findings

### Terminology of Collaboration

A challenge in this growing, emergent field is the lack of a common language. Different terms are used to describe similar phenomena. To that end, respondents were asked how they identify the work to support families and communities through collaboration and partnership. The responses fell into three categories.



**Eshauna Smith,**  
Director of Community  
Impact, Ballmer Group

#### *Place-Based Partnership*

Four respondents (L. Hult, M. Matthews, M. Pollack, and E. Smith) categorized their work as place-based partnership. Eshauna Smith of Ballmer Group explained this perspective by saying:

**“When we say place-based partnerships, we’re talking about cross-sector tables facilitated by an intermediary, like a backbone organization that ensures that everything is centered on data and that clear outcomes are being advanced through this collaborative cross-sector partnership.”** E. Smith

#### *Cradle-to-Career*

Five other respondents (R. Booker, S. Crowder, S. Desai, C. Groth, and L. Schaaf) saw their work through the cradle-to-career paradigm. Colin Groth of StriveTogether said that they think about this work in the way of creating a framework for building a cradle-to-career infrastructure in communities. In doing so, the goal is to organize a key set of actors in a community around a shared vision, measurable set of goals, and accompanying outcomes. Former Mayor of Oakland, California, Libby

Schaaf, explained her preference in the following way:

**“I’ve really enjoyed the term cradle-to-career because collective impact can feel really big. Cradle-to-career still is very big, it can still be overwhelming to some leaders, but it definitely has a definition that feels less overwhelming than just collective impact or even children’s council.”** L. Schaaf

#### *Not into Nomenclature*

The third category of response was from two individuals (A. Cohen and E. Gaines) who were largely indifferent to the terminology used in the field. Alan Cohen of the Child Poverty Action Lab expressed his view that “the terminology is actually getting in the way of the work most of the time. I tend to think more about different ingredients that can be helpful for organizations to navigate fairly complex local ecosystems.” Elizabeth Gaines of the Children’s Funding Project agreed and stated that:

**“It just has to start with a C basically. Whatever it is, it’s Collective Impact. It’s the Children’s Cabinet, it’s a commission, it’s a collaborative, it’s a coordinating body. Truly for some reason it always starts with a C. In fact, I can’t even think of one that doesn’t start with a C. It’s about have you organized your people, all the people in all of these systems...in a way that they are working toward a shared set of goals, outcomes, what have you for kids?”** E. Gaines



**Libby Schaaf,**  
Former Mayor,  
Oakland, California



**Elizabeth Gaines,**  
Founder and CEO,  
Children’s Funding Project



Melinda Pollack,  
Managing Director,  
Catalytic Supports,  
Blue Meridian Partners

### *Sensemaking*

Melinda Pollack of [Blue Meridian Partners](#) provided an interesting perspective as to how all of these various terminologies may potentially work together:

**“The way that we think about it, I can go from broadest to most narrow: the broadest way that we think about place-based partnerships in America is that it’s an effort to close racial disparities and move kids and families on the path to economic and social mobility. But when we think about who an actor in a place-based partnership is, we typically think about a backbone. We believe place-based partnerships can focus really on any domain and get to meaningful outcomes. It’s really the folks who center on cradle-to-career first and build out to other domains, whether it’s health or housing or economic development... not because it’s the only way...but when you look at the link between geography and destiny, where folks here come from...the sort of theory of change that Blue Meridian believes is that over time this link can be broken and sharing successes and lessons from current places can benefit many other communities.”** M. Pollack

Noting the varying perspectives on terminology in the field, for the purposes of this report, collaborative efforts in communities to support youth and families will be referred to throughout as C2C/PBPs (cradle-to-career place-based partnerships).



Sagar Desai, Managing  
Director of Innovation,  
StriveTogether

### **Public Sector Engagement**

While there may not be consensus on terminology in the field, respondents were unanimous as to whether they see the public sector as a necessary partner in advancing their work. “Role is too mild of a word,” Sagar Desai (then of StriveTogether and now a consultant working with EdRedesign) opined, “the public sector has to be an integral part of the work.” For Michelle Matthews and her work with [Purpose Built Communities](#), public sector engagement is non-negotiable:

**“I can’t think of any Purpose Built community where the public sector is not involved in some way with the effort. It just depends on the partner and the scope of their involvement. It might be the housing authority, the public school system, or someone out of the mayor’s office, but you can’t make neighborhood transformation work without public-private partnerships.”** M. Matthews

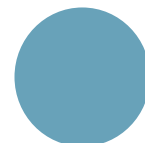
From the philanthropic perspective, Melinda Pollack shared a similar view, adding:

**“You can’t actually do the work without the deep, deep buy-in of the public sector because from what we see...in order to respond to local needs and solve complex problems, programming alone does not get you there.”** M. Pollack

As a follow-up question, respondents were asked what would be the most impactful ways in which a closer relationship with the public sector could support their work. Perspectives primarily fell into two categories: leveraging resources and achieving scale.



Michelle Matthews,  
Senior Vice President,  
Purpose Built Communities





Lauren Hult, Partner,  
The Bridgespan Group

### *Leveraging Resources*

Local school districts and municipal governments in most locales control an immense amount of human and fiscal resources. Lauren Hult of The Bridgespan Group sees a key opportunity in focusing not only on the amount of funds, but specifically on the flexible funding some public sector actors have to steer towards equitable strategies.

Respondents interviewed find that public sector involvement can serve as a key lever to attract additional dollars to support work on the ground. Dr. Russell Booker, CEO of Spartanburg Academic Movement, offered this perspective on his current work:

**“We have over \$100 million in private investment that’s getting ready to flow through our community; but that’s one-time money. Where the public sector is so critical to this work is helping us sustain the work over time. If we can prove that these strategies we’re putting in place work, as we’re building this seven- to eight-year plan, they will be more inclined to come alongside of us as a part of the work.”** R. Booker



Dr. Russell Booker,  
CEO, Spartanburg  
Academic Movement



Shanda Crowder,  
Vice President of Capacity  
and Civic Infrastructure,  
Partners for Rural Impact

Shanda Crowder, Vice President of Capacity and Civic Infrastructure at Partners for Rural Impact, echoed these sentiments adding:

**“They [the public sector] bring an already funded system and so they bring the ability to leverage existing funding that could be braided with other funded opportunities.”**

S. Crowder

From a funder’s perspective, seeing thriving, or even nascent, partnership activities can signal to a national funder that a community is serious about coming together, thereby triggering the potential for additional investments. Melinda Pollack reflected:

**“Many communities were already developing and building place-based partnerships. So when we saw evidence of those communities sharing the same value – to break the systemic barriers to economic and social mobility for young people and families at the local, regional, and national level – Blue Meridian Partners, in partnership with anchor funders Ballmer Group and other local foundations and philanthropists, can invest and be thought partners to the community leaders that are working on interventions that foster equitable change in their communities. Secondly, we can invest in the capacity of other national organizations to provide critical infrastructures and the technical assistance needed for place-based partnerships to succeed.”** M. Pollack

Money is important, but oftentimes a large portion of money is devoted to human capital. The leveraging of both human and fiscal resources has the potential for the positive cascading of interventions and supports for young people and their families.

As well-intentioned and well-positioned as many C2C/PBPs may be, the sheer magnitude of the public sector in many local contexts necessitates their substantive involvement.





Alan Cohen, Founder and CEO, Child Poverty Action Committee

### *Achieving Scale*

Mayor Libby Schaaf offered her vision for these types of relationships:

**“My theory of change for making the world a better place is that public-private partnerships are the only way we will do it. The private sector, the nonprofit sector, even the philanthropic sector, will never have the reach and the scale and the control of the systems that government has.”** L. Schaaf

Alan Cohen agreed, adding:

**“If we are going to reach outcomes and improve lives for kids, it’s going to require the kind of scale of resources that government has and that frankly, philanthropy and nonprofit and just private wealth doesn’t have.”** A. Cohen

Elizabeth Gaines noted that the confluence of money and the people in charge of allocating those funds is a key driver. She stated:

**“The lion’s share of dollars that go to support our kids in this country come from the public sector far and above [all other sources]. And so if that’s true, shouldn’t we have the public sector get its act together and its ducks in a row to say, here’s a mayor and here are a bunch of departments that theoretically report to that mayor and they’re all off doing their own thing. Well, what if a mayor had a cabinet that said, “Okay, what are we doing? What are our goals for kids? Now everybody go implement those goals.”** E. Gaines



The Poughkeepsie Children’s Cabinet team at EdRedesign’s 2023 By All Means Convening at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.





Paul Reville, Founder and Director of EdRedesign, talks with Jorge Elorza, Former Mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, at the inaugural convening for the By All Means community of practice in 2016.

### Challenges Associated with Engaging the Public Sector

If public sector engagement with C2C/PBPs is such an obvious and necessary enabling condition, the question arises as to why such partnerships are not the norm nationally. Respondents were asked their perspectives on the challenges in building closer relationships between C2C/PBPs and the public sector. The three most prevalent thematic challenges identified were: the difficult work of collaboration; transitions in the public sector; and competing priorities in both the public and private sectors.

#### *Collaboration is Hard*

As Occam's Razor suggests, often the simplest answer is the easiest to verify because it involves the fewest assumptions.

Individuals and organizations find fostering collaboration challenging because cultivating collaboration is in fact hard. Alan Cohen acknowledged that bringing together two or more entities is not an insignificant task. When asked to elaborate, he offered this perspective:

**“Collaboration is actually hard. In the corporate world, we call it mergers and acquisitions. And we pay attorneys millions of dollars to help two entities collaborate. And by the way, it doesn't always feel good, okay? Right. But everybody does that because they realize that there's going to be value created by the parts that don't feel good. We pass out big sheets of paper and sticky dots and think that that's going to be enough. So we have got to get serious about professionalizing collaboration, and that means understanding that there's going to be real negotiation and that not everybody is going to have their ideas win at every moment; it's got to be about a goal.”** A. Cohen

Michelle Matthews offered additional sobering insights:

**“Realizing long-term impact and results requires overcoming significant challenges with creative and innovative solutions. If it were easy, we would've solved the disinvestment in Black and Brown communities a long time ago.”**

M. Matthews

#### *Navigating Transitions*

A challenge that was brought up repeatedly was transitions. Though the public sector is perceived to move at a sometimes glacial pace, the movement of individual actors within the system is often much more fluid and frequent. Dr. Booker lamented that in his local context there are 16 separate superintendents in the area. The challenge as he put it is “It's just been a revolving door. So constantly having to stop and explain who we are and what we do...it just makes it difficult”. Sagar Desai shared a similar situation in Dallas where there were 14 school districts, 13 of which had undergone a leadership transition in the past seven years.

Melinda Pollack views this potentially as simply a reality of this field, offering a note on the importance of a strong C2C/PBP:

**“I think it’s like the challenge and the opportunity of the political cycle, right? That you know that when you work with government, you are working within a political cycle and the challenge of...you get something great going and then there’s total turnover. On the other hand, the existence of the political cycle helps to make the case for the importance of the backbone that I mentioned earlier, right? So there’s a give and take on that for sure.”** M. Pollack

From the political perspective, Melinda Pollack offered these insights:

**“Like the political realities of turnover in election cycles, there’s also political realities of governments needing to focus on the thing that’s happening in their community at that moment, which may or may not align with the areas of focus of the place-based partnership.”** M. Pollack

Eshauna Smith sees capacity issues in both the public sector and C2C/PBPs as a contributing factor to the inability to establish common ground. She stated:

**“Government officials are often overburdened with numerous responsibilities and limited capacity. Similarly, those involved in place-based partnerships face capacity constraints, making it difficult to engage effectively with the government. This imbalance leads to a situation where policy decisions and funding allocations may not accurately reflect people’s actual needs.”** E. Smith

Understanding these challenges is key to planning and promoting future collaborations.

#### *Competing Priorities*

Working with a diverse group of stakeholders often is a challenge in and of itself. Part of the challenge is that working on such large-scale issues requires bringing together individuals with varying perspectives on what is most important. In working with partnerships, Shanda Crowder offered this perspective:

**“Everyone has a different stop on that cradle-to-career continuum that’s important. And so we’ve got our early childhood champions, we’ve got our post-secondary champions, and we often have to spend a considerable amount of time getting everyone together to align around a single result or a result that’s wide enough that could catch the differing places on that continuum folks want to be in.”** S. Crowder



Marc Nelson, Former Mayor of Poughkeepsie, New York, attends EdRedesign's 2023 By All Means Convening.

### Identifying Effective Roles and Relationships between the Public Sector and C2C/PBPs

Despite the challenges that respondents noted, respondents identified promising practices that C2C/PBPs may consider in their journey towards more robust engagement with the public sector.

A recurring theme from several respondents is the need to codify best practices in building and maintaining the relationship among C2C/PBPs, school districts, and municipal governments. A palpable area of frustration from several respondents is that public sector actors are often slow to engage and even slower to change their practices. In her positionality as a former city mayor, Libby Schaaf offered an interesting perspective as to why this might be the case. She reflected:


**“Government was not designed to move quickly, to take risks, to try new things. Government gets criticized by taxpayers when we take risks with their money. They don’t like that. Government was designed to be contemplative, and slow, and have the balance of powers.”** L. Schaaf

This interesting insight offers a potential path forward to temper the sometimes adversarial tensions that practitioners in this field experience with their colleagues in the public sector. The public sector inherently is not designed to be as nimble as C2C/PBPs are able to be. In navigating a web of rules, regulations, laws, and policies the public sector’s very nature is often the antithesis of the quick action that is needed to move against real-time issues and concerns faced in communities. Shanda Crowder echoed this challenge from the public school perspective. She noted:

**“They’ve got their own benchmarks and indicators that they’ve got to meet, and they tend to latch on around something; but that doesn’t resonate with the local community. And so it’s really trying to figure out how...do we hold what their interest is and hold the interests of the community to try to figure out where’s that sweet spot to really capitalize on an opportunity to impact change?”** S. Crowder

Mayor Schaaf’s follow-up comments provided an almost serendipitous segue:

**“I believe the place of accelerated positive change is in that sweet spot. On the edge of government with government as a partner, but with outside stakeholders driving the innovation, informing the experiments or the new initiatives, and using outside dollars. Government is willing to take much bigger risks with someone else’s money, with a private donor’s money, than with the taxpayer’s money. So that’s that sweet spot, I believe, of why you need both [partners] at the table.”** L. Schaaf

A circular portrait of Libby Schaaf, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a red jacket, looking slightly to the left.

Libby Schaaf,  
50th Mayor of Oakland,  
California (2015-2023);  
EdRedesign By All Means  
Senior Fellow.



**Christian Rhodes, Deputy Executive Director, William Julius Wilson Institute at Harlem Children's Zone**

Government officials are often proactive in implementing solutions, but ensuring these initiatives are thoroughly discussed and tested with the community is essential.

Christian Rhodes, Deputy Executive Director, William Julius Wilson Institute at Harlem Children's Zone, offered that early wins that align around the sense of urgency that elected officials and community members share can build trust between public officials and the community.

**"If you're an elected municipal leader, you have a sense of urgency because you want something accomplished either for reelection or for your next seat. You want it done within a specific timeframe because you want credit for it...And then there's normally an immediate sense of urgency on some low hanging fruit items in the community...So one way in which I think tactically you build trust is by finding those places of alignment and addressing early wins. That's creating space for early wins. And an early win doesn't always have to be big. It can be a stoplight or a streetlight."** C. Rhodes

#### *Incubator for Innovation*

In their own ways, several respondents illuminated the opportunity for C2C/PBPs to become local incubators for innovation. Eshauna Smith reflected that, in her experience, those in government are often "proactive in implementing solutions, but ensuring these initiatives are thoroughly discussed and tested with the community is essential." She believes that the public sector working with local partnerships provides a way to inform policies and practices that affect communities. She went on to say:

**"If you work alongside and with your local place-based partnership, you will have a better shot at creating equitable policies and equitable funding streams. Ideally, what's happening is that the partnership can help you develop policy solutions and then funding solutions on the government side that tap into what the community needs."** E. Smith

Alan Cohen provided a concrete example of this practice in action. He reflected on work with community members in Dallas to redefine what an intentional feedback loop could look like:

**"You're giving people the opportunity to become heroes. When a neighborhood shows up to the city council meeting and says, we counted all of the street lights in our zip code, and there are 36 streetlights that are out, you now give a city council member an opportunity to say, when I started there were 36 streetlights that are out, and now today all the streetlights are in place and working, which makes it a safer place to walk up and down the streets at night. You're giving them a framework to show that they have accomplished something."** A. Cohen

Both Eshauna Smith and Alan Cohen see the opportunity for C2C/PBPs to provide tangible, real-time information to public sector stakeholders who can then take action based on that information. Colin Groth also agreed with this notion, commenting that the "endgame for StriveTogether is that the work is absorbed into the public sector; transforming systems in the way that policies, practices, and resources have shifted to drive equity-centered outcomes at the population level."



**Colin Groth, Executive Vice President of Strategy and Development, StriveTogether**



### *Planning with Purpose*

A recurrent theme that emerged in interviews with respondents was the role that planning plays in their work. Dr. Booker, whose organization in Spartanburg recently received a substantial investment from Blue Meridian Partners, feels that without a robust planning process, the funding wouldn't have been made available. He reflected on the process in this way:

**“What’s been different about my planning with The Bridgespan Group versus all the other plans we’ve done in this community is number one, the amount of time we’re taking to build the comprehensive integrated economic mobility plan while being really methodical about the real [funding] numbers that it’s going to take to achieve this percent of kids who we want to be ready, this percent of adults who we want to re-engage, etc. There’s a lot of science behind it. And unfortunately, what we run into oftentimes is that we don’t have the capacity to do this level of deep, deep planning.”** R. Booker

By capacity, Dr. Booker was referring to the cost of securing technical assistance. He was more candid saying that without funding to engage with Bridgespan, he would not have been able to afford such comprehensive assistance in planning. Dr. Booker continued to highlight the sophisticated level of data analysis that he has been able to access via this planning process.

Other respondents spoke to the importance of not only data, but also of reimagining data usage in planning processes. Eshauna Smith sees data as a tool to illuminate specific areas of need where activities and resources need to be elevated. She went on to say:

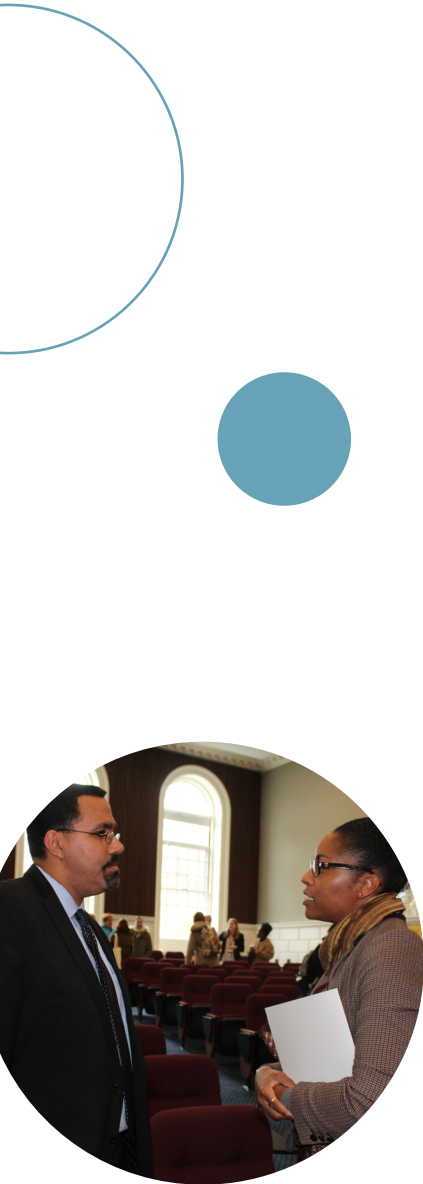
**“It is supposed to push past the politics and get down to what it is that [a child] needs to not drop out of high school, not become truant, or what have you. That’s based on community-level data—qualitative data from the community and real-life lived experiences that the partnership should be mining, using, and surfacing.”** E. Smith

Alan Cohen agrees with the notion of democratizing data to empower residents to tell their own stories, to identify their own needs, and to help advocate for their own solutions. He remarked:

**“Better data leads to better decisions, and better decisions leads to better outcomes. Community members can show up with data. So often the government institutions...hold all the information and then we’re asking them to share the information so that we can plan. Well, I feel like one of our greatest opportunities is to invest in the advanced strategy of counting stuff.”** A. Cohen



Karmen Smallwood,  
Dutchess County Assistant  
Commissioner for Youth  
Services and member of the  
Poughkeepsie Children's  
Cabinet, attending the 2023  
By All Means Convening.



John King, Former U.S. Secretary of Education speaks with Kyla Johnson-Trammell, Superintendent of Oakland Unified School District at EdRedesign's 2017 By All Means Convening.

Shanda Crowder feels that planning processes can help prioritize action by “figuring out what is that sweet spot that everyone could align their contributions around while still saying, we’re going to still hold the whole cradle-to-career [continuum], but we’re going to focus right now in this one place.”

While there was general agreement among the respondents that planning was an integral component of C2C/PBP work, there were differing opinions on the specific role that planning could or should play. Elizabeth Gaines recognizes that long-range planning is almost requisite in other public sectors and should be in this field as well. She observed:

**“We’ve got 20-year transportation plans and all these things that cities are busy developing. Is there a way that the [cradle-to-career] intermediary can backbone a process like that, one that really understands that the city is here for the long haul and needs to be. Those [public] institutions are permanent things that’re going to be around. And so how do we codify it?”** E. Gaines

Michelle Matthews agreed as she reflected on the approach her organization takes to the planning process:

**“Our work is not episodic. In partnership with our Network Members, we really think about the plan for strategic investments in a neighborhood over time that will yield results. And that requires people to have some kind of understanding of needs and interests. Some kind of plan that says over time, this is what we’re trying to do. That said, you must also be prepared to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves and make sense.”** M. Matthews

Alan Cohen, a believer in the power of data, is not a believer in the value of traditional robust planning processes. He offered an interesting dissenting opinion:

**“I’m just convinced that comprehensive plans are collaboration killers. Comprehensive plans allow us to have fights forever about the piece of a comprehensive plan that we don’t like, or what’s going to come first, or what actually allows us to move towards action. A big mantra for our organization is get beyond professional advocates to actual residents. And the reason why is professional advocates orient themselves around issues, and issues lead us towards politics. If we can get rid of...the comprehensive plan [that] starts with kind of your value statements and everything. Instead if we’re just like, how do we fix lead pipes? How do we remediate the lead pipes? You open up a world that might not agree on a whole lot, but we can agree on some action steps to fix the lead pipes, and that’s going to help kids.”** A. Cohen

There are differing perspectives on the process of planning, but there is agreement that some level of planning, whether deliberate or emergent, long- or short-term, is necessary for the viability of C2C/ PBPs to make a tangible difference in the lives of children, families, and the communities in which they reside. Once those plans are developed by the partnership, however, the challenge is how to get those plans inside monolithic public sector entities.

### *Adopt a Bureaucrat*

As plans and priorities are developed, there often needs to be a handoff to an individual within the system who can elevate the items and priorities within the public sector. An interesting notion that kept coming up in our interviews was the opportunity for C2C/PBPs to “Adopt a Bureaucrat”. Mayor Libby Schaaf remarked that “sometimes the mid-level bureaucrat can operate under the radar screen and get a lot of things done without it getting into the political mess. So that’s [an] avenue that I’ve heard works really well.” This tactic can be useful as Elizabeth Gaines noted that information “has to get into not just the current elected sort of zeitgeist. It has to be something that becomes owned by multiple stakeholders and multiple people.”

Alan Cohen (who coined this section’s title) offered an extended perspective on the promise of this practice:

**“I always tell people if you really want to have impact in this work and unlock resources, adopt a bureaucrat. And I don’t mean go to the city manager, or the mayor always, or the elected officials. I mean, obviously there’s a role to play there and political organizing is really important...”**

**But there is not enough that is done at the middle management level. There are enormous amounts of authority and power in rulemaking. I used to be an assistant superintendent of early childhood education at a district in Dallas. If you’ve spent any time around school districts, then you know that assistant superintendent is just a cool way of saying I was a middle manager. At 30 years old, I had pretty much total rulemaking control for \$200 million worth of public resources for pre-K through third grade and almost never had to go to the school board to make decisions. But I needed all sorts of help, and nobody ever paid attention....If an organization has a relationship with a middle manager that has a lot of rule-making control and is the one that is going to put the budget priorities in front of their council or in front of their leader, then everyone, every resident and community member that your organization interacts with, you’ve just brought them closer to the decision-making. So adopt middle manager bureaucrats; that is a huge opportunity. And usually nobody knows their name, they’re never in the paper. They only get hit over the head. They never get celebrated. Huge opportunity.”** A. Cohen

EdRedesign Panel of By All Means Consortium City Mayors, 2016, Harvard Graduate School of Education.



### Supports to Catalyze Public Sector Engagement

Much like the question asking if the public sector should have a role in this work, the responses from participants in this section were concordant. Early in this report, Elizabeth Gaines observed that the nomenclature of this burgeoning field typically begins with the letter “c”.

As a coda to this report, the final themes also start with supports that begin with the letter “c”. Respondents identified three key supports that would serve to increase public sector engagement in the field of C2C/PBPs—convening the public sector, communicating the value of this work to agents in the public sector, and credentialing a burgeoning talent pipeline to support C2C/PBPs.

#### *Convening the Public Sector*

Respondents noted the value of bringing public sector actors, particularly mayors and superintendents, together to grapple with the entire ecosystem affecting children and youth in their communities. Russell Booker highlighted how these convenings need to uniquely highlight C2C/PBP work and its potential for systems change:

**“We are not just talking about curriculum and instruction. We are not talking about state assessments. We’re not solely focusing on the school. We’re now going to be talking about place-based work and we’re going to be talking about systems-level transformation. We’re going to see if we can’t learn from one another and share best practices of how superintendents can be involved in this work outside of their district office. I would love a space to bring my city manager and my mayor.”** R. Booker

Elizabeth Gaines noted that “when [a] mayor is shining a light on [the work of an effective C2C/PBP], you can really move the needle.” Others observed that the credibility and reputation of the convener is important in attracting public sector actors.

#### *Communicating the Value of C2C/PBPs*

While the respondents in this field study unanimously agreed on the value of public sector engagement in C2C/PBPs, they also noted the need to more broadly communicate the value of these public/private partnerships and to lift up and spotlight effective exemplars. Shanda Crowder noted the need to shift the narrative and uplift the work, “No one is the enemy. I think everyone really needs to be present.” Melinda Pollack asserted that,

**“The public sector has to understand itself as part of the work, and everybody else—like funders, the general public, social sector leaders, and the communities they serve—has to accept the public sector as part of the work.”** M. Pollack

Alan Cohen emphasized that C2C/PBPs can work in conjunction with many cross-sector models, such as StriveTogether communities, Purpose Built communities, and Promise Neighborhoods, stating “There’s not a single way to do this.”





Kim Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts and Former Mayor of Salem, speaking at the 2016 By All Means Convening.

### *Credentialing to Support a Burgeoning Talent Pipeline*

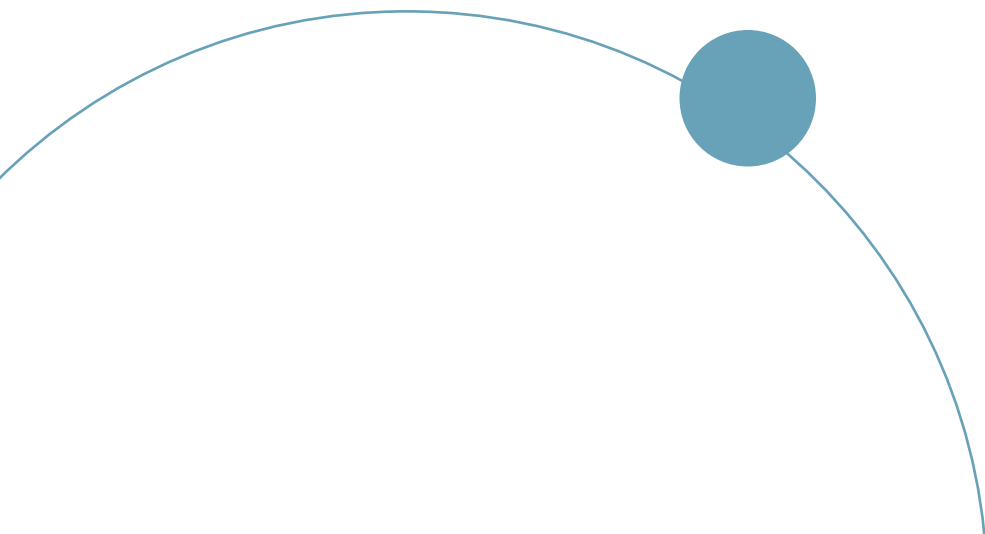
Backbone organizations play an indispensable role in supporting place-based collaborative action work. Leaders of these initiatives are at the center of C2C/PBPs and require a unique cross-sector skill set that is not typically taught in academic programs or professional development programs. Respondents identified communities of practice, fellowships,

and sustained programs tailored to this field as initiatives that could support the development of a talent pipeline prepared to lead effective and impactful C2C/PBPs that include public sector actors. Bringing future public sector actors along in these talent development initiatives would help bridge what is often a divide between the public and private sectors.

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## Conclusion

**Over the last 20+ years, cradle-to-career place-based collaborative action has become a critical and increasingly utilized approach to address our nation's most pressing socioeconomic and educational challenges.** From the pioneering work of the [Harlem Children's Zone](#) to the federal [Promise Neighborhoods](#) program and broader collective impact movement, the field of cradle-to-career place-based partnerships has emerged. This work intentionally broadens the boundaries of education beyond schooling to include the broader ecosystem of children's lived experience and the supports and opportunities each child, youth, and family needs in order to restore social mobility. Public sector engagement is necessary for this work to be effective. While there are challenges to engaging the public sector, there are key elements to doing so effectively and key supports that would further fuel the successful implementation of these public/private partnerships.



## Appendix A

Respondents surveyed included the individuals listed below. Note that some interviewees have transitioned from the organizations with which they were affiliated (listed below) at the time of the interviews.

Name	Title	Organization
Dr. Russell Booker*	CEO	Spartanburg Academic Movement
Alan Cohen*	Founder and CEO	Child Poverty Action Lab
Shanda Crowder	Vice President of Capacity and Civic Infrastructure	Partners for Rural Impact
Sagar Desai	Managing Director of Innovation	StriveTogether
Elizabeth Gaines	Founder and CEO	Children's Funding Project
Colin Groth	Executive Vice President of Strategy and Development	StriveTogether
Lauren Hult	Partner	The Bridgespan Group
Michelle Matthews	Senior Vice President	Purpose Built Communities
Melinda Pollack	Managing Director, Catalytic Supports	Blue Meridian Partners
Christian Rhodes	Deputy Executive Director	William Julius Wilson Institute at Harlem Children's Zone
Mayor Libby Schaaf*	Former Mayor	City of Oakland
Eshauna Smith	Director of Community Impact	Ballmer Group

\* Current EdRedesign [By All Means Senior Fellow](#)

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

### Questions

1. When you think about the work of cross-sector collaborations to support youth and families, what does that mean to you? Is there existing terminology your organization currently uses to talk about this work?
2. Yes or no; Do you see a role for the public sector to support your work?
  - a. If so, what would be the most impactful way a closer relationship with the public sector could impact your work?
  - b. If not, what apprehensions do you have in establishing a closer relationship with the public sector?
3. In establishing relationships with local government (city/county), what do you feel are the key opportunities and challenges?
4. In establishing relationships with local public school systems, what do you feel are the key opportunities and challenges?
5. Do you know of any communities in the United States that are working in this intersection in what you feel are very impactful ways?
6. As these conversations move forward, do you see there being an actionable role to support the field in promoting increased public sector engagement?