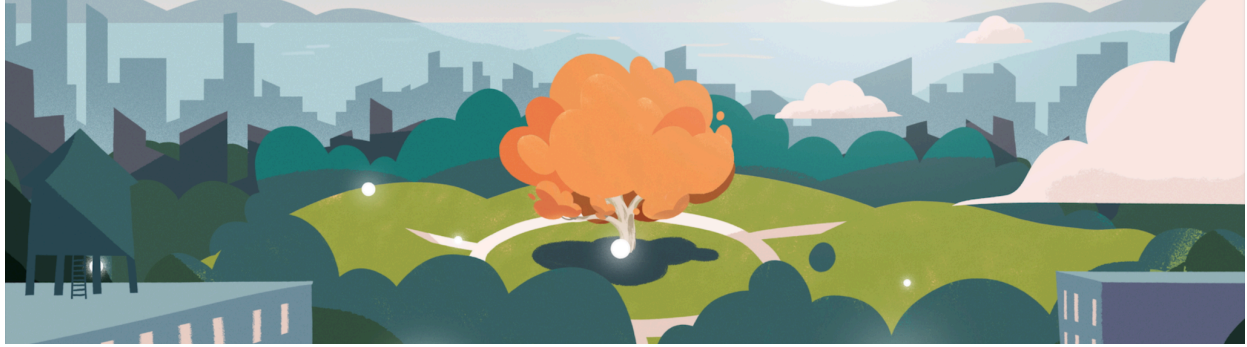


Toolkit Overview



Problem-Solving Network Mapping & System Coordinator Role Co-Design Toolkit

Overview

This toolkit is designed to help communities strengthen their community's ability to solve system-level challenges through mapping their problem-solving network and creating role clarity for a boundary-spanning position.. Boundary-spanning positions are any position that connects and strengthens different aspects of your community in service of common goals. In Built for Zero work, these positions are commonly called **System Coordinators** though these boundary-spanning positions can come with many different titles or roles (we will use the term system coordinator or just coordinator as generic titles for your position in this toolkit).

What challenges this toolkit is designed to address

System coordination work is challenging in its ambiguity. Coordinators are tasked with improving the way a community collaborates and coordinates with very little guidance on where to start and how to translate that directive into tangible action.

This toolkit is designed for any community or coordinator who wants to *structurally* improve their community's ability to solve problems - but doesn't know where to start.

We will do this by defining the challenge of improving your community's problem-solving capacity and then translating that into a tangible workplan for your coordinator.

Orientation

This toolkit includes this google doc with tabs (the menu to the left ↔) and a link to a Mural template. The tabs in the google doc include:

- **Toolkit Overview:** You are here! . Establishes the core premises of system coordination work and how they underpin the activity's outputs.
- **Problem-Solving Network:** Frameworks and mental models about how complex challenges are solved across community workgroups.
- **Boundary-Spanning Roles:** What system coordinators in the Built for Zero network and contemporary research on boundary-spanning positions says about how to set coordinators up for success.
- **Activity Walkthrough:** How to complete the problem-solving network activity and a link to the mural template.
- **Example Worksheet:** An example of the completed document this activity produces.
- **Blank Worksheet:** A workplanning worksheet for you to copy and fill in after completing the Mural exercise.

Acknowledgement and Built For Zero Support

This toolkit is built on the learnings graciously shared by dozens of community-level system coordinators and their teammates across the Built for Zero network. We thank them for the incredible work they are doing spurring system change in their communities in countless seen and unseen ways! We deeply appreciate their willingness to share what they've learned through the ups and downs of the work.

This toolkit was compiled by Leonard Pierce (lpierce@community.solutions). If you or your community is interested in completing this exercise or if you have any questions or feedback, please reach out! We'd love to support your community through this process.

Key Foundations and Toolkit Summary

Communities are Problem-Solving Networks

- Much like how Built For Zero frames a community's homeless response system as one with measurable client inflow into and outflow out of the system, communities experience an "inflow" of challenges on a regular basis and produce an "outflow" of solutions.
- Communities who are able to adaptively solve challenges at the pace they are identified - in other words, communities with a high [problem-solving rate](#) - are more likely to create the solutions and develop the infrastructure that ultimately houses more clients and mitigates the impact of future challenges.
- Built for Zero experience has observed that communities require three distinct levels of collaboration to address complex system challenges, shift the community's enabling conditions, and sustainably end homelessness. Looking at a community as a [problem-solving network](#) is a helpful lens for identifying opportunities to increase its problem-solving rate.
- Not only do communities require effective workgroups within each level, the systems with the highest problem-solving rates have strong connections *between* levels and workgroups. Within-group collaboration and between-group coordination are distinct actions and therefore have [different measures of effectiveness](#).

System Coordinators are Boundary-Spanners

- In order to strengthen a community's problem-solving network and increase its problem-solving rate, system coordinators are often tasked with bolstering both within-group collaboration and between-group coordination. This requires coordinators to deploy their [foundational system improvement skills](#) to improve each workgroup's ability to solve challenges
- System coordinators also serve as [boundary-spanners](#) across individuals, organizations, and workgroups to translate information, build relationships and

coordinate action. Boundary-spanning is a related but separate skillset from improving within-workgroup collaboration.

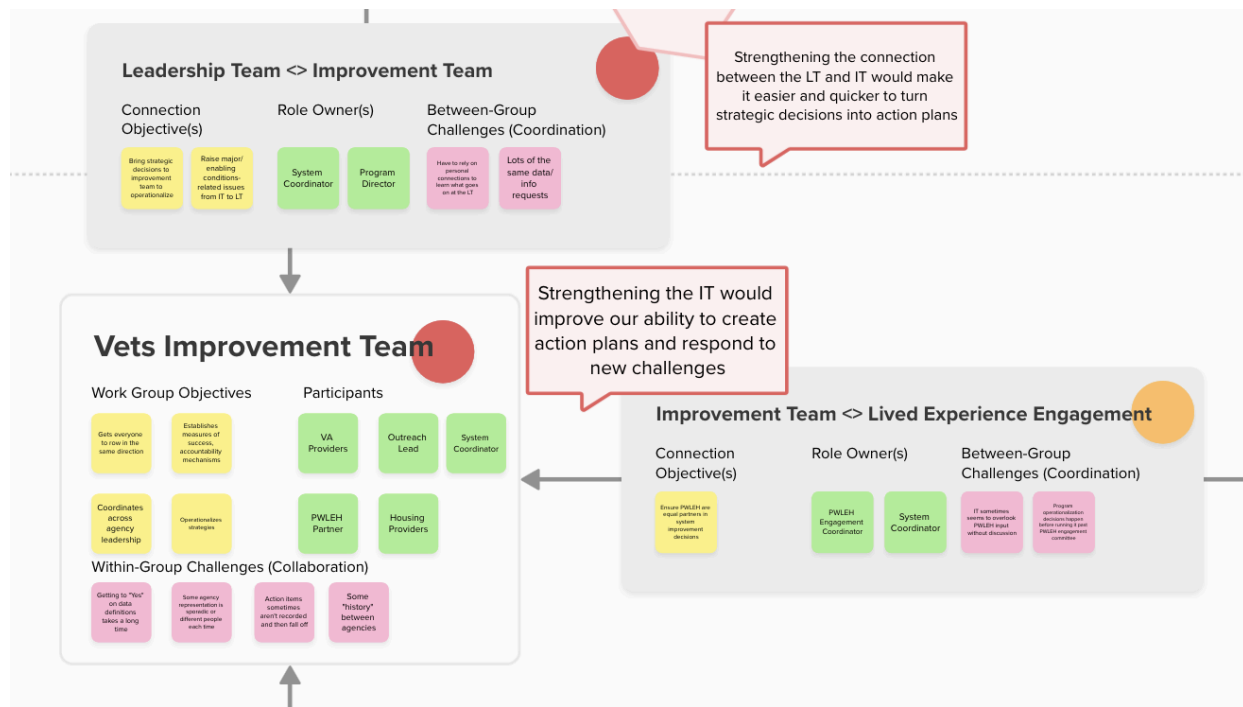
- Thoughtfully planning a system coordinator's scope of work, identifying key allies for them to build relationships with, and ensuring the system is not over-reliant on an individual are [key pillars to establish](#) in their boundary-spanning role.

This Toolkit

This toolkit aims to articulate a) your community's problem-solving network, and b) how your system coordinator can strengthen it. The primary outputs of this toolkit are a **Problem-Solving Network Map** and a **System Coordinator Workplan**. The network map is generated through this [mural template](#) which informs this [workplan worksheet](#).

Problem-Solving Network Map

- **Mapping your network's workgroups and connections:** Your community will map out what workgroups exist, their objectives, who participates, and what their within-group challenges are. Your community will also define the key connections between workgroups and their characteristics.
- **Identifying your network's highest leverage rate-limiters:** Your community will identify and prioritize workgroups or connections that, if strengthened, would yield the largest gains in problem-solving rate.



System Coordinator Workplan

- Naming process measures and tests of change:** For each priority point, your community will establish measures a coordinator can work towards that would indicate the component of the problem-solving network is strengthening
- Identifying key allies and sources of legitimacy:** For each priority point, your community will name key allies and relationships the coordinator can connect with to help establish their independent legitimacy as a system coordinator

Priority Area #1	<i>Improvement Team <> Leadership Team Connection</i>
Strengthening this element will...	<i>Allow for more communication and smoother coordination between the two groups. That means the LT is able to clear more paths for the IT and will <u>allows</u> the community to more quickly implement strategic decisions made by the LT via the IT.</i>
Potential Key Allies	<i>Mary T. from Gathering House sometimes sits on both the LT and IT - she may have ideas and energy to help solve.</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>The IT doesn't have strong insight into what's going on at the LT level which makes it hard to proactively align system change strategy</i>
Measure	<i>Increased understanding of LT goings on at the IT level</i>
Baseline	<i>No consistent, written communication vehicle between LT and IT</i>
Test of Change	<i>Report out email is sent out within 48 hours of each monthly LT meeting and includes participants, topics discussed, decisions reached, and assigned action items</i>
Target Date	<i>By May LT meeting</i>

Together these artifacts should set your community and system coordinator on a path towards strengthening your network's problem-solving rate, ultimately building the infrastructure to resolve challenges quicker and house more clients.

What's Required?

When to do this activity

Completing the toolkit **when designing a potential new role or right as the role begins** would allow for a new coordinator to hit the ground running. That said, this toolkit can help a community develop a deeper understanding of their problem-solving network and can help sharpen the role of a coordinator at any time.

How much time is required

Budget **at least two hours for the group to complete the activity** - one hour to map out your community's problem-solving network and one hour to create process measures and define support. We recommend taking as long as necessary to map your network! If your team finds the conversation generative, it is much better to dedicate more time than rush to complete the activity. Budget an additional one hour to compile the resulting information into the worksheet.

Who should participate

It is critical this conversation involves **multiple stakeholders from across your community's key working groups** - this can include your community's Leadership Team, Improvement Team, and Case Conferencing Team. The toolkit can be used independently by communities. We recommend designating a facilitator/mural-driver and that the coordinator whose work will be guided by the end product is an active participant.

If you would like Built for Zero support in facilitating this activity, feel free to reach out to your coach or Leonard Pierce (lpierce@community.solutions).

What to know beforehand

It is helpful to be familiar with the Built for Zero theory of change as well as the basics of improvement science (Ex. PDSA cycles, process vs. outcome measures). It can also be helpful to have a general familiarity with the **role of a [System Coordinator](#)** though the purpose of this toolkit is to define what that role looks like within your community context. The structure of the activity is based on premises derived from Built for Zero network experience and academic research, specifically that [communities are problem-solving networks](#) and [system coordinators are boundary-spanning positions](#).

Ready to get started?



If you feel comfortable with the foundational concepts - that your community is a [problem-solving network](#) and that system coordinators are [boundary-spanning roles](#) - go ahead to the [Activity Walkthrough](#) tab to get started!

If you have any questions or would like support in completing this toolkit, please reach out to Leonard Pierce (lpierce@community.solutions). We'd love to help!

Problem-Solving Network



Your Community is a Problem-Solving Network

Understanding your community as a network of interconnected problem-solving entities elevates system change conversations from the challenges of today to a longer view of how your community identifies and solves emergent challenges.

[Your Community's Problem-Solving Rate](#)

[The Three Levels of Collaboration](#)

[Measuring Within-Group Collaboration and Between-Group Coordination](#)

Summary: Your Community is a Problem-Solving Network

A community's problem-solving rate is their ability to successfully address their "inflow" of challenges in a given timespan through their "solution outflow". Communities who have a net positive problem-solving rate are able to solve challenges as they arise *and* build opportunities to mitigate the impact of future challenges.

Sustainably ending homelessness requires a network of interconnected workgroups spanning three key levels of collaboration. Not only do these workgroups need to be functional in and of themselves, they must have strong connections between them to maximize the community's problem-solving capacity.

Problem-solving networks are made up of workgroups where participants collaborate to produce novel solutions and constellations of workgroups that coordinate to implement solutions. The acts of collaboration and coordination require different measures of effectiveness.

Your Community's Problem-Solving Rate

Beyond the pressing system fixes for your community in the here-and-now, there are yet unknown challenges just over the horizon. These can come from uncovering new challenges in your existing system (e.g. improving data quality uncovers programmatic disparate impact, establishing population-specific case conferencing highlights siloed resources) or from changing external conditions (e.g. 100-year weather disaster creates large inflow, shifts in funding streams threaten housing resources).

The fact that there are always novel challenges means a key measure of a community's effectiveness is not just direct client outcome measures such as housing placement rate but also the network's **problem-solving rate**. A community's problem-solving rate is roughly how many system challenges can be sustainably solved in a given amount of time. Communities who are able to solve more problems in a given amount of time (higher problem-solving rate) are more likely to be able to implement the system fixes that result in improved client outcomes over time - in other words, a community's problem-solving rate is an *accelerant* for housing placements.

The same way that we think of our community's actively homelessness count as a result of client inflow and outflow, we can think of system challenges in a similar "challenge inflow" and "solution outflow" paradigm. Suppose there are two communities starting with similar client inflow and outflow rates and encountering the same challenges but with different problem-solving rates.

	Breyers County CoC	Tillamook County CoC
Monthly Metrics Over a 6-Month Average	Inflow: 13 clients/month Housing Placement Rate: 10 clients/month Actively Homeless: 40 clients	
"Challenge Inflow" Over 6-Month Period	- Case conferencing reveals inconsistent inactive policies across providers complicating service delivery and skewing data - Community's primary youth and family provider unexpectedly loses staff capacity - Flooding in rural area displaces residents and strains local services - New major grant opportunity presents itself but requires multiple agencies to collaborate to meet requirements	

<i>"Solution Outflow" Over 6-Month Period</i>	- Community aligns inactive policies, socializes new processes across agencies, and cleans data - Service providers independently run sprints to try and absorb new inflow	- Community aligns inactive policies, socializes new processes across agencies, and cleans data - Community strategically secures and reallocates resources sourced from across the whole CoC to support displaced rural clients and youth/family clients - Coordinating efforts with state departments leads to creation of state-CoC housing crisis task force - Key agencies collaborate to create joint application for new funding
<i>Monthly Metrics Over Next 6-Months</i>	Inflow: ??? Housing Placement Rate: ??? Actively Homeless: ???	Inflow: ??? Housing Placement Rate: ??? Actively Homeless: ???

Given each community's "solution outflow", what do you think their monthly client metrics may look like over the next six months? Tillamook County CoC's higher problem-solving rate allows them to not only address the challenges flowing into the community but also capitalize on those collaborative moments to build further opportunities, ultimately creating infrastructure that promotes community resiliency in the face of future challenges. If each community were to continue with their current problem-solving rate, consider what each community's "active challenge count" may look like after another six months, one year, two years, and so forth.

(This begs the question - what about Tillamook County CoC's system contributed to their high problem-solving rate?)

Communities with different "net" problem-solving rates experience their challenge inflow differently and have different downstream experiences:

What This Means

Impact on Community

"Net Negative" Problem-Solving Rate	The community is unable to resolve challenges at the same pace as challenges are identified	The community triages challenges and perseveres through their impact but unaddressed challenges become part of the community's enabling conditions of homelessness.
"Net Neutral" Problem-Solving Rate	The community is able to "tread water" and keep pace with resolving their challenge inflow	The community experiences minimal disruption as it resolves challenges as they are identified.
"Net Positive" Problem-Solving Rate	The community is able to resolve challenges at the same pace they are identified <i>and</i> build proactive opportunities to weather new challenges.	The community is able to mitigate significant disruption from new and completely preempt future challenges by establishing infrastructure and marshaling resources, i.e. develop community resiliency..

To that end, system improvement is the work of increasing your community's problem-solving capacity. This involves identifying and resolving your community's highest leverage **problem-solving rate limiters** - i.e. the characteristics of your problem-solving network that are *consistently and systemically* hindering your community's collective ability to solve complex challenges.

Takeaway: Your Community's Problem-Solving Rate

A community's problem-solving rate is their ability to successfully address their "inflow" of challenges in a given timespan through their "solution outflow". Communities who have a net positive problem-solving rate are able to solve challenges as they arise *and* build opportunities to mitigate the impact of future challenges.

Some reflection questions:

- What is a community's problem-solving rate? What are the parallels between client inflow, outflow, and actively homeless and challenge inflow and outflow?
- What is the benefit of having a "net positive" problem-solving rate?
- What is a problem-solving rate limiter?

The Three Levels of Collaboration

In order to sustainably end homelessness at a population level and reach Functional Zero, communities must shift the enabling conditions of homelessness in addition to strengthening the systems that directly serve and house clients.

The work of strengthening operational systems and shifting enabling conditions at the same time is really hard! Doing both in a mutually reinforcing manner requires multiple interconnected levels of coordination across the community. To that end, it is helpful to think of your community as a **problem-solving network** consisting of three levels of collaboration: **direct engagement coordination**, **systems change alignment and integration**, and **influencing enabling conditions**.

LEVEL
3

Influencing Enabling Conditions

Creating enabling conditions of a sustained end to homelessness.

Establishing new funding sources, providing advocacy and political pressure for policy changes, helping to increase political will and change public perceptions about homelessness or solutions, etc.

Example Teams: CoC Leadership Team, Cross-Sector Partner Groups

LEVEL
2

Systems Change Alignment and Integration

Changing foundational systems to work more efficiently and effectively together. Alignment around goals, strategies, and policies, establishing shared ways of working, creating a system of governance and decision-making, and creating integrated processes

Example Teams: Improvement Teams, Backbone Teams

LEVEL
1

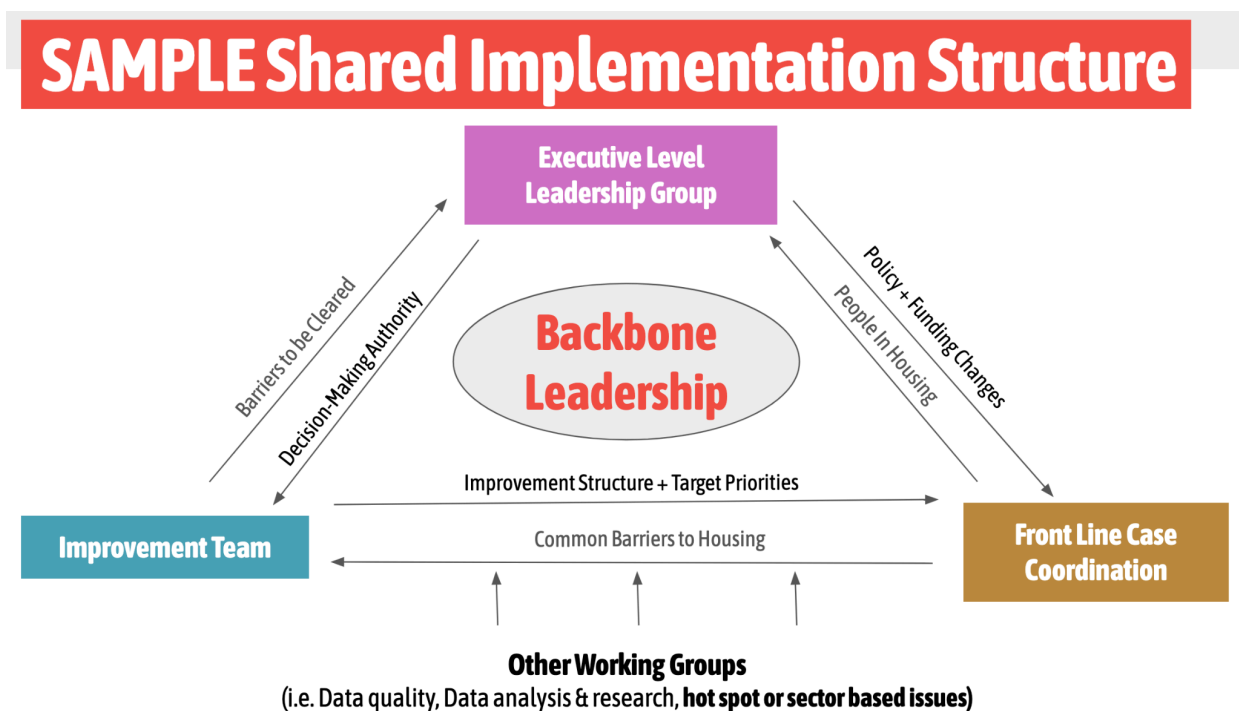
Direct Engagement Coordination

Coordinating service delivery and engagement of people experiencing homelessness. Cross communication, data sharing, program and practice improvement, reducing duplication, improving service delivery efficiency, etc.

Example Teams: Case Conferencing, Prevention & Diversion

Any group of people who come together to solve a problem can be thought of as a workgroup and each workgroup in your community - everything from case conferencing to city-CoC taskforces - generally falls within one of these three levels of collaboration. Though some workgroups may address more than one level of collaboration, it is important to monitor mission creep in those groups. Tightly defined workgroups with specific objectives are more likely to drive progress towards those goals than an all-things-for-all-people workgroup.

Within Built for Zero work, the most commonly referenced implementation structure consists of an **executive level leadership group**, an **improvement team**, and **front line case coordination teams**. Backbone organizations facilitate the convening of and coordination between these groups.



Template implementation structure covering all three levels of collaboration

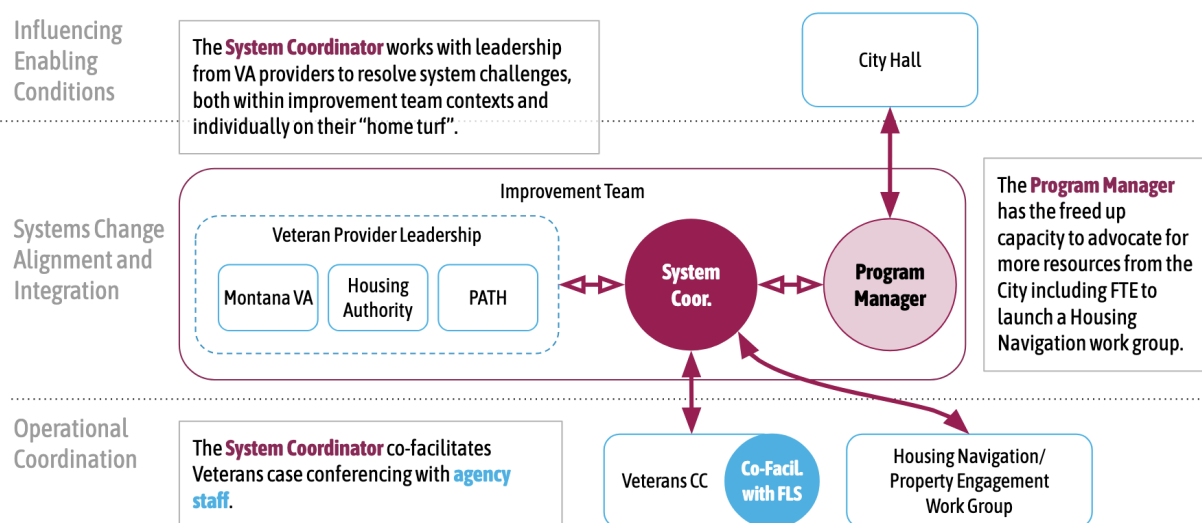
Though each level or workgroup can identify and solve a number of system challenges in isolation, oftentimes **the level or workgroup where a challenge is identified and where it can be most effectively addressed are often not the same!** For example, misaligned outreach practices might be identified most readily in **case conferencing** but the most impactful system-level fix may be developed through the coordination and buy-in of CoC

leadership who sit on the **community improvement team**. Therefore, there must also be strong connections *between* different workgroups and levels of collaboration.

These connections expand your community's ability to solve problems through stitching together each workgroup's individual strengths:

- **Wider Awareness of Challenges:** Connections allow connected workgroups to highlight across the community the existence of challenges encountered in one part of the network.
- **Shared Opportunity Landscape:** Connections allow connected workgroups to be aware of and leverage the unique opportunities, resources, and problem-solving acumen of every other connected workgroup.
- **Coordinated Implementation:** Connections allow connected workgroups to work in concert to deploy system-level fixes across multiple levels of the community.

Understanding your community's working groups and their interconnections as a problem-solving network allows for the identification of structural strengths and areas for improvement in addressing system-level challenges. This insight can then inform the design of your coordinator's role to strengthen your community's network.



Missoula CoC's Problem-Solving Network from the System Coordinator's perspective

Consider **Missoula CoC's** problem-solving network, above. The team's **Veteran Case Conferencing** and **Housing Navigation & Property Engagement Work Group** serve as the

core coordination hubs for some of the community's direct service efforts. Community-wide coordination efforts such as establishing cross-agency accountability structures are led by the **Community Improvement Team** which includes representation from all Veteran providers and is hosted by the CoC's dedicated System Coordinator. The dedicated system alignment capacity has freed up community leadership to establish a **City Hall Liaison Group** to build relationships with elected officials and advocate for sustained funding.

The System Coordinator specifically helps braid the direct engagement coordination and system improvement alignment levels together by co-facilitating the Veterans case conferencing and participating in the improvement team. Through these touchpoints, the coordinator built up relationships with veteran stakeholder groups and developed an understanding of how each of them saw their roles in the community.

When concerns were raised in the **veterans case conferencing team** that some housing vouchers were inaccessible due to being buried under layers of bureaucracy at an agency, the coordinator was able to highlight the challenge both at the **improvement team** meeting and through the 1:1 relationships he'd developed with agency leadership in those meetings. This connection and feedback loop between front line staff and agency leadership has allowed for slow but steady progress towards unlocking access to those vouchers.

Takeaway: The Three Levels of Collaboration

Sustainably ending homelessness requires a network of interconnected workgroups spanning three key levels of collaboration. Not only do these workgroups need to be functional in and of themselves, they must have strong connections between them to maximize the community's problem-solving capacity.

Some reflection questions:

- What are the three levels of collaboration? What are some examples from your community of workgroups that fall in each level?
- Why is it important to have clearly defined workgroup objectives?
- How do connections between workgroups and collaboration levels facilitate problem solving?

Measuring Within-Group Collaboration and Between-Group Coordination

Strong problem-solving networks require workgroups that are effective solution-generators in their own right and the connections that allow different workgroups to coordinate to solve more complex problems. To that end, it is important to be able to measure the **within-group collaboration** of workgroups and **between-group coordination**.

Roughly speaking, collaboration is a generative process requiring the deep interdependent creativity of the group to produce a novel shared understanding, product, or process. Coordination, on the other hand, is the ability for multiple entities to be on the same page and execute a plan independently. Put another way, collaboration is working *together* to achieve a shared goal while coordination is working *separately* to achieve a shared goal.

The difference between collaboration and coordination means they require different actions to achieve - and therefore there are different measures for within-group vs. between-group effectiveness. Additionally, each category can have their own outcome measures (direct measures of success) and process measures (measures of a test of change that will theoretically improve outcome measures).

Within-Group Collaboration: These measures track the alignment, participation, and efficiency of individual workgroups as they strengthen their ability to address system challenges. Some *outcome* measures indicating greater collaboration could include:

- Number of action items cleared per meeting
- Time to completion of action items
- Number of PDSA cycles run per month
- Number of successful cases resolved (this can be workgroup-specific: clients housed, clients matched with services, property managers signed onto an MOU, etc.) per month

In support of these outcome measures, a number of *process* measures tracking actions that will ultimately contribute to the outcome measures could include:

- % of all veteran service providers attending case conferencing
- % of weekly action items with clear owners and timelines
- # of cross-sector partners sitting in on quarterly improvement team meetings

Inter-Group Coordination: These measures track the effectiveness of the connections between different workgroups. Outcome measures that indicate greater inter-group coordination can include:

- Time between challenge identification, solution-design, and implementation
- Degree of shared understanding of community statuses (e.g. number of actively homeless clients)
- Alignment of coordinated responses to challenges (e.g. timeliness, messaging)

Some process measures that could be in support of these outcome measures:

- # of direct service engagement representatives participating in improvement team meetings
- # of shared boundary objects (dashboards, HMIS reports, community updates) used across levels
- Timeliness and depth of newsletters or meeting summaries distributed to workgroups

When designing a PDSA cycle to strengthen your community's problem-solving rate, make sure to delineate whether your community is targeting within-group collaboration or inter-group coordination.

Takeaway: Within-Group Collaboration and Between-Group Coordination

Problem-solving networks are made up of workgroups where participants collaborate to produce novel solutions and constellations of workgroups that coordinate to implement solutions. The acts of collaboration and coordination require different measures of effectiveness.

Some reflection questions:

- Generally speaking, what's the difference between within-group collaboration and between-group coordination?
- What are some measures of successful within-group collaboration? What about between-group coordination?
- What is the difference between a process and an outcome measure for collaboration? For coordination?

Boundary-Spanning Roles



System Coordinators are Boundary-Spanners

System Coordinators have the challenging task of improving their community's systems - this is often an ambiguous challenge! Built for Zero experience and academic research on boundary-spanning positions offer guidance on how to prepare a coordinator for the novel and unique challenges they will face.

[System Improvement Competency Model](#)

[Boundary-Spanning Roles](#)

[Preempting Common Pitfalls](#)

Summary: System Coordinators are Boundary-Spanners

System Coordinators are tasked with embedding system improvement methods into their community's ways of working. This is complex, adaptive work where no two situations will be the same. System improvement skills, technical knowledge, and system improvement work postures are proven competencies that empower coordinators to navigate novel system-building challenges.

Coordinators play a boundary-spanning role across entities. They translate information, build relationships, and coordinate action across individuals, organizations, and workgroups. Strong boundary-spanners are critical for increasing a community's problem-solving rate.

System Coordinators and other boundary-spanning positions who are successful are able to avoid common pitfalls: role ambiguity, lack of independent legitimacy, and over-reliance on individuals. Careful planning at the outset of the position can preempt these pitfalls.

System Improvement Competency Model

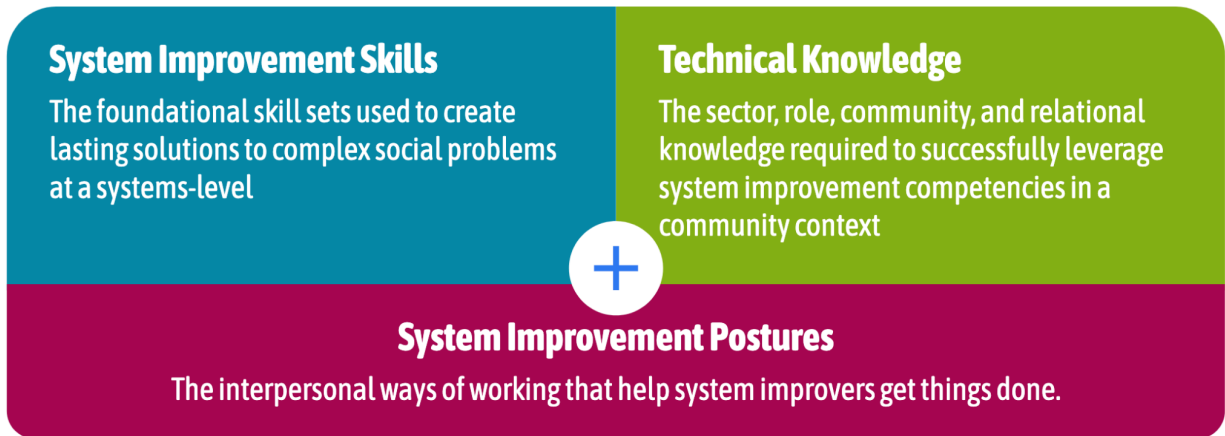
System Coordinators are tasked with using system improvement methods to strengthen their community's ability to house clients. Built for Zero's [system coordinator archetype sheet](#) describes their role:

System Coordinator Role Summary

System Coordinators leverage and promote continuous quality improvement best practices to actively reshape community processes and behavioral norms. They co-develop a shared vision for success across the community, provide the project management support to actualize that vision, and embed Collective Impact principles into community processes to ensure system-level gains are sustained. They establish and maintain critical communication and knowledge-sharing lanes between end users, providers, the community as a whole and the broader systems that touch the HRS.

That's a lot! System coordination work is challenging, non-linear, and has been described as "planting seeds for trees under whose shade they will never sit". That said, a lot has been learned about what helps system coordinators succeed in their role. A coordinator's primary directive is to **embed system improvement methods into their community's ways of working**. Because every community is different and every moment in time presents a novel landscape of opportunities and constraints, there's no single step-by-step playbook for success. Instead coordinators must be able to adapt their skills, knowledge, and experience to the unique moment in front of them in service of the long-term goal of embedding system improvement methods into their communities.

Built for Zero has identified a set of competencies for adaptive and effective coordinators - coordinators must have a combination of **system improvement skills, technical knowledge**, and **system improvement postures**.



System Improvement Skills are a constellation of skills with an established cross-sector track record of helping communities strengthen systems and fundamentally shift the enabling conditions of complex social challenges. Coordinators use these foundations to leverage their technical knowledge in pursuit of creating system change. This foundation is made up of:

- **Quality Improvement:** The foundational mental models of how to take a structured approach to systems change.
- **Project Management and Facilitation:** The ability to implement practices that lead to increased accountability, richer communication, and more efficient use of time/resources.
- **Human-Centered Design:** The ability to center and incorporate the experience of those impacted by systems when designing system-level fixes.
- **Data for Analysis and Data for Improvement:** The ability to manipulate and interpret data as well as design the data infrastructures necessary to measure the impact of tests of change.
- **Place-Based Partnerships:** The knowledge of how backbones and place-based partnerships facilitate population-level change.

Built for Zero has a wide range of resources to help you improve your system improvement skills - feel free to ask your coach about how you can skill up.

Technical Knowledge is the knowledge, skills, and experience relevant to the position's specific role and the wider community's unique context. System positions use their technical

knowledge to ground their use of improvement science foundations in lived expertise and the community history. These knowledge groups include:

- **Community Knowledge:** The history, served population, stakeholders, relationships, and other key characteristics of your community
- **Role-Specific Knowledge:** The specific explicit know-how that is required to successfully perform the functions of the position

Strengthening your technical knowledge comes from time spent in the community and some formal instruction. Be curious about people's history in the community and take every opportunity to sit in on working groups outside your immediate sphere!

System Improvement Work Postures are interpersonal ways of working that help the system leader get things done. System leaders must have work postures that allow them to successfully interact with the systems they are looking to influence. Examples of work postures are responsiveness, empathy, and proactivity.

Though work postures fall into a more "know it when you see it" category of skill, observe and aim to emulate the way your peers navigate challenging situations.

All three of these skill groups must work in concert for a system coordinator to successfully shift embedded working norms. A skilled facilitator or project manager may be less successful in building relationships with agencies across the community without understanding the community's history. Someone with long-standing relationships and a knack for rallying others may struggle to translate motivation into sustained action without system improvement skills.

Some success measures for embedding system improvement methods include [within-group collaboration measures](#). Workgroups that successfully adopt system improvement methods into their working norms are more likely to increase their [problem-solving rate](#).

Takeaway: System Improvement Competency Model

System Coordinators are tasked with embedding system improvement methods into their community's ways of working. This is complex, adaptive work where no two situations will be the same. System improvement skills, technical knowledge, and system improvement work postures are proven competencies that empower coordinators to navigate novel system-building challenges.

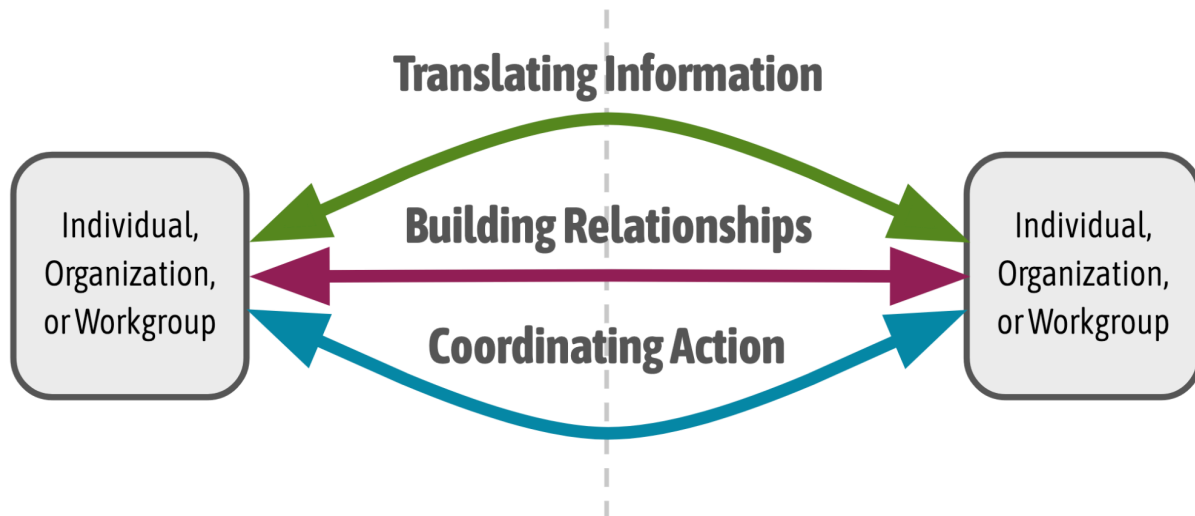
Some reflection questions:

- What is the overall goal of a system coordinator?
- What are the three categories of skills required for a successful system coordinator?
- What are some sub-categories of skills within system improvement skills? Technical knowledge? System improvement postures?

Boundary-Spanning Roles

Positions tasked with coordinating between multiple discrete entities without formal authority over those entities are called **Boundary-Spanning Roles**. Generally speaking, a boundary-spanner is an individual who links individuals, organizations, or workgroups to other entities. Built for Zero experience and academic research in adjacent sectors has demonstrated that boundary-spanning positions help organizations and communities measurably improve their innovation, adaptability, and overall performance. By bridging different groups, boundary spanners help recombine knowledge and ideas, leading to novel solutions developed more quickly.

Boundary-spanning positions accomplish this through strengthening information exchange and knowledge transfer, relationship quality, and coordination and alignment of action.



Translating Information and Broadening Shared Knowledge: Boundary-spanners act as knowledge brokers. In bringing information from one work group to another, they must select the most relevant information to raise and often must translate the information into language the receiving workgroup can understand and act on. Additionally, a boundary-spanner's expanded viewpoints across teams allows them to identify opportunities for solutions that may not be visible to the workgroups independently.

- Example: A community's case conferencing team identifies that a specific geographic area isn't receiving outreach services at the same rate as others, leading to disparate impact. The coordinator takes that information to the Improvement Team and succinctly summarizes the context, challenge, impact on client outcomes, and potential opportunities for solutions. The improvement team is able to rely on the coordinator for information and to help align solution development and implementation with the case conferencing team.

Building Quality Relationships: Boundary-spanners strengthen the relationships between individuals, agencies, and workgroups by serving as a trusted and neutral facilitator, and broker of information and action. Not only do boundary-spanners increase trust within groups through the coordinated action towards a common goal, they create trust between groups by serving as a shared accountability mechanism. As often there are the same organizations with different representatives across different workgroups in a community, the boundary-spanner serves as a matrixed connective tissue between organizations.

- Example: A community has strong Veterans case conferencing and improvement team workgroups but there is a major Veterans provider who has been resistant to aligning their policies and practices to the rest of the community. Through their participation in both case conferencing and the improvement team, the system coordinator is able to develop trusting relationships with multiple individuals in the

Veterans provider. Through those interactions, the coordinator is able to integrate the provider into the wider community.

Coordinating Action: Boundary-spanners serve as the coordination and accountability hubs for actions that require multiple workgroups to work in parallel to solve a shared complex problem. They bring action items from one group to another and ensure dependencies between the two groups are cleared. In doing so, they ensure each group feels accountable to each other for their progress towards the shared goal.

- Example: A community received flex funds to improve client housing outcomes so the community needed to develop policies and procedures for case managers to access the funds for their clients. The system coordinator worked across the community's improvement and case conferencing teams to design and then socialize flex fund disbursement procedures. The coordinator served as the two-way feedback loop mechanism during the procedure's rollout, allowing for adjustments to messaging or policies as needed to streamline the deployment of funds to clients.

Measures of success for boundary-spanning between different workgroups or entities include [between-group coordination measures](#).

Ultimately, increasing the bonds between entities through those mechanisms leads to more creativity and innovation, project success, and organizational adaptability. The more ideas a community is able to generate and implement, the more problems get solved - an increased [problem-solving rate](#) - and the more clients will ultimately get housed, now and through the next batch of challenges the community faces.

Takeaway: Boundary-Spanning Roles

Coordinators play a boundary-spanning role across entities. They translate information, build relationships, and coordinate action across individuals, organizations, and workgroups. Strong boundary-spanners are critical for increasing a community's problem-solving rate.

Some reflection questions:

- What is a boundary-spanner?
- In what specific ways do boundary-spanners bring two entities together?
- How does boundary-spanning lead to an increased problem-solving rate?

Preempting Common Pitfalls

From the experience of system coordinators in the Built for Zero network and research into other boundary-spanning roles has revealed a number of pitfalls that communities should proactively address in order to set their coordinators up for success. The most common pitfalls are **role ambiguity**, **lack of independent legitimacy**, and **over-reliance on individuals**.

Pitfall	Impact	How to Preempt
Role Ambiguity The coordinator is not given a clear directive for what aspects of the system to improve or what success for their work looks like.	Less focused time spent on collaboration/coordination As day-to-day “fires” come up, the lack of role clarity or measures of success makes it easier for the coordinator’s time to be redirected away from within-group collaboration or between-group coordination work.	Have clear role objectives and guardrails to protect from scope creep Clearly identify for your coordinator the aspects of your community’s problem-solving network that they should focus on. Establish SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals for each objective. Use the facilitated exercise to map your community’s problem-solving network and translate it into a workplan for your coordinator.
Lack of Independent Legitimacy The individuals, organizations, or workgroups the coordinator is tasked with working with don’t perceive them as having proper authority or legitimacy to convene or direct action.	Less collaboration or coordination from participating entities Individuals, organizations, or workgroups who don’t recognize the coordinator’s legitimacy as a neutral facilitator won’t work towards the	“Borrow” legitimacy from established sources then build authentic, independent legitimacy Secure mandates for coordination and/or support from established authoritative sources such as a

Alternatively, those entities perceive the coordinator as “taking sides” or not neutrally in service of shared goals.

common goals established by the coordinator.

respected member of the workgroup, a backbone organization, or higher-level strategic workgroup. From there, demonstrate transparency, neutrality, and dogged commitment to the shared goals of the community.

Use the [facilitated exercise](#) to identify key allies.

Over-reliance on Individuals

Though collaboration and coordination work is inherently tied to individuals, within-group or between-group effectiveness can become solely dependent on the boundary-spanner or another individual

Potential for major disruption in the problem-solving network

In the event of turnover, change of role, or something else that removes the key individual from the role, the workgroup or connection will cease to function effectively.

Set institutionalization of processes or norms as the end goal

Establish handing off coordination and collaboration roles as the desired end-state. Codify aspects of the workgroup or connection into documents that can be followed by others - this includes agenda templates, calendars, working norms, role definitions, and other information that would allow someone other than the coordinator to step into that role.

Takeaway: Preempting Common Pitfalls

System Coordinators and other boundary-spanning positions who are successful are able to avoid common pitfalls: role ambiguity, lack of independent legitimacy, and over-reliance on individuals. Careful planning at the outset of the position can preempt these pitfalls.

Some reflection questions:

- What are some common pitfalls for boundary-spanning positions?
- What impact do these pitfalls have on a coordinator's ability to help entities collaborate or coordinate?
- What are some ways of preempting these pitfalls?

Activity Walkthrough



Problem-Solving Network Mapping Activity Walkthrough

This activity will help your community articulate how your problem-solving network operates and identifies priority rate-limiters. The resulting map can inform a workplan and help create role clarity for your system coordinator.

[Materials and Pre-work](#)

[Mural Orientation](#)

[Activity Walkthrough](#)

Materials and Pre-work

We recommend this activity is completed by a group of stakeholders of multiple levels of your community - this includes key representatives from your leadership team, improvement team, service providers, and people with lived experience of homelessness. We recommend holding **2 hours** for the group activity and then another **1hr** to complete the worksheet.

Creating Your Community's Mural Board

The activity and conversation will mostly take place within [Mural](#), an online whiteboard app. We have created a template with embedded instructions in the Mural.

If you are hosting the conversation, click [this template link](#) and create a free mural account to create a copy of the template board.

Here is the link in full:

<https://app.mural.co/template/5d6841f9-9133-4a54-9c01-6278a0f3565c/2845c11c-cb84-4a88-b634-2b1155a56e89>

If someone else is hosting the conversation, ask them to share the board your community will work in using the "Share" button in the top right of their screen. You may join as a "visitor".

Participant List

The intent of this activity is to name and characterize the significant workgroups in your community's problem-solving network and how they relate to each other. Therefore, it is important to have representation from each of those workgroups so there can be first-hand experience speaking to the workgroup's strengths and challenges. We recommend **about 3-7 participants** for this activity - if there are more workgroups than can be effectively represented, your community's problem-solving network may be very large and complex! Consider facilitating two different sessions to cover the entirety of your network.

Pre-Work

It is helpful to prime your participants with some mindsets to start:

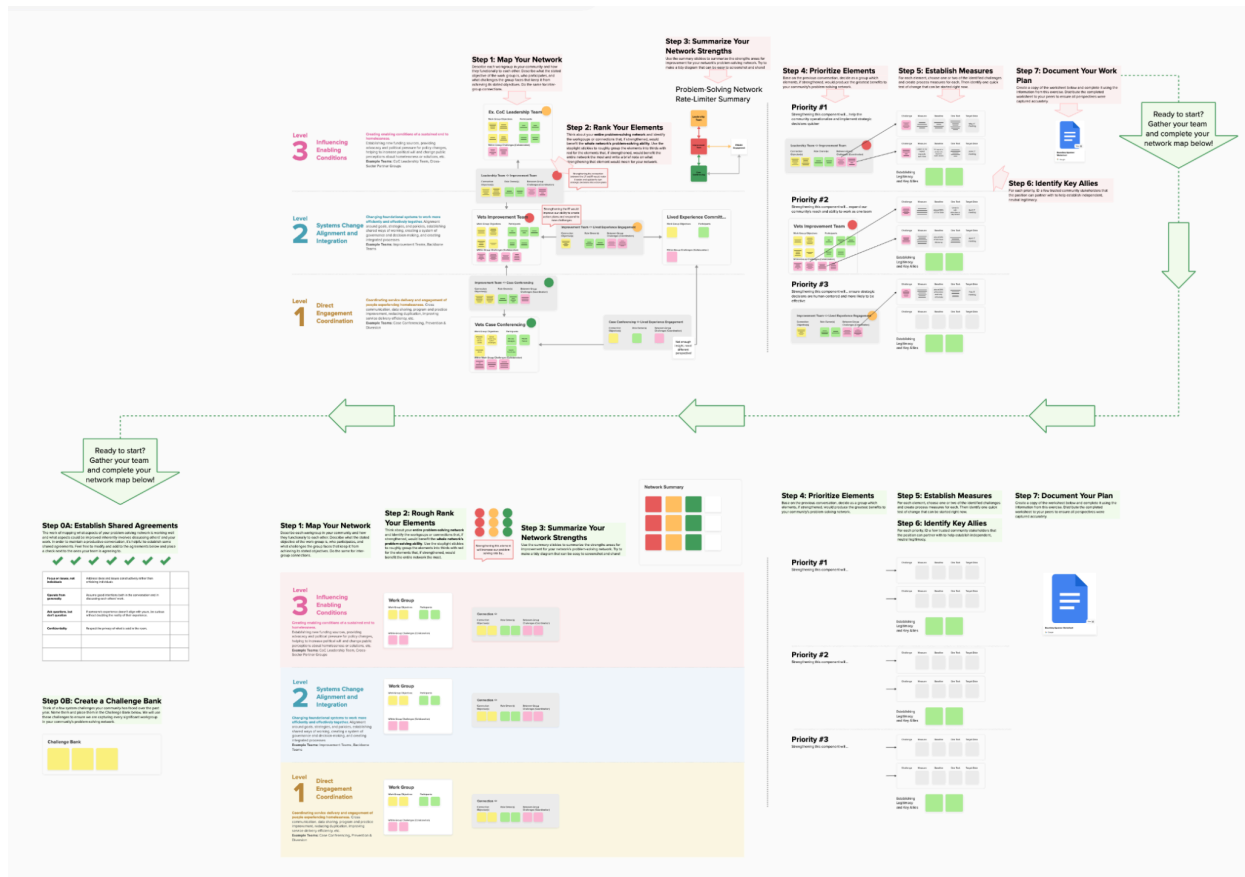
- **Share this toolkit:** Participants should read through at least the Toolkit Overview tab to familiarize themselves with the premises and workflow of the toolkit. Participants should enter the conversation with a broad understanding that this activity is intended to strengthen the community's [problem-solving rate](#).
- **Establish shared agreements:** The work of mapping what aspects of your problem-solving network is working well and what aspects could be improved inherently involves discussing others' and your work. In order to maintain a productive conversation, it's helpful to establish some shared agreements. The template includes a few suggested agreements but feel free to modify and add to the agreements.
- **Create a "Challenge Bank":** Think of a few system challenges your community has faced over the past year. Name them and place them in the Challenge Bank within the template. Rather than having these challenges be what your network is aiming to solve for, they will serve as checks to ensure we have accurately captured all of the significant working groups in your community's network.

Create a Copy of Workplan Worksheet

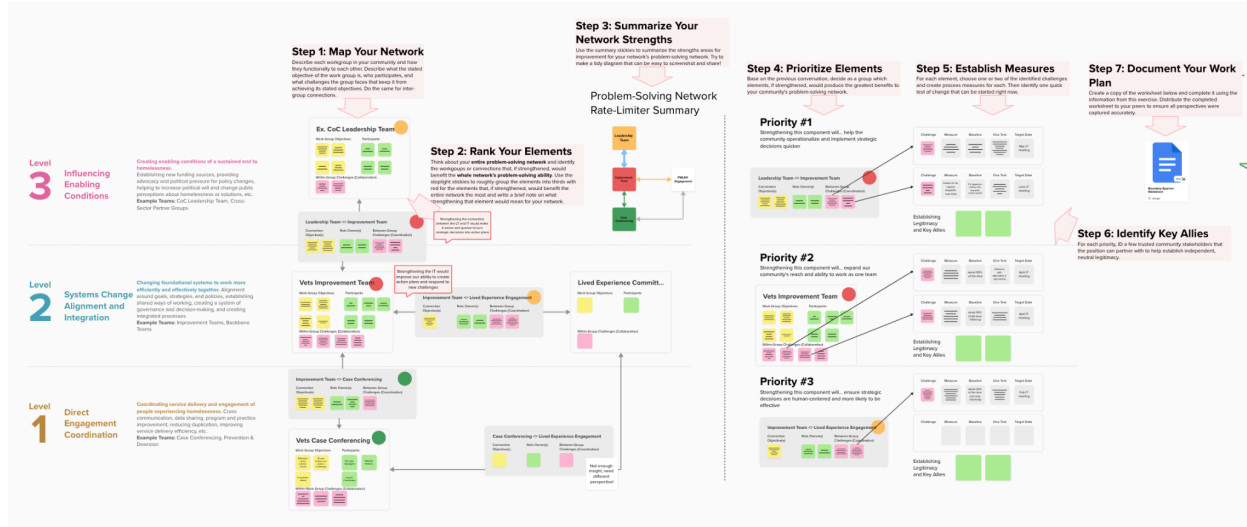
Go to the [Blank Worksheet tab](#) and create a copy for your community's records. Your community will revisit this worksheet at the end of the activity and complete the worksheet with the information created in the Mural.

Mural Orientation

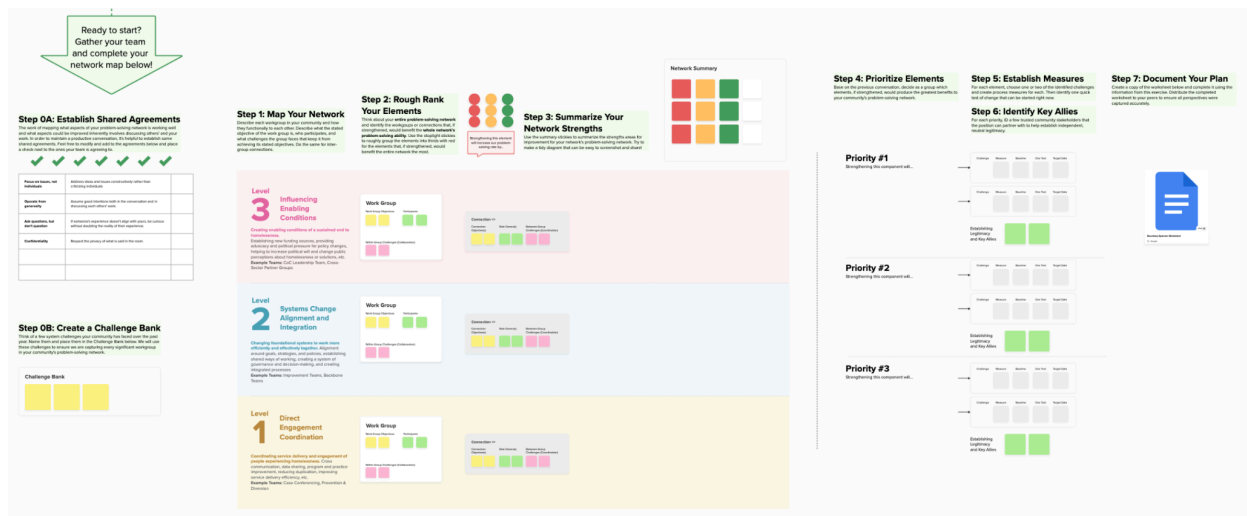
The template is split into upper and lower halves. The top half is a completed *example* network map. Your workgroups and connections may look different than the example - that's ok! The bottom half is a blank network map - this is where your community will work.



Each half (the example and the blank work space) are generally split into two left-right halves. The left half is where your community will create your network map. The right half is where, after the network map is complete, where the group will prioritize and operationalize priority elements into a workplan for your coordinator.



The only significant difference between the example section and the blank workspace is that there will also be a section to note your community's shared agreements and challenge bank.



Activity Walkthrough

This section will establish what success looks like for each segment of the conversation and some general tips - the exact instructions for each step of the activity are listed in the mural itself.

Mapping Your Problem-Solving Network (1hr)

Activity: Naming and characterizing - objective, participants, and either within-group collaboration or between-group coordination challenge - each workgroup and connection within your community's problem-solving network

Success looks like: A map of all of the significant workgroups within your community and the connection between them. Characterizations of each that the group can generally agree on. A wider understanding of how information flows within and between groups to solve challenges.

Some tips:

- Make sure to establish [problem-solving rate](#) as the unit of analysis for this activity. Named system challenges such as streamlining CES or developing coordinated outreach can be instructive for how your community leverages its problem-solving network to solve those challenges *and future challenges*.
- Start with the most significant workgroups and connections! Much like achieving 95% outreach coverage is a more attainable achievement than 100% outreach coverage, mapping the workgroups and connections that cover 95% of your community's problem-solving information flow is a great standard.
- Don't feel constrained by the template - this is your workspace! If there is generative discussion that the template doesn't have a ready-made space to capture, do what you need to do to capture that information.

Establishing Priorities (1hr)

Activity: Narrowing in on the highest-leverage elements of your problem-solving network that, if strengthened, would produce the highest gains in problem-solving rate.

Success looks like: Agreed upon priority elements for the coordinator to address. Specific challenges to solve, what those challenges represent in the functioning of that

workgroup/connection, and a test of change to try in the immediate future. Key allies for the coordinator to develop relationships with to help them [establish independent legitimacy](#).

Some tips:

- While the network mapping half of the activity is intended to be approached somewhat independent of your community's moment-in-time, consider your community's immediate broader goals when prioritizing work. If it is imperative to prioritize an element of your network to move an initiative forward, take that into consideration!
- "One Test Of Change" doesn't mean *only* test of change. Consider low-hanging fruit or tests of change that would be easy to deploy immediately to start the work.

Complete Worksheet (1hr)

Activity: Completing the [Role Definition Worksheet](#) to create a detailed workplan that produces [strong role clarity](#) for your system coordinator.

Success looks like: A single document that summarizes your community's problem-solving network, priority areas, immediate tests of change, and key institutional support from the perspective of your system coordinator.

Some tips:

- Have your system coordinator complete this task. It will be helpful for them to put into their own words what they see as their priorities based on their observations.
- Once complete, circulate the worksheet along with a link to the completed mural. This will document this snapshot in time to be revisited in 6-months, 12-months' time.

Example Worksheet

EXAMPLE Role Definition Worksheet

This document defines and prioritizes a boundary-spanner's work in service of strengthening this community's system-level problem-solving network. Use the above toolkit and this Mural template to facilitate a conversation with your community and then use this worksheet to document your results.

Insight from Built for Zero communities along with research on boundary-spanning positions from other sectors identify **role clarity** and **organizational support** as critical to success. This document aims to do that by articulating the community's wider context, drilling down into specific priorities, and identifying key allies.

Co-Design Context

Information about the moment in time when the network was mapped and the role was designed.

Position Title: *Community System Coordinator*

Co-Design Date:

Sep 1, 2025

**Co-Design
Participants:**

*Lenny Pierce, Built for Zero
Megan K., Gathering House
Melanie L., Housing Authority
Ian F. VA Regional*

**Important Community
Context in the Moment:**

While service coordination has been solid, the community has experienced a lot of turnover at leadership positions and once strong inter-agency relationships have started to stall out. Agency leads have realized that we need dedicated system capacity to help move the community off its current stuck point.

Network Map Link:

<https://app.mural.co/template/5d6841f9-9133-4a54-9c01-6278a0f3565c/2845c11c-cb84-4a88-b634-2b1155a56e89>

Problem-Solving Network Overview

Information about our community's problem-solving network including key workgroups & the connections between them, the network's strengths and weaknesses, and which are priorities to improve.

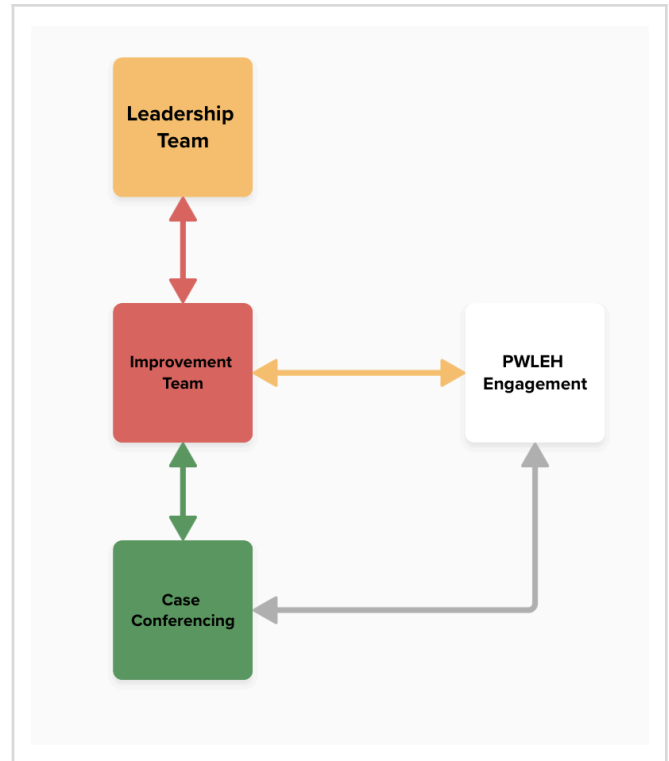
What Works Well?

Veterans case conferencing remains pretty strong. There's long-time active participation from partner agencies though the leadership turnover at a few new partners has made it hard to onboard new teams. We have a strong facilitator who knows the community inside and out.

What Needs Strengthening?

The Improvement Team needs to be rebuilt after a few members transitioned to other positions, including a key member who also sat on the CoC leadership team. As a result, it's been hard to align strategic decisions with action planning and implementation.

Your Problem-Solving Network



Why is the part of your network that **needs strengthening a rate-limiter and how will strengthening it facilitate system-level problem-solving across the community?**

With the improvement team struggling, we don't have a fast-track to implementing policy changes across the community like we used to. The case conferencing team will ID challenges that they don't have the reach to solve but we've had to rely on case managers individually going out of their way to their leadership structures to try and institute policy/procedure changes. We also have a fractured report-out from the leadership team meetings and no consistent way to turn those decisions into coordinated action.

A stronger improvement team would allow our case managers to focus on what they do best and would give the leadership team a team they could trust to carry out community strategy.

Priorities and Process Measures

Details about how progress towards strengthening your network will be measured. We recommend one or two process measures for each network element - this can be one or two measures for a single challenge within the element or a measure each for two different challenges within the element.

Priority Area #1 <i>Improvement Team <> Leadership Team Connection</i>	
Strengthening this element will...	<i>Allow for more communication and smoother coordination between the two groups. That means the LT is able to clear more paths for the IT and will allow the community to more quickly implement strategic decisions made by the LT via the IT.</i>
Potential Key Allies	<i>Mary T. from Gathering House sometimes sits on both the LT and IT - she may have ideas and energy to help solve.</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>The IT doesn't have strong insight into what's going on at the LT level which makes it hard to proactively align system change strategy</i>
Measure	<i>Increased understanding of LT goings on at the IT level</i>
Baseline	<i>No consistent, written communication vehicle between LT and IT</i>
Test of Change	<i>Report out email is sent out within 48 hours of each monthly LT meeting and includes participants, topics discussed, decisions reached, and assigned action items</i>
Target Date	<i>By May LT meeting</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>LT has to make lots of the same requests for data and information which delays strategic decision-making and keeps us from asking more nuanced questions.</i>
Measure	<i>Lower number of requests for follow-up data or information from LT</i>
Baseline	<i>About 1-2 requests repeat requests</i>
Test of Change	<i>Create dashboards and automated reports of the most commonly requested data points</i>
Target Date	<i>By November LT meeting</i>

Priority Area #2 *Vets Improvement Team*

Strengthening this element will...

Help the community row in the same direction! Right now it's challenging to turn decisions or challenges into action because we're always missing someone or things just aren't followed up on. That means we're getting in the way of our own systems change.

Potential Key Allies

John G. from the VA has been on the Vets IT for years and also serves as the PWLEH engagement committee representative sometimes.

Challenge Definition

Some agency representation is sporadic or there are different representatives each time meaning it's hard to develop shared norms and practices.

Measure

Weekly 100% attendance rate from agencies with predictable representatives.

Baseline

Only about 50% of the time we have full attendance.

Test of Change

Check in with agency representatives one or two days before to make sure they have representation.

Target Date

April IT meeting

Challenge Definition

Action items sometimes aren't recorded leading to delays and confusion about responsibilities

Measure

All action items are recorded + distributed and 90% of action items have some sort of update each week (even if that update is "checked but no update")

Baseline

About 50% of AA have some sort of follow up each week

Test of Change

Send out AAs with assignments within 24 hours of every IT meeting

Target Date

April IT meeting

Priority Area #3	<i>Improvement Team <> PWLEH Engagement Committee Connection</i>
Strengthening this element will...	<i>Ensure strategic decisions are human-centered and the implementation of those decisions incorporate feedback from PWLEH. This will ultimately lead to more effective services and greater trust within the community.</i>
Potential Key Allies	<i>John G. for the same reasons as above.</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>Program operationalization decisions sometimes happen before running it past the PWLEH engagement committee</i>
Measure	<i>90% of significant operationalization plans include written feedback from PWLEH committee representative</i>
Baseline	<i>We only get feedback about 20% of the time and usually informally.</i>
Test of Change	<i>Co-design a policy with the PWLEH engagement coordinator to institutionalize the feedback mechanism into decision-making processes.</i>
Target Date	<i>Response</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>Response</i>
Measure	<i>Response</i>
Baseline	<i>Response</i>
Test of Change	<i>Response</i>
Target Date	<i>Response</i>

Establishing Legitimacy and Support For Success

Other details about what individual and organizational support will help the coordinator succeed in their efforts to strengthen the above priority areas.

Other Allies and Staffing Support

Chelsea N. from The Leland Center will serve as day-to-day supervisor for the position
Erin H. from Wild Lilac recently onboarded to the Improvement Team so would have fresh eyes for feedback

**Professional
Development
Opportunities**

Working with Lenny P. from BfZ to identify system improvement skill-up opportunities

**Whole Role
Check-in Moments**

The community has their eye on the fall quarterly CoC board meeting to show that the improvement team is back on track after all of the turnover. We'll check in as a group in the months preceding to see where we are against goals.

Other Notes and Resources

Other Notes

We also anticipate this position sitting in on case conferencing to learn how it's done and to serve as a system improvement conduit to the IT.

**Key Resources (ex.
Job Description)**

Response

Blank Worksheet

Role Definition Worksheet

This document defines and prioritizes the System Coordinator's work in service of strengthening this community's system-level problem-solving network. Use the above toolkit and this Mural template to facilitate a conversation with your community and then use this worksheet to document your results.

Insight from Built for Zero communities along with research on boundary-spanning positions from other sectors identify **role clarity** and **organizational support** as critical to success. This document aims to do that by articulating the community's wider context, drilling down into specific priorities, and identifying key allies.

Co-Design Context

Information about the moment in time when the network was mapped and the role was designed.

Position Title: *Response*

Co-Design Date:

Sep 1, 2025

**Co-Design
Participants:**

Response

**Important Community
Context in the Moment:**

Response

Network Map Link:

Response

Problem-Solving Network Overview

Information about our community's problem-solving network including key workgroups & the connections between them, the network's strengths and weaknesses, and which are priorities to improve.

What **Works Well**

Response

Your Problem-Solving Network

Small screenshot of network summary from Mural template

What **Needs Strengthening**

Response

Why the part of your network that **needs strengthening** is a rate-limiter and how strengthening it will facilitate system-level problem-solving across the community.

Response

Priorities and Process Measures

Details about how progress towards strengthening your network will be measured. We recommend one or two process measures for each network element - this can be one or two measures for a single challenge within the element or a measure each for two different challenges within the element.

Priority Area #1 <i>Ex. Improvement Team <> Leadership Team Connection</i>	
Network Element Function (What Good Looks Like)	<i>Ex. Bringing resourcing and whole-community challenges surfaced at the Improvement team level to leadership. Bringing strategic direction from the LT down to the IT for operationalization. Ensuring all both teams are up to date about the actions of the other.</i>
Potential Key Allies	<i>Ex. Mary T. from Gathering House sits on both the LT and IT - she may have ideas and energy to help solve.</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>Ex. The IT doesn't have strong insight into what's going on at the LT level which makes it hard to proactively align system change strategy</i>
Measure	<i>Ex. Increased understanding of LT goings on at the IT level</i>
Baseline	<i>Ex. No consistent, written communication vehicle between LT and IT</i>
Test of Change	<i>Ex. Report out email is sent out within 48 hours of each monthly LT meeting and includes participants, topics discussed, decisions reached, and assigned action items</i>
Target Date	<i>Ex. By May LT meeting</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>Ex. LT has to make lots of the same requests for data and information which delays strategic decision-making and keeps us from asking more nuanced questions.</i>
Measure	<i>Ex. Lower number of requests for follow-up data or information from LT</i>
Baseline	<i>Ex. About 1-2 requests repeat requests</i>
Test of Change	<i>Ex. Create dashboards and automated reports of the most commonly requested data points</i>
Target Date	<i>Ex. By November LT meeting</i>

Priority Area #2	Response
Network Element Function (What Good Looks Like)	Response
Potential Key Allies	Response
Challenge Definition	Response
Measure	Response
Baseline	Response
Test of Change	Response
Target Date	Response
Challenge Definition	Response
Measure	Response
Baseline	Response
Test of Change	Response
Target Date	Response

Priority Area #3	Response
Network Element Function (What Good Looks Like)	Response

Priority Area #3	<i>Response</i>
Potential Key Allies	<i>Response</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>Response</i>
Measure	<i>Response</i>
Baseline	<i>Response</i>
Test of Change	<i>Response</i>
Target Date	<i>Response</i>
Challenge Definition	<i>Response</i>
Measure	<i>Response</i>
Baseline	<i>Response</i>
Test of Change	<i>Response</i>
Target Date	<i>Response</i>

Support For Success

Other details about what individual and organizational support will help the coordinator succeed in their efforts to strengthen the above priority areas.

Other Allies and Staffing Support	<i>Response</i>
Professional Development Opportunities	<i>Response</i>
Whole Role Check-in Moments	<i>Response</i>

Other Notes and Resources

Other Notes	Response
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Key Resources (Ex. Job Description)	Response
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