

A Cincinnati Story

Cincinnati is the third-largest city in Ohio, after Columbus and Cleveland. Its greater metro area, which expands in all directions, including southward over the Ohio River and into nearby Northern Kentucky, is home to more than 2.1 million people.

First settled in 1788, the city's location at the confluence of the Ohio and Licking rivers proved auspicious. As a convenient outpost supporting westward expansion, the settlement quickly built itself into the first major inland city in the United States, earning the nickname "Queen of the West," or the Queen City, as it is still often called. By 1880, it was the most densely populated city in the country, and the fast growth spawned the establishment of other cities nearby. Just over the river to the south, Newport, Kentucky, was settled in 1791, and Covington, on the west bank of the Licking, was established in 1814, close neighbors to Cincinnati that today are folded into the greater metropolitan area.¹

At the end of the 19th century, the region was a powerhouse of manufacturing and meatpacking and Cincinnati a boomtown churning with iron and cloth production and woodworking. There were also hospitals and opportunities for higher education, like the University of Cincinnati, which began as the Medical College of Ohio in 1819.² The region had much to recommend it and for decades drew immigrants by the tens of thousands.

But like the rest of the country, Cincinnati's economic drivers changed over time; manufacturing, once the backbone of American money making, suffered and all but went away by comparison to what it once was. Still, today the greater Cincinnati area is home to several of what can be called strong anchor institutions, organizations that because of their size and deep roots in the community are not likely to pick up and move away, big

businesses that are big employers. It is headquarters to nine Fortune 500 companies—household-name powerhouses like Procter & Gamble, Kroger, and Macy's, to name a few. The greater region is also home to many colleges and universities, as well as nearly 40 hospitals and, of course, beloved professional sports teams, the Bengals and the Reds.

But as the 20th century came to a close, while Cincinnati had many strengths and assets, there were also warning signs of significant challenges.

The Greater Cincinnati area reflected the national pattern of struggling urban education systems. Nearly half of Cincinnati Public School students were dropping out before graduating from high school.³ The numbers were equally concerning when it came to other indicators of the community's "education health": Kindergarten-readiness rates were below 50 percent, and reading and math scores, college enrollment, retention, and graduation rates were below state and national averages.⁴ Too many Cincinnati-area students were leaving high school unprepared for the workforce or college, an untenable trajectory for the local economy and quality of life.

These results were alarming not just for parents, teachers, and school administrators but were enough to catch the attention of the broader community. Like many cities in the United States, there was already a multitude of programs and services in place to help at-risk students. But then why were the numbers slipping or stagnating at dangerously low levels? A handful of Cincinnati-area leaders found themselves asking this question in earnest.

Then, months before the events of 9/11 shook the nation to its core, Cincinnati experienced its own painful entrance to the 21st century, with three days of violent and destructive riots in April 2001 triggered by the killing of a young black man by police. Cincinnati, a city known as a good place to live and raise kids, was left embarrassed and stunned after the riots, Dan Horn of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* later wrote.⁵ Not only was the city's outward image damaged; its sense of self was shaken. The riots of April 2001 forced Cincinnati and its neighbors to acknowledge that for all the good reasons to call the region home, there was a stew of deep-seated problems that were getting worse.

This combination of destructive events and frightening economic and educational indicators left the city with a sense of urgency, priming leaders to look for new ways of approaching problem solving, an open stance that

may have opened the door just enough to allow for the embrace of a very different approach to education reform.

A New Kind of Collaboration

The work that ultimately evolved into the StrivePartnership was possible only through the participation of a wide range of leaders. There are many players, and many contributed their insights to this book. Chad Wick, then president and CEO of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation (KWF), had been thinking for some time about how to improve the systems that drive educational outcomes. At KWF, Chad had been involved with the creation of the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative in 1986–1987 and had been involved in local education issues for more than two decades. In that time, he recalled seeing many well-meaning interventions and projects fail to improve high school graduation rates, specifically. Try as they might, the graduation rate dial was virtually unchanged from the early 1990s to 2001. “My DNA is to look for system solutions,” Chad said, “and the beauty of KnowledgeWorks was that it gave me an opportunity to patiently look into these kinds of solutions and invest in those that would further education and youth development in a systematic way.”

Another key player was Kathy Merchant, president and CEO of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation (GCF). Kathy had long been tackling the city’s quality of life and economic challenges with a group called Cincinnati Community Action Now (CAN), but she and her colleagues had yet to make a connection to education. According to Kathy,

CAN worked for nearly two years after the 2001 riots to identify a range of initiatives that would improve the lives and the prospect of a brighter future for everyone in our community, especially poor families and disenfranchised African Americans. . . . Those initiatives spanned early childhood education, getting jobs for “hard to hire” persons with criminal records and other barriers, affordable housing, better access to health care, and of course improving police/community relations.

When CAN completed its work in 2003, the group created Better Together Cincinnati, a collaboration of funders who pooled over \$7 million to support development of several new initiatives that CAN's leaders felt were missing in the package of solutions, including the Community Police Partnering Center and Minority Business Accelerator.

By 2005, those new initiatives were up and running, achieving small gains to advance the community's big goals. But, Kathy said, this was still not enough. "While acknowledging that reversing decades of lost opportunity would take a long time, and that GCF had chosen areas of focus wisely and well, we still felt that we were missing an important lever for change."

Chad's and Kathy's paths had been crossing regularly for many years, and the two had become close colleagues and friends. They saw the necessary connections to be made between schools and communities. They shared a desire to help Cincinnati's schools and communities make those connections, and they had many brainstorming sessions over lunch or dinner about how their own organizations could work together to help more kids succeed in and out of school. They knew that greater collaboration would benefit children, their families, and their communities, but they struggled with just how to take action.

In 2001, Rob Reifsnnyder came to Cincinnati as president of the local United Way chapter. Chad and Kathy brought Rob into their discussions because they felt strongly that they would need a partner focused on providing youth services. Chad and Kathy quickly piqued Rob's interest, but the pivotal role his organization would eventually play in the development of the StrivePartnership could not yet be seen clearly. "I remember having dinner about this with Chad and Kathy," Rob said. He continued,

They had me asking, "What does the map look like for our education system?" There are a thousand players, but nobody knows who's doing what to whom and why and when. I was able to see that there were a lot of entrepreneurial efforts springing up here and there, and many of them were doing great work, but it was really hard to know what the big picture looked like. United Way wanted to be a good supporting partner in this work, but we really didn't know where we could fit effectively.

Upon reflection, the StrivePartnership probably could not have happened without Rob's leadership in launching the United Way's Community Impact Agenda in 2003. It marked a critical transition from the United Way and its partners simply handing out grants to assessing how grantees moved specific outcomes. There was significant resistance in the community to using data in this way, but Rob persevered and helped leaders embrace more data-informed work.

Then, in 2003, Nancy was appointed to the presidency of the University of Cincinnati and arrived committed to the critical role of a university to engage deeply with its community.

She saw that a university's active engagement in the community was essential to that community's success, to creating good jobs and preparing people for those jobs, to raising the overall standard of living and quality of life. She knew that for the University of Cincinnati to reach its full potential, it needed the benefits of a thriving urban community. She also knew that being the head of a university meant more than being a campus administrator; it meant being a bridge to the community, reaching out and saying, "This university could help make this city the best place to live in America by asking: What can we do together to make that happen?"

Building a sustainable and successful Cincinnati, Nancy believed, would require higher education to forge strong links with P-12. This was something that Chad, Kathy, and Rob hadn't considered as they had been focused on making P-12 that primary driver. Nancy understood where higher education was falling short in its service to P-12, and vice versa, and where both could do better together. To really see high school graduation and college enrollment and completion levels rise, it was colleges and universities, not P-12 schools, that needed to get smart and serious about improving teacher training and working more closely with school systems to see that students were on track to be prepared for college. This meant cultivating relationships and forming partnerships. And it meant starting new conversations, which is what started happening in Cincinnati in 2003 when these leaders came together.

Based on her experience as the leader of a large, public urban research university in Milwaukee, and leading a network of similar institutions nationally, Nancy was ready to see UC merge its agenda with Cincinnati's

future. She knew that future would be defined by our ability to educate better: a better college experience, better-prepared teachers to serve in our city's schools, and a better success rate for graduating high school students who are college and career ready. In the very early weeks and months as UC's new president, her calendar began to fill with meetings with the key people on campus and in the broader community who could make this vision a reality.

Chad had met Nancy years earlier, when she was dean at the College of Education at Ohio State University. But it was her work in Milwaukee that had really gotten Chad's attention. He saw that her approach sparked a new kind of university-community engagement that had far-reaching effects in the city, including the performance of its public schools. When he heard that she'd gotten the UC job, he dispatched a letter to her immediately, inviting her to meet him when she got to town.

The two met shortly after Nancy's arrival in Cincinnati and began to build the table that would become the initial StrivePartnership. "We were essentially soul mates, connecting on several levels," Chad recalled of those early conversations. "We were trying to create an atmosphere around public education of finding the common ground among schools, universities, and communities. We were trying to get everyone on the same page, and as president of UC, Nancy seemed to be elevating everybody to a higher plane."

The fall of 2003 was an intense series of reach-outs, connection-making, and meetings, as their table gradually expanded and more and more community leaders joined them in asking, "What can we do together to improve education outcomes in Cincinnati schools?"

While the discussions between Chad, Nancy, and a growing number of community leaders were steadily confirming the need for increased collective action, discussions in key K-12 sectors were anything but galvanizing. Meetings with the then-Cincinnati Public Schools superintendent started on a positive note, but he left the position before any action resulted from those discussions. His successor, who had been a deputy superintendent in the system but not part of those early discussions with the Partnership, initially closed the door to further dialogue, a position backed by the school board, which had appointed her with its own agenda and set of priorities. Not without reason, these district officials were suspicious of "help" from the outside. Far too often, partners come saying they want to work with

school districts, only to try to impose their will down the road. As a result, district leaders felt distracted at best—burned at worst—by community partners who rarely respected their expertise.

Complicating the matter, the head of the teachers' union was engaged in bitter negotiations with the board and had sent a clear message that there was no place for this new partnership at their table.

This initial resistance in Cincinnati prompted Nancy and Chad to expand their reach into the neighboring school districts and higher education catchment areas. The idea was that if they could get these surrounding systems to sign on, Cincinnati would be more open to getting involved. The strategy worked. Growing cross-sector support became evident, and the Cincinnati Public Schools began to realize that they stood to benefit from the effort.

Former Covington Public Schools superintendent Lynda Jackson recalled,

Originally, we thought we should get involved with the Strive-Partnership because of money, and I think the district jumped on the train to follow the dollars. Then, as it evolved and things came to fruition, we realized it wasn't about the money. It was about thinking systematically about how we could build partnerships to improve student achievement in schools and work on the whole child, not just the academics, but also with community partners and parents and get everyone around the table.

Discussions with two area university presidents had quickly provided the added value Nancy and Chad needed. Father Michael Graham, president of nearby Xavier University, and Jim Votruba, president of Northern Kentucky University, located a short distance across the Ohio River, were also instrumental in the development of the Partnership. With the presidents of three major universities in the area vowing to develop a more coordinated approach to education from its earliest stages through college, P-12 support began to fall into place.

"We were concerned that too few students from our urban core were going on to college, and, if they did go on to college, too many were ill prepared to succeed," Jim recalled. He continued,

Each of us understood that college readiness required more than a focus on the junior and senior year in high school. A more comprehensive approach was required to align the in-school and out-of-school development of children and to focus on the entire education continuum from early childhood through high school and beyond. What began as a college readiness conversation quickly became a conversation focused on comprehensive urban education reform. I became involved in this initiative because I felt it provided the best opportunity to impact what I believe is the most important challenge confronting our nation. I continue to feel this way today.

Michael Graham echoed this sentiment:

Too often, we have tasked our schools to solve alone problems they are incapable of solving, problems whose origins in poverty and social change schools simply cannot solve alone. This kind of partnership enables a community to see how all of these issues exist on a continuum, understand what research tells us are the most effective levers for intervention at the crucial steps along the way, and muster integrated community support to enact change that works. As a priest, I grieve at the lost human lives our inaction creates. As a university president, I worry that not enough young people are adequately prepared for college. As a citizen, I fear that we are on the slippery slope of becoming a has-been, second-rate nation. Education is our future—individually and collectively—and this is a new way of addressing how we can get better results out of our educational systems.

This core group of top-level leaders from the region's three major universities, the school districts, and key social agencies and foundations later added the executives of several of the region's major employers and charitable foundations, leaders in early childhood education, and the directors of such civic groups as the Urban League. The Partnership ultimately became a broad and potent mix of leadership, skills, and influence, united by a broad common interest in improving education in the region.

The initial work consisted of significant outreach to the community as a whole. In addition to summarizing themes from years of engagement, community partners held a host of forums. In one gathering at Ninth Street Baptist Church in Covington, as one community member spoke highly of an after-school program she believed kept her child off the streets, another resident expressed anger and frustration that she was not aware of that program, that it was essentially left to chance as to whether her grandchild would be able to take advantage of the opportunity. And it became clear: With assets as precious as our children, we simply could not leave their future to chance.

Over the next four years, the conversation evolved, but the evolution was not always seamless or easy. We hope that the lessons learned in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, and the early experiences of other sites discussed here, can help other communities convene the necessary partners and seat them at the common table in a more timely and efficient manner.

A New Way of Doing Business

The community rallied around the concept that it was “program rich and system poor,” but nobody had a clear path to determine what it meant to be “system rich.” One thing was clear: Leaders from across sectors would need to work together, arm in arm, to develop a new way of doing business. Because this was not part of anyone’s job description in particular, the Partnership would need, as Jim Votruba said, someone to wake up every day thinking about how to create this system by weaving together “what works” among the massive variety of programs and services in operation locally. It would take, the partners joked, something of a “cat-herder,” someone with the problem-solving and task-management skills to bring together even the most complex set of professionals and programs.

KWF loaned Jeff to play this role and report directly to the community leaders at the partnership table and not to the KWF board. This decision gave Jeff increased credibility with the partners because it was their strategic direction he was tasked with carrying out, not KWF’s or his own. Jeff listened to what the partners were interested in accomplishing together and formulated a strategy that kept them focused on their collective vision

while meeting the “enlightened self-interests” of each partner. This way they could justify to their own boards why being involved in the Partnership contributed to their individual purpose.

The strengths and purposes of the different partners shaped the path of the work. Procter & Gamble helped lead a process to market the work. The districts were able to clarify what they really needed from the Partnership to help improve their bottom line: student achievement. And investors were able to identify the information and data they really needed to make more informed decisions. All of the partners embraced the concept of Robert Greenleaf’s servant leadership without ever explicitly referencing it in the work:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?⁶

With this approach to leadership as a foundation, the partners were willing to let KnowledgeWorks provide the staff to act as the “backbone,” supporting a collective vision for the community as a whole. Their courage to lead in a new way made it possible for this work to come to life.

Articulating a Shared Cradle-to-Career Vision

The questions remained: Where do we start? Where should we begin to address the massive challenges confronting children in the region, especially those from poor families? What leadership roles might the various partners play to make sure the work is owned by the community, not a select few?

Given the critical mass of higher education leaders, the obvious first focus was college access and success, which fell squarely in the group’s domain. Chad provided “backbone” staff at KWF to support the effort,

under Jeff's supervision. Shortly thereafter, extended meetings were held at each of the three universities bringing together a diverse array of individuals committed to providing strategies and resources to make college access a reality for many more students, especially poor and minority youth support. At this stage, the effort was known as the College Access/Success Partnership (CAP).

By the summer of 2005, the CAP participants had formulated a vision and a mission for the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky region; all students would have access to higher education and the opportunity to succeed in earning a degree. The education, philanthropic, civic, business, and non-profit sectors would provide necessary academic and financial support by strategically aligning programs and initiatives throughout the region that promote college access and success. CAP's mission embraced three primary goals. First, CAP staff would coordinate existing college access and success efforts throughout the region by mapping their efforts. Next, they would align those efforts with the needs of postsecondary institutions, school districts, schools, and students and their families. And finally, they would monitor their implementations and measure their results.

While improved college access and success had now been defined as CAP's ultimate goal, it became clear as Jeff and his staff delved deeper into student data and an evaluation of existing programs that the region was "program rich and system poor." There were numerous programs that were serving youth with the goal of increasing college access and success locally, but taken together, they were not moving the collective dial. One of the core problems was not a lack of *effort* but a lack of *coordination*.

It was also clear that the obstacles standing in the way of college access and success among kids locally began much, much earlier than high school. Conditions surrounding children's lives both in and out of school—often before they were even school age—were at the core of the problem. This realization had the group circling back to the concept of the leaky education pipeline and their earlier focus on a wider effort that spanned that pipeline from cradle to career.

"The conversation became, 'Well, what is keeping kids from going to college anyway?'" Chad explained. "First we thought the problem was in high school, but then we realized it was elementary schools, and then

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—Michael J. Graham, SJ

finally, we said, ‘this goes as far back as preschool.’ And that is how it all began.”

As their vision continued to take shape, partners began to pinpoint predictable and prevalent problems that confronted children at every stage of the pipeline and discussed interventions that could help children navigate those challenges and stay on the desired

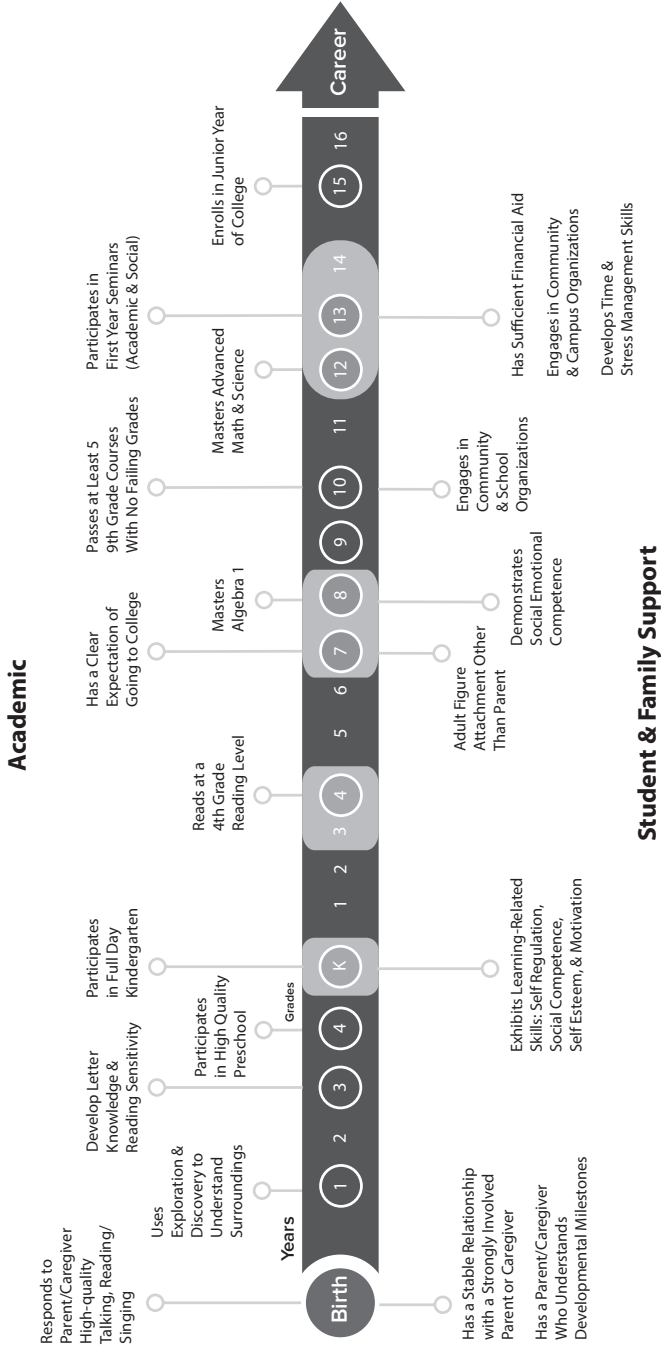
educational course. These discussions were the beginning of what later became the “Student Roadmap to Success,” which was first sketched on a napkin at a local pub by a few key partners who were struggling to capture the new vision conveyed by their peers.

The roadmap was intended to be a visual depiction of the Partnership’s ambitious goals for the region, serving students in school for the length of the pipeline but also providing more coordinated out-of-school supports beginning as early as a child’s preschool years.

Nancy pulled together a UC team led by Larry Johnson, dean of the college of education and an outspoken advocate for youth, and his associate dean, Nelson Vincent, who worked with a cadre of talented doctoral students to develop the roadmap, a version of which StriveTogether still uses today. The roadmap went through several iterations before it was embraced by cross-sector leaders and began to be viewed as a guide for action late in 2005.

Asked to explain the importance of the roadmap, Chad said that one of its most valuable aspects is that the roadmap gives everyone involved in the process a complete mental picture of the work itself, beyond their individual scopes. “We come to this from so many different disciplines. We filter goals through our own mental processes, understandings, and emphasis,” he explained. “The roadmap creates a mental model that causes everybody to suspend their view of the world and see the bigger picture. Because we all think in pictures, and the roadmap essentially gives us a picture of our interventions and what we are setting out to accomplish, it is a transformational tool.”

Student Roadmap to Success



Going forward, we started every meeting with a display and reference to the roadmap, because of its compelling visual map of the journey from prenatal care and birth to career, and every important educational intervention along the way. It also kept the focus on academic assessments and improvement mechanisms (above the line) and critical social, family, and community supports (below the line) that ensure that children and youth arrive at school healthy, happy, and ready to learn.

The Way Forward: Launching the StrivePartnership

About three years into this dialogue, we got collective sign-on across Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. The group's early focus on college access and success had provided an impetus for a broader vision, one that is depicted by the roadmap and underscored by the continuing leaks in the area's education pipeline. It was time for *collective action*—a more closely coordinated *system* of education in and out of school—that would serve every child, every step of the way, from cradle to college and into career.

The Partnership planned a public launch for the summer of 2006. We felt it was important that the start of our collective action commence in a symbolic manner that demonstrated both the boldness of our vision, which was shared and would be carried out by a broad cross-sector group of partners from both sides of the Ohio River, the likes of which the region had never seen.

Among the many bridges that span the Ohio River, only one is purple. Locally referred to as the “Purple People Bridge,” its official name is the Newport Southbank Bridge. The bridge has long been closed to vehicle traffic but was repaired and reopened to pedestrian and bicycle traffic only in 2003. Rather than dividing the two states and four neighboring cities, the Purple People Bridge is a strong connector of the vibrant banks on both sides of the river. We felt it would be an ideal spot for our public launch. And so it was. On a sunny August 16, 2006, morning, hundreds of people from both sides of the river met in the middle of the bridge to finally and officially launch the StrivePartnership of Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky.

We knew we needed more than just the roadmap at the launch. Initially they planned to do a landscape analysis of all the resources avail-

able to children and youth along the cradle-to-career continuum. But Rob Reifsnnyder had seen enough of these in his day that amounted to very little, and he warned the partners not to “asset map our way to nowhere.” Based on the very challenging work the United Way had done to launch the Community Impact Agenda that marked a shift for simply funding programs to driving improved outcomes, he recommended we first agree on goals and measures. This would, he noted, give partners a concrete way to measure whether their collective work was actually having an impact.

In hindsight, this decision may have been what enabled the Partnership to stick. The primary focus on outcomes and their sustained improvement was what differentiated this work from previous efforts at collaboration. While those efforts centered on launching new programs or initiatives, this effort would be all about using local data to identify what is really working to improve the overarching outcomes. In all of this work, the

Goal	Metric
1. Every child will be prepared for school.	Kindergarten Readiness
2. Every child will be supported in and out of school.	TBD
3. Every child will succeed academically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fourth Grade Reading Proficiency • Eighth Grade Math Proficiency • High School Graduation • ACT Score
4. Every child will enroll in some form of college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Enrollment • College Retention
5. Every child will graduate from college and enter a career.	College Graduation

central question became: “How do we bring *what works* to scale to move the collective dials that had been stagnant for so long?” The data-driven approach to decision-making CAP embraced has since proved to be the only way to achieve a true collective impact.

In the end, the partners identified five major goals that the Partnership would collectively work to achieve and specific outcomes they would track annually to assess their progress.

Right up until the time of the launch, the Partnership had still been calling itself CAP, a title that marketing experts at Procter & Gamble felt was “too mundane” for the transformative signature effort taking place. In answer, UC’s earlier development of the roadmap was expanded to include the larger task of branding, with the UC team ultimately naming and designing all of the materials used at the launch.

The community was rejuvenated by the launch. In an editorial published that day, the Cincinnati Enquirer observed, “This partnership looks like the real deal, and is making us an offer we dare not refuse.” A new energy began to ripple through Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky as families, teachers, community leaders, businesses, and others began to view the StrivePartnership with high expectations for the future of their children and the cities in which they lived. The Partnership had been successful in conveying that this was not a program or even a set of programs. It was a system that would facilitate collective, data-driven action for the betterment of the community at large. The Partnership, and the communities it set out to serve, were now primed for that action to start taking place.

Building a Cradle-to-Career Civic Infrastructure

Having KWF at the table from the beginning as a “backbone organization” gave the StrivePartnership a critical leg up. This kind of support and infrastructure is critical to any partnership’s long-term progress and sustainability. Unlike Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky, most communities that undertake this work do not have this asset in place until a concerted effort to establish one is made.

Pat Brown, a former KWF staff member who then went on to work with Nancy to bring similar initiatives to communities in New York State, spoke of the organization's role in making the effort possible and how its unique mission fosters ideas and innovation from within. "KnowledgeWorks is an operations innovation incubator," she said. "Their mission is to not only provide funding for social innovation but to get involved in the day-to-day operations of the initiatives they funded."

In Cincinnati, KWF's early commitment enabled the Partnership to reach the point of public launch with a backbone staff and fairly sizeable operational budget in place, and it afforded them time to spend focusing on other aspects of the Partnership such as the goals and outcomes. At the time of the launch, the Partnership also had some early in-kind support, with a loaned executive from Procter & Gamble and several point people from UC. There were early funding partners as well in the United Way, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and Procter & Gamble. In retrospect, the only problem with this backbone support was that it dampened incentive for the Partnership to do any early fundraising, so its broader base of funding partners did not come until much later.

Likewise, it was not until years after the 2006 launch that the Partnership saw the need to define the building blocks, or the core characteristics, that were enabling their work to have an impact where other efforts locally and around the country had previously failed. The group began to refer to it as the process of *building a cradle-to-career civic infrastructure*. In the same way networks of roads and bridges join to create our nation's transportation infrastructure, a new *civic* infrastructure that connected the region's educational schooling and programs with the rest of the services locally that supported the growth of children and families and combined to shape their society's future was the *system* these cross-sector leaders had long been working toward.

The term "cradle-to-career civic infrastructure" is also meant to define the new kind of leadership we had embraced. Much of the Partnership's success toward having a collective impact was made possible by a collective notion of shared vulnerability and responsibility.

This began to define the collaborative process that had unfolded among them. Still, a more detailed framework was needed to support the

momentum we were building, something concrete that could guide the process and keep us on track.

Fortunately, an important new partner would soon emerge and help us to achieve just that.



**FAILING FORWARD LESSONS:
*CINCINNATI***

- **FOCUS ON OUTCOMES FROM THE BEGINNING.** Organize all work at all levels around these outcomes. They are the true north for all collective work and related decisions.
- **DON'T RUSH TO LAUNCH.** Let the results speak for themselves to generate a collective sense of progress and purpose.
- **FIND EARLY WINS.** Use local data to lift up practices that get results for kids.
- **SHARE OWNERSHIP FOR THE WORK.** Make sure the organization providing staff does not chair the partnership. This way it won't be viewed as an organizational initiative.

Paving the Way for Quality Replication

A Framework for Cradle-to-Career Civic Infrastructure

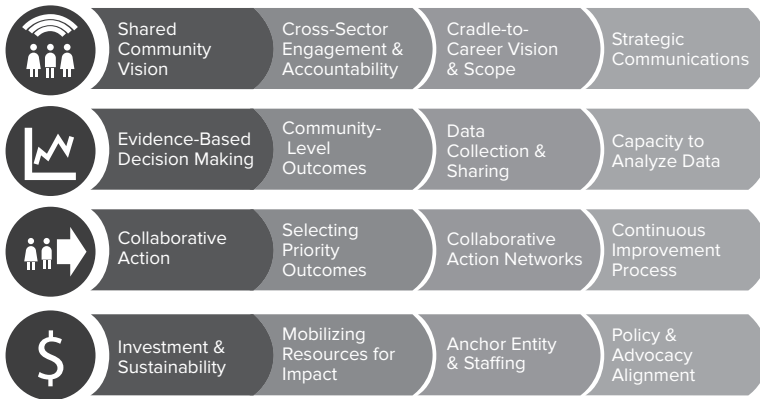
In the summer of 2007, Nancy was invited to participate in a working session convened by the Brookings Institution and hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation at its retreat site at Lake Como in Bellagio, Italy, that was attended by more than 40 key leaders of urban renewal. The session is where Nancy first met Ben Hecht, the incoming CEO of Living Cities, a collaborative of 22 corporate and foundation philanthropic entities focused on creating a higher standard of living for low-income urban residents. The two discussed the educational responsibilities shared between cities and universities, and Nancy piqued Ben's interest in the cradle-to-career work in Cincinnati.

After a series of follow-up meetings back on U.S. soil and continued conversations, Living Cities offered to support us to document/codify the activities into a concrete framework, to test whether this framework could be replicated in other communities.

With the support of Living Cities, we were able to have a KWF staff member, Pat Brown, observe the interactions, decisions, and activities as well as research the processes that had brought the Partnership to its current position, asking, "What are the key conditions that must be in place for this kind of partnership to succeed?" and "What are the criteria that each of those conditions must meet?"

Over time, this information was distilled into a tool called the Framework for Building Cradle-to-Career Civic Infrastructure. The Framework has evolved over time and has likely not yet reached its final form. However, the four *primary* building blocks, or "pillars," originally identified remain virtually unchanged.

Framework for Building Cradle-to-Career Civic Infrastructure



Pillar I: Shared Community Vision

A broad set of cross-sector community partners come together in an accountable way to implement a cradle-to-career vision for education and communicate that vision effectively.

Pillar II: Evidence-Based Decision Making

The integration of professional expertise and data to make decisions about how to prioritize a community's efforts to improve student outcomes.

Pillar III: Collaborative Action

The process by which networks of appropriate cross-sector practitioners use data to continually identify, adopt and scale practices that improve student outcomes.

Pillar IV: Investment and Sustainability

There is broad community ownership for building cradle-to-career civic infrastructure and resources are committed to sustain the work of the Partnership to improve student outcomes.