



Guidance on Building and Sustaining Action Teams

Overview

With the launch of a next generation sector partnership, business champions identify priorities, and volunteer to help drive implementation of specific actions. They still need time to formulate their ideas and needs, and definitely need guided facilitation to start gelling around their shared priorities. The follow-up calls or conversations (ideally within 3-4 weeks from the Launch meeting) are their time to begin forming real “action teams.” It is *after* this that community partners can join them to start to co-create solutions.

The formation of action teams is a critical step that requires as much care as preparing for the original sector partnership launch. Over time this includes selecting the right community partners, thoughtfully meshing the business and community partners to form an effective team, and taking steps to sustain the team over the long term to get results.

How to Build and Sustain an Effective Action Team

1. *Getting Business Partners to Own their Priorities*

The launch meeting served an important purpose: it surfaced exciting trends and shared opportunities for the industry in your region, it allowed businesses to start seeing commonality across their diverse organizations, and it defined a potential shared action agenda. But that agenda will go nowhere without further guided inquiry, group brainstorming of potential solutions, and joint commitment to real implementation. Businesses who signed up for priority areas still need protected time for their voices to take center stage. To ensure this happens, consider follow-up calls or small meetings 3-4 weeks after the launch meeting for each of the priority areas. These calls or meetings can follow this structure:

- How do we define success? What is the end result? i.e. how will we know we’ve made change?
- What are the 2-3 specific actions (or “early wins”) that should be taken to trigger change or progress in this area in the next 6 months? 12 months?

- Criteria 1) Will it yield high, positive impact for the most number of organizations and/or the community and 2) Will change be feasible (assume: one year timeframe; no new, immediate resources; change occurs within spheres of our region)
- Who needs to be involved? What is the first step? What is our *first win* (i.e. what can we accomplish in 60-90 days?)

The answers to these questions for each priority area should be turned into the elements of a concise Action Plan for your emerging sector partnership. This is an important synthesis to present back to business members and have them review and revise its elements. At this stage, support partners to begin seeing the big picture and exactly where they can start plugging in with potential solutions and resources.

2. *Selecting the First Responders*

The initial interactions between business champions and community partners set the tone and trajectory for collaboration. First responders (from the support partner side) must be individuals who are carefully chosen from their organizations vs. simply representatives or volunteers. The convener plays a critical role in recruiting these first responders and working with them to ensure that Action Teams make progress. In identifying and recruiting these first responders, look for these key traits. They are:

- able to commit their organization’s resources (in-kind, financial, policy/process changes) and help secure additional resources for action plan implementation.
- sensitive to keeping business champions deeply engaged, at the center, and as co-owners of the implementation process vs. taking over the implementation process, pushing business to the periphery, and/or driving their own agendas.
- flexible and creative in viewing their organization’s resources as a “tool kit” to be selectively applied/adapted/combined with resources of others vs. pre-packaged, stand-alone, off-the-shelf solutions.
- collaborative and positive-sum vs. competitive and zero-sum in thinking and action, preferably with a track record of working productively with other community partners and business.

3. *Mastering the Meshing Process*

Once the first responders are in place, for the process of interaction with business champions to be most effective, it is critical follow some key rules:

- Deeply understand the desired outcomes and actions business champions want to pursue by asking probing questions vs. providing quick answers.

- Explore possible resources (“tools from different organizational toolkits”) that could be used to help achieve desired outcomes, explaining how they might fit or be adapted or combined with other resources vs. offering quick fixes.
- Map out potential collaborative approaches, identifying complementary roles different organizations would need to play, including business champions vs. assuming full implementation responsibility with little role for business champions.
- Define early wins and specific actions, champions, and timelines vs. focusing only on long-term strategy with general goals and strategies.
- Create “just enough” organization to follow-through on early wins vs. longer-term organizational decisions that would bog down the implementation process.

4. *Building for the Long-Term*

While the action team is achieving some initial success and making course corrections, it is important to keep the following in mind to build for long-term sustainability:

- Build trust by achieving and honestly assessing early wins vs. breaking trust by not following-through.
- Use early wins as a pivot to defining and achieving “next wins” and building momentum vs. declaring victory and moving on.
- Progressively address organizational and sustainability needs as implementation of next wins gets larger and more complex vs. jumping too much organization too early, creating at best a distraction and at worst a turf war.

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