



Theory of Aligned Contributions

The Theory of Aligned Contributions is a tool that can help us move toward our desired outcomes. The Theory states that in order to make an impact on complex, systemic problems in our communities, leaders from different sectors must align their actions and strategies around a common result.

Individual people and organizations working independently will not be able to solve these problems. Even if those people and organizations work together, they will not be successful if they do not have a common outcome for which they are all striving.

The Theory of Aligned Contributions contains three main elements. When combined, these elements help a group accelerate their work and produce meaningful outcomes. The three elements will be explained in more detail on the following pages.

According to the Theory of Aligned Contributions, a group must:



Unite around a population-level result



Create urgency and accountability

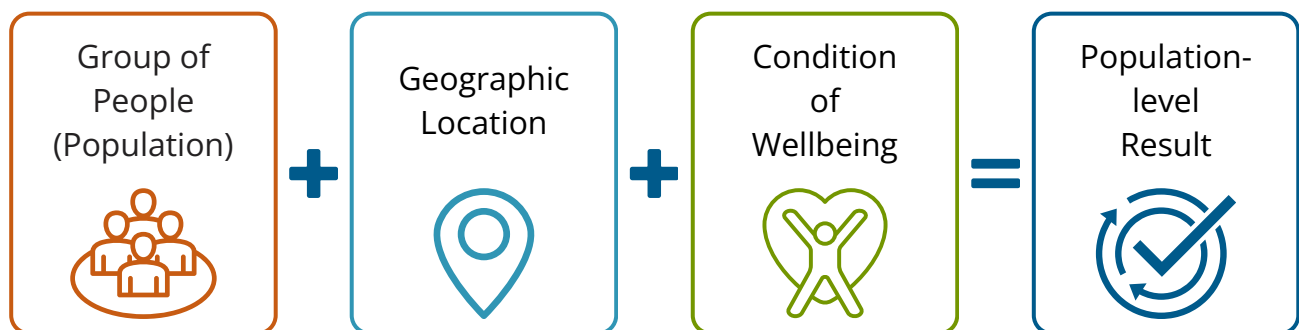


Develop the group's skills

Element #1: Unite around a Population-level Result

A population-level result will create a sense of common purpose and will drive the group's work. This result will also help leaders focus on the bigger picture of the whole population rather than simply their individual portion of the work.

A population-level result is created by defining a group of people (or population), a geographic area, and a condition of wellbeing.



An example of a population-level result is:

- All foster youth in Franklin County graduate high school ready for post-secondary success

Once the result is defined, indicators should be identified. Indicators will measure whether or not the group's work is successful. The group should ask itself, what would success look like? That image of success can help define the indicators. Good indicators are relevant to the result, are measurable, and have available data.

For example, success for foster youth in Franklin County might mean all foster youth have a job or are continuing their education after graduation. The indicator could be the percentage of students employed or enrolled in a post-secondary program within 6 months.

Element #2: Create Urgency and Accountability

Data can spark motivation and create a sense of urgency within the group. The group should investigate data about the population's current state as it relates to the condition of wellbeing identified in the result. This data will help the group understand the reality of the situation.

For example, if a group is working on post-secondary success for foster youth in Franklin County, they might review disaggregated data related to:

- Graduation rates of foster youth
- Enrollment rates of foster youth in post-secondary programs such as college, trade, and certificate programs
- Rates of foster youth entering the military after high school graduation
- Employment rates of foster youth after high school graduation

The data reviewed should not only include information about the whole population. The data should also be disaggregated by factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Disaggregated data will help the group understand where they need to prioritize support within their identified population.

Then, the group must publicly commit to actions and strategies that will help the group move toward their result. The group should decide how frequently they want to meet and how they will divide the work. Who will be in charge of which tasks? When will those tasks be completed by? The group should regularly discuss people's tasks and commitments to assess progress, address barriers, and revise those commitments as the work evolves.

Element #3: Develop the Group's Skills

Group members equipped with the appropriate skills and competencies will do a better job moving the work forward.

Some specific areas where groups may want to develop skills might include:

- Results-based Accountability – Applying a framework for improving outcomes that starts with defining the desired results and working backward to identify the necessary actions and strategies
- Race, Class, & Culture Competence – Leading meaningful and productive conversations about race, class, and culture in a way that allows the group to address inequity
- Collaborative Leadership – Leveraging a group's diverse perspectives and ideas to make shared decisions
- Leading from the Middle – Engaging both those you are responsible to and those you oversee to implement strategies and move the work forward

Once group members are trained in these skills, the group should create an environment where members can experiment, take risks, and learn through practicing these skills. A supportive environment will allow group members to build on their training and learn how to apply those skills to the group's work.

Four Quadrants of Aligned Contributions

The Theory of Aligned Contributions demonstrates how group members need to be willing to do the work. They must also be willing to align that work to the group's common population-level result. The group will make forward progress when members are actively working on aligned actions.

The graphic below shows the different quadrants groups might fall into depending on members' levels of action and alignment. When the group falls into the top right quadrant (high action, high alignment), they make the most productive and meaningful progress toward their shared result.

