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**Intermediary Development: Frameworks for Success  
A Quick Guide for Practitioners<sup>1</sup>**

This Quick Guide is designed to support Intermediary development and makes a case for going beyond addressing the individual issues facing young people in isolation, and pushes the boundaries of traditional youth-serving models to create a system that leverages services and supports designed to serve all youth. Building on the Intermediary Frameworks developed through the School-to-Work Intermediary Project and All Youth-One System model developed by New Ways to Work, the following *Frameworks for Success* provide a planning and implementation guide to broaden and deepen intermediary practice at the local or regional level. This guide details the *Elements* of such a system, identifies the *Strategic and Operational Intermediary Functions* necessary to create it, and outlines the *Stages of Intermediary Development* in implementing a system.

The conceptual frameworks address the following key questions:

- ❑ What does a comprehensive local youth-serving system look like? How are the most in need served by a comprehensive system and what core *elements* and service strategies need to be in place to support it?
- ❑ What are the *functions* a local Intermediary must perform to help build the local system to support the needs of and ensure positive outcomes for youth? What needs to be done by Intermediaries in order to bring together the right people and institutions to guide local practice, connect and leverage local systems with the resources of a range of community partners, measure the effectiveness of programs and services, and sustain effective program practices?
- ❑ What are the day-to-day *operations* of an intermediary in connecting systems, building capacity, providing operational supports, and creating opportunities for youth?
- ❑ How does an Intermediary build a local system over time? What are the *stages* of local system development, and what process must be followed to move from the current state of disconnected and categorical service strategies, to an integrated, sequenced, and coordinated comprehensive system?

## **Elements of a Comprehensive Youth-Serving System**

### **What Does a Comprehensive Local Youth-Serving System Look Like?**

Intermediaries bring local programs, initiatives, and institutions together to eliminate the duplication of services, maximize the impacts of multiple funding sources, and implement long-range plans to improve outcomes for the youth they serve. They connect employers and workplace partners, schools and training organizations, social services and community organizations, and families and neighborhoods to serve the needs of young people as they prepare for life as adults.

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<sup>1</sup> This Quick Guide was adapted from the Intermediary Guidebook (2001) and the Youth Council Institute Guidebook (2006) by New Ways to Work and the Intermediary Network members in April 2007. Revised April 2008.



Four core *Elements*, illustrated in the chart above, would be in place in order to provide a balanced set of services, supports and opportunities to youth and ensure their success as they transition to adulthood. These four content elements are supported by a fifth: a community-wide structure and approach that ensures the coordination of a continuum of services across programs, institutions, and projects and delivers those programs and services with a youth development approach. These four elements are listed below.

### **Academic Achievement**

All youth are engaged in their learning in the classroom and expected and supported to achieve high academic and career technical standards at all levels of the educational system.

### **Career Development**

All youth are provided learning opportunities and experiences in the workplace and community. They are exposed to a range of activities that further their career awareness, help them develop personal career goals, and build the skills they need to be successful in the future.

### **Community Services and Support**

All youth experience positive connections to caring adults and peers, and receive services in safe environments. Services and community supports target and address individualized needs.

### **Youth Leadership**

Youth are engaged and visibly active in leadership roles in the community and take an active role in designing and determining the activities and opportunities provided to them.

## **Comprehensive Youth Development Approach**

A formal, networked system of institutions, providers, and programs is in place and provides a comprehensive set of services and supports that support successful transitions for youth. Youth development principles of thriving, learning, working, connecting, and leading are infused throughout the system.

## **Academic Achievement**

In a comprehensive youth serving system, all youth are engaged in their learning in classrooms at all levels of our education and training systems. Teachers, faculty and other practitioners hold high expectations for the youth they serve and apply instructional strategies that address the learning styles of each individual student. Curriculum is designed to support standards-based academic achievement while also linking content to contextualized and relevant learning experiences that prepare youth for future educational and technical skills success. Programs and services support high academic standards and workplace and community experiences encourage academic excellence. Educators utilize a variety of strategies to support young people's educational success, specifically tailoring approaches to address individual learning and developmental needs. When young people complete their education, whether at the high school or college level, they are prepared for success in their career and life, and understand the range of options before them.

The following characteristics describe a community that is successfully addressing the element of Academic Achievement:

*All youth are engaged in their learning in the classroom*

- Adults promote high academic and technical success
- Workplace experiences support classroom learning
- Multiple educational approaches address individual needs
- Standards-based alternatives are available at all levels of education

**Result: All Youth are Educated and Ready to Learn**

## **Career Development**

In a comprehensive youth serving system, all youth are engaged in their learning in the workplace and community. Early and ongoing exposure to career and employment opportunities is provided to young people through their school and community-based programs. Youth participate in quality work-based activities that support what they are learning in the classroom, beginning as early as the elementary school level, and continuing throughout their high school and post-secondary experiences. Schools and community-based organizations have strong partnerships with government, local businesses, and other workplace partners, who provide relevant and meaningful learning experiences for young people. These experiences address the individual needs of each young person and youth are prepared for and understand their career options.

The following characteristics describe a community that is successfully addressing the element of Career Development:

*All youth are engaged in their learning in the workplace and community*

- Early employment exposure and experiences are provided
- Quality work-based learning opportunities are in place
- Community and workplace partners provide work and learning opportunities
- Classroom learning supports career development

**Result: All Youth are Experienced and Ready for Careers**

### **Community Services and Support**

In a comprehensive youth serving system, all youth receive individualized services and community support. All youth have safe and stable living arrangements, and receive support from caring adults who see to their physical, developmental, and emotional needs. Youth experience strong and enduring peer relationships and connections to at least one adult who will support them throughout their lives. Young people are prepared for adulthood, having experienced and practiced the life skills necessary to live independently and have access to a full range of culturally competent social services and supports to address their needs.

The following characteristics describe a community that is successfully addressing the element of Community Services and Support:

*All youth receive individualized services and community support*

- All youth have safe and stable living arrangements
- All youth have strong and enduring adult and peer connections
- All youth receive life skills training and practice
- A full range of social services is available

**Result: All Youth are Connected to Adults, Peers, and Services**

### **Youth Leadership**

In a comprehensive youth-serving system, youth are visible and active in leadership roles. They participate in decisions about their lives and play active roles in designing their individual service strategies. They provide the voice that drives policy and decision making. Adults encourage and support youth in leadership roles within their organizations and institutions, and opportunities for youth leadership are leveraged within communities and connected to broader, systemic change. As a result, youth grow up confident and ready for life.

The following characteristics describe a community that is successfully addressing the element of Youth Leadership:

*Youth are visible and active in leadership roles*

- Youth actively participate in decisions about their lives
- Youth voice drives policy and decision making
- Youth are encouraged and supported in leadership roles
- Youth leadership opportunities are leveraged and connected

**Result: All Youth are Confident and Ready for Life**

### **Comprehensive Youth Development Approach**

In a comprehensive youth serving system, a formal network provides the foundation for an equitable and coordinated system that meets the needs of youth. Institutions and organizations that support young people apply a youth development approach in all their activities and services. Community leaders are engaged in efforts to support the lives of youth and promote effective collaboration between and among systems. Activities are intentionally sequenced and coordinated, resources are leveraged, and a connected, operational infrastructure is in place.

The following characteristics describe a community that is successfully addressing the element of a Comprehensive Youth Development Approach:

*A formal network provides the foundation for an equitable and coordinated system*

- All activities embody a youth development approach
- Individualized, youth-centered plans guide programs and services
- Engaged community leadership supports collaboration
- Adequate resources are available and leveraged
- A quality system is responsive to individual and cultural differences
- The community publicly supports a focus on youth issues

**Result: A Connected, Operational Infrastructure Supports Youth Success**

## **Strategic Intermediary Functions**

### **What is the Role of the Intermediary in Building a Comprehensive Local Youth-serving System and Making and Managing Community Connections for Youth?**

Four *Strategic Functions* describe the roles and actions performed by an Intermediary as it builds and supports a system and makes and manages community connections for youth. Each function should be addressed if an Intermediary is to be successful in its efforts. A functional description – rather than a task or activities list – allows local Intermediaries to develop their own plans and conduct those operations that are responsive to local needs and take advantage of unique opportunities. At the same time, Intermediaries from diverse communities facing different sets of challenges and addressing different components of the system can, by focusing on the *functional* aspects of the work, communicate, share practices, and build on each other's accomplishments.



This chart depicts the four *Strategic Functions* an intermediary performs to support the development of a comprehensive system. These functions are described in greater detail below.

### Strategic Intermediary Functions

Intermediaries perform four key *functions* in their communities to connect services and supports and help build a comprehensive system that ensures that youth are provided the opportunities, services, and supports they need to ensure success as adults.

Intermediaries

- ❑ **Convene** local, regional and/or state leaders, practitioners, and customers across sectors to ensure youth success.
- ❑ **Connect** and broker or provide services to youth, public and private partners, including schools and training organizations, employers and workplace partners, social service and community organizations, and families and neighborhoods.
- ❑ **Measure** effectiveness and ensure the quality and impact of youth-serving efforts.
- ❑ **Sustain** effective practices through advocacy and progressive policies.



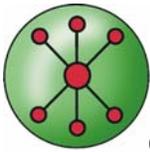
## **Convene**

Intermediaries convene local, regional and/or state leaders, practitioners, and customers across sectors to ensure youth success. They bring key leaders together and provide a forum for ongoing dialogue and decision-making around a common vision. Intermediaries convene leaders to improve young people's pathways to postsecondary learning and careers and to ensure the successful transition to adulthood.

### Intermediaries

- ❑ Identify and engage leaders
- ❑ Convene a leadership body around issues and opportunities
- ❑ Share quality practices among partners
- ❑ Build and sustain a common vision among key stakeholders
- ❑ Engage constituents across sectors and communities
- ❑ Create a forum for building a connected, comprehensive system

### **Outcome: Engaged Leadership**



## **Connect**

Intermediaries broker and provide services to youth; employers, workplace and community partners; educational and training institutions; social service and community organizations; and families and neighborhoods. They perform key, day-to-day, operational functions in their communities to serve these key sets of community partners and connect them with each other to provide wider and deeper opportunities for the young people they serve. Intermediaries ensure cross-agency collaboration and promote quality.

### Intermediaries

- ❑ Create demand and build awareness
- ❑ Address partner needs and support involvement
- ❑ Provide training and professional development
- ❑ Map services and support cross-agency collaboration
- ❑ Place and support youth in developmental experiences
- ❑ Promote quality work-based and classroom learning

### **Outcome: Coordinated Services**



## **Measure**

Intermediaries measure effectiveness to ensure the quality and impact of youth-serving efforts. They regularly collect data and evaluate the impacts of their efforts.

Intermediaries review program performance, promote continuous improvement, and encourage adjustments in strategies and activities based on their assessments of performance.

### Intermediaries

- ❑ Set goals and measure success
- ❑ Build partner capacity
- ❑ Use data to improve performance and promote equity
- ❑ Set quality standards based on promising practices
- ❑ Conduct regular, formal reviews and external evaluations
- ❑ Share and apply research, strategies, and results

### **Outcome: Measurable Impacts**



## **Sustain**

Intermediaries sustain local efforts through advocacy, progressive policies, and practice. Intermediaries frequently develop, promote, and influence policies that strengthen the ongoing connections of schools and other youth-serving institutions with workplaces and other community resources.

### Intermediaries

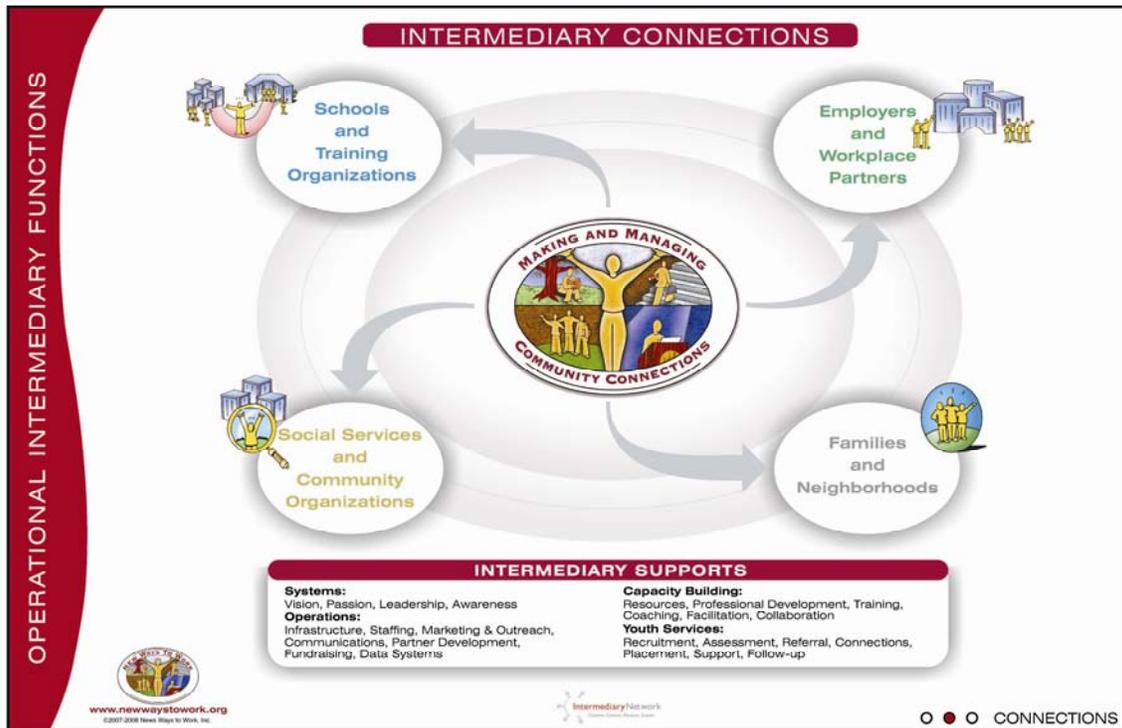
- ❑ Build public awareness and support
- ❑ Influence national, state, and local policies
- ❑ Connect and align local youth-serving systems
- ❑ Generate, leverage, and distribute resources
- ❑ Promote the long-term commitment to youth success
- ❑ Align workforce development, economic development, and educational improvement efforts

### **Outcome: Supportive Policies**

# What do Intermediaries do to Make and Manage Community Connections for Youth?

## Intermediary Connections

Intermediaries provide community connections for youth and the organizations that support their growth between and across four distinct sectors as depicted in the chart below.



These four sectors are connected and supported by intermediaries to provide services, opportunities, guidance, and support for young people and include the following:

- ❑ Schools and Training Organizations
- ❑ Employers and Workplace Partners
- ❑ Social Services and Community Organizations
- ❑ Families and Neighborhoods

At the *systems* level, Intermediaries provide the vision, passion, leadership, and awareness to prioritize and sustain efforts to ensure that comprehensive, local youth systems are in place and serve the needs and interests of youth, families, employers, and community partners.

At the *operational* level, Intermediaries provide the infrastructure and staffing to support connections across multiple sectors, develop and support their partners, conduct marketing and outreach to engage new partners, provide the communications link, conduct fundraising and maintain data systems to measure the impact of local efforts.

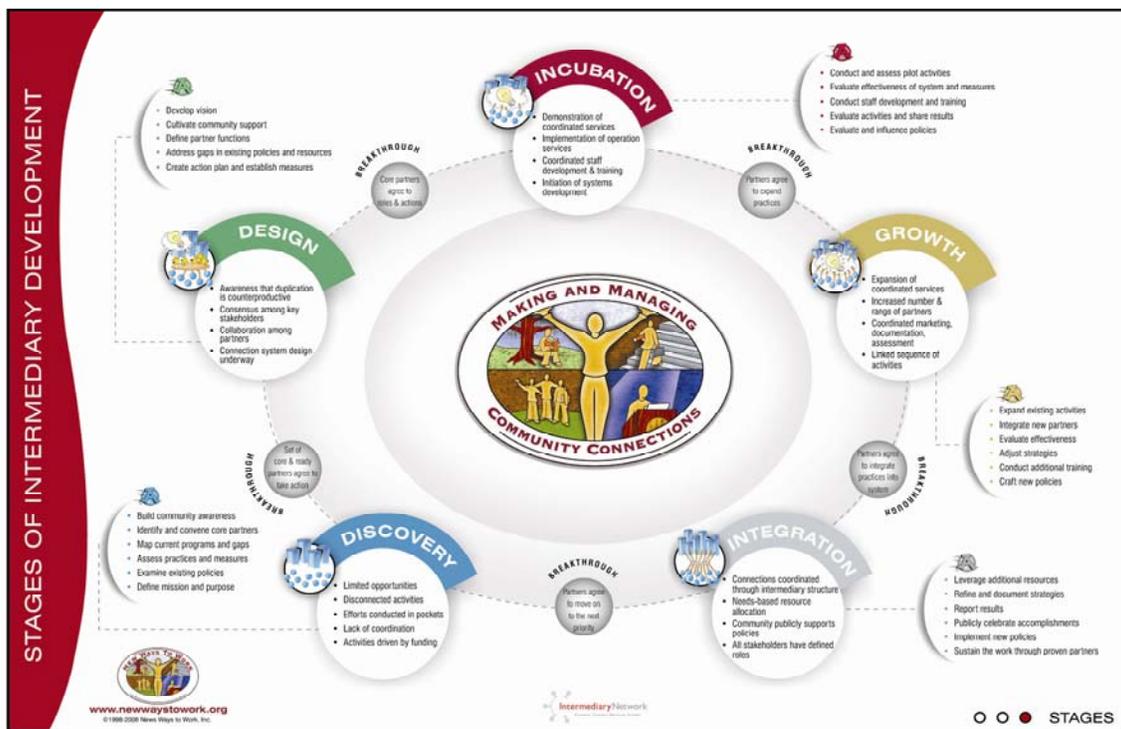
At the *capacity building* level, Intermediaries broker and provide resources to community and school partners, conduct professional and staff development activities, provide targeted and cross-agency training, fulfill a coaching and facilitation role in the community, and promote and support collaboration across a network of community partners.

At the *youth services* level, Intermediaries also broker or provide services to youth, and subscribe to a sequence of developmental activities over time that include recruitment, assessment, referral, connections, support, placement, and on-going follow up.

## The Stages of Intermediary Development

### How do Intermediaries evolve? What are their stages of development?

The Intermediary Network has developed a five-stage model for describing the process of connecting schools, community services and supports, and youth-serving organizations with workplaces and other community resources. The model is designed to help a community and its intermediary organization(s) visualize and identify progress in making and managing community connections and building the local system. It is a road map to continuous improvement and system-building. The chart below illustrates the five-stage process.



This model, which can be applied to many different systems-change processes, incorporates five *stages*:

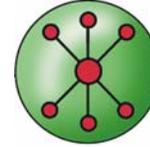
- ❑ *Discovery*: Analyzing the existing condition
- ❑ *Design*: Planning for implementation
- ❑ *Incubation*: Piloting strategies, services, and programs
- ❑ *Growth*: Expanding activities
- ❑ *Integration*: Institutionalizing the activities in a system that makes and manages community connections

The *stages* reflect a process of building the capacity to deliver better services and yield a more effective system for serving young people. Rather than a strict set of steps to be followed, communities can adapt the model in ways that best help them identify priorities and think

about a *progression and cycle* of activities. And the model highlights the important role of intermediary organizations in bringing potential partners together and helping them work collectively on the ongoing task of improving the community's youth-serving system. Intermediary organizations play a critical role by engaging community partners in the five-stage development process to build a more effective system for making and managing community connections. In this model, the outcomes depicted below are the result of performing the four strategic intermediary functions described earlier in this guide.



**Engaged Leadership**



**Coordinated Services**



**Supportive Policies**



**Measurable Impacts**

To achieve these four goals, a set of core and ready partners comes together around a common purpose and need. As their partnership forms, it begins identifying other partners, building community awareness, identifying and assessing existing programs, assessing effective practices locally and elsewhere, examining public policies, and analyzing community needs. In this first phase of work, called the Discovery Stage, the intermediary convenes community partners to assess needs and set priorities. The real work of intermediaries is reflected in the four stages of Design, Incubation, Growth, and Integration.

Each strategy or program that the community undertakes - and that the intermediary implements or brokers to other organizations to provide - goes through some or all of these stages. Most efforts that an Intermediary undertakes begin in the Discovery Stage, then advance sequentially through Design, Incubation, Growth, and Integration, but this is not always the case. For example, another organization or agency may ask the Intermediary to take an existing, successful pilot program and “grow” it. Or the stakeholders may pilot, and even grow, an initiative only to decide that it lacks sufficient impact or support to be continued (i.e., to “integrate” it into regular systems). Moreover, at any one time, several initiatives may be in the Design Stage, while others are Incubated, and yet others Grown, even as the process advances to Integration for the most developed and successful efforts. Most importantly, the five stages form a “continuous-improvement” cycle. Even as some activities are integrated into an evolving community system, the Intermediary is likely to undertake new ones, applying the knowledge, experience, and credibility it has built through these earlier efforts. And as strategies and activities move through the five stages of development, they contribute to the ongoing process of making and managing a system of productive, efficient community connections that provide young people with the preparation and resources they need to succeed in school and life.



## **Discovery**

*In the Discovery Stage, the partners in a particular effort come together to build on effective local programmatic practices, coordinate and consolidate existing efforts, and move beyond a set of isolated activities toward creating a system.*

*The community faces a set of familiar problems or characteristics that define the Discovery Stage:*

- Limited opportunities
- Disconnected and uncoordinated activities
- Efforts conducted in pockets
- Activities driven by funding

Effective intermediaries have the staff, partners and support to build community awareness, identify and convene core partners, map current programs and gaps, assess practices and measures, examine policies, and define mission and purpose.

### **Breakthrough: Set of Core and Ready Partners Agree to Take Action**



## **Design**

*In the Design Stage, the core partners plan specific strategies and activities in response to identified and agreed-upon needs and gaps. Coordination and common goal development begin to take shape.*

*Characteristics of the Design Stage include:*

- Awareness that duplication is counter-productive
- Consensus among key partners
- Collaboration among partners
- Connecting system design under way

The first major Intermediary activity in the Design Stage is to help the partners *agree on the community vision and goals* to support the mission and purpose defined in the Discovery Stage. When the partners complete the Design Stage tasks and activities, they have cultivated community support, defined partner functions, addressed gaps in existing policies and resources, and most importantly, created an action plan and established key measures of success.

### **Breakthrough: Core Partners Agree to Roles & Actions**



## **Incubation**

*In the Incubation Stage, the pilot implementation of intermediary activities takes place. Strategies, services, and programs planned in the Design Stage are put into practice on a small scale, and operational systems are tested and refined.*

*Characteristics of the Incubation Stage include:*

- Demonstration of coordinated services
- Implementation of operational services
- Coordinated staff development and training
- Initiation of systems development

Incubation is a critical and challenging stage in Intermediary development. In this stage Intermediaries conduct and assess pilot activities, evaluate effectiveness of the system and measures, conduct staff development and training, evaluate activities and share the results, and evaluate and influence policies.

### **Breakthrough: Partners Agree to Expand Practices**



## **Growth**

*In the Growth Stage, the partners improve and expand their activities by revisiting and evaluating the initiative's operational strategies. Most often, expansion "downshifts" a community back into elements of the Design Stage but at a higher level that builds on the experience and assessment of pilot activities, engages more partners, and improves or expands services and activities. Characteristics of the Growth Stage include:*

- Expansion of coordinated services
- Increased number and range of partners
- Coordinated marketing, documentation and assessment
- Linked sequence of activities

The Growth Stage is by far the most exciting work for Intermediaries. It creates the opportunity to take what works and grow successful efforts. In the Growth Stage Intermediaries expand existing activities, integrate new partners, evaluate effectiveness, adjust strategies, conduct additional training, and craft new policies.

### **Breakthrough: Partners Agree to Integrate Practices into System**



## **Integration**

*At the Integration Stage, strategies, services, and programs are institutionalized within the operations of the community system. As that happens, the Intermediary and core partners turn to the next set of priorities, strategies, and programs, with the intent to continue improving on the system for making and managing community connections.*

*Characteristics of the Integration Stage include:*

- ❑ Connections coordinated through intermediary structure;
- ❑ Needs-based resource allocation;
- ❑ Public support from the community for policies; and
- ❑ Defined roles for all stakeholders.

It is not uncommon for great initiatives, great programs, and great ideas to come to fruition. Unfortunately, it is less common to *sustain* effective practices. If an activity, strategy, or an entire initiative flows smoothly through Discovery, Design, Incubation, and Growth yet never gets to the Integration Stage, future efforts become more difficult, may be met with skepticism, and have difficulty in recruiting and engaging new partners partners. At the Integration Stage, it is the critical role of the Intermediary to complete the five-stage process and continue the cycle, ensuring that *resources are leveraged, strategies continue to be refined and documented, results are reported* to core partners and the community. *Accomplishments are celebrated publicly, and new policies are implemented* to help sustain effective practice, and most importantly *the work is sustained through the efforts of proven partners.*

**Breakthrough: Partners Agree to Move on to the Next Priority**