

Working Together Better

2017 FutureMakers Coalition Capacity Assessment Report

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With the initial coalition-building stages behind us, the FutureMakers Coalition (FMC) is turning its attention toward learning how to work together better through an assessment of coalition capacity. The purpose of this assessment is to:

- Better understand how coalition partners view the current cradle-to-career system in Southwest Florida (SWFL)
- Reflect on how coalition partners are currently working together, and
- Strategize on how to improve the system and coalition processes.

The assessment will strengthen the coalition by shining a light on areas that need focused efforts for improvement and point toward directions of future shared work. The information in this report can be used by backbone staff, Champions, and team leaders to set the agenda for upcoming meetings and coalesce energy in needed partner recruitment and project areas.

Findings Summary

FMC team participants think partner activities on the cradle-to-career pathway and the relationships between coalition partners are working well. They would like to see more culture and practice shifts to improve the system, as well as more internal and external communication with the FMC.

The survey of the coalition members showed that those involved generally think positively of the FMC, but could benefit from more visibility with the stakeholders and the community. The most cited barrier to participation in coalition activities is the work schedule and responsibilities of participants.

Assessment Process and Methodology

The overall assessment framework employed here is based on coalition assessment design and practice from the Innovation Network (Pankaj, Athanasiades, & Emery, 2014). The capacity criteria for assessing the coalition capacity have been adapted from those outlined by the Innovation Network.

The process for engaging FMC stakeholders in this assessment was two-fold. First, Regional Action Team participants reflected together on a facilitated set of questions to get in-depth information about the state of the coalition. The facilitated question set for the in-person team meetings can be found in Table 1. These questions were adapted from the coalition-building framework developed by Civic Lab (Civic Lab, 2017).

Table 1 - Facilitated Question Set

Question	Capacity Building Criteria
What's currently working and how can we do more of it?	Basic Functioning and Structure – creating a current picture
What key interrelated actions could produce whole systems change?	Basic Functioning and Structure - Co-creating the future
How can we strengthen and rewire relationships to redesign our work together?	Ability to Cultivate and Develop Champions – Developing relationships and projects
Where should this work reside in the FutureMakers Coalition?	Ability to Cultivate and Develop Champions – Developing a collaborative structure

Twenty participants from the Aspiration and Preparation, Access and Entry, and Completion Regional Action Teams were engaged in the Fall of 2017 to respond to and discuss the questions.

Their responses were collected and then qualitatively coded (Saldana, 2013) to find emergent trends.

A survey was also sent in Fall 2017 to all coalition stakeholders to provide additional quantitative information about the coalition to provide additional support for the qualitative data. The survey was designed using the Innovation Network framework (Pankaj, Athanasiades, & Emery, 2014) with a Likert rating scale to reflect individual stakeholder perspective on FMC processes and activities. The FMC Coalition Capacity Criteria, based on the Innovation Network framework, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - FutureMakers Coalition Capacity Criteria

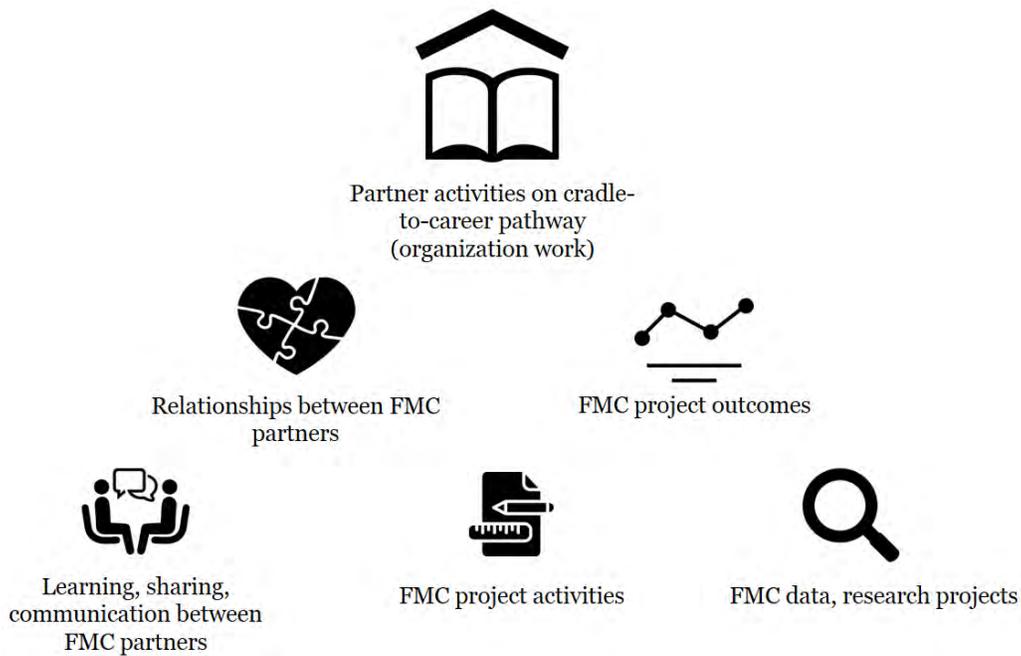
Basic Functioning and Structure	The basic structures and processes inherent to the functioning of the coalition. The coalition's ability to function effectively and efficiently.
Ability to Cultivate and Develop Champions	The coalition's ability to cultivate awareness about the advocacy issue, to garner supporters, and to cultivate champions.
Coalition Leadership	The skills, relationships, and vision of coalition leadership. The leadership's contribution to coalition functioning and success.
Ability to Develop Allies and Partnerships	The coalition's overall ability to build relationships with individuals and organizations outside of the coalition. The growing power of the coalition through relationships, networks, fields, etc.
Reputation and Visibility	The coalition's visibility with stakeholders and target audiences.
Ability to Learn and Improve	The coalition's ability to systematically scan the environment and collect data to inform decision-making. The coalition's ability to learn and improve over time.
Sustainability	The groundwork being laid by the coalition to ensure a long-term life span.

Assessment Results

Team question reflections

When asked to reflect on the question *“What’s currently working and how can we do more of it?”* FMC Regional Action Teams most frequently discussed the existing work of coalition partners. Much discussion was focused on activities related to work around FAFSA completion as **can be seen in this quote:** “FAFSA/financial aid/post-secondary informational sessions in classrooms, auditoriums in high schools.” **The next most cited currently working area is the relationships between coalition partners.** One comment that highlighted this sentiment is “making working together the new norm.” **Figure 1 shows the further breakdown of the common themes in the response to this question.**

Figure 1 - Reflections on what is working in the FutureMakers Coalition



The next question the teams focused on was “*What key interrelated actions could produce whole systems change?*” The most common response in this area focused on the shifts in paradigms. In other words, the way that education and workforce is approached could improve the whole system. **An example of this that was given is “career exploration/assessments in middle/high school.”** **The following three most discussed areas focus on system and process alignment between coalition partners, and leveraging the coalition for communication and sharing.** One team participant said they wanted to “close the loop across the spectrum for where a gap in one area breaks the chain.” When it comes to shifting existing processes, there is the example of making district requirements for Federal Student Aid Identification (FSA ID) to be mandatory in every senior class. The following lists the thematic breakdown on the reflections on the key interrelated activities for system change in descending order of prevalence in the team conversations.

1. Culture shifts in practice toward student-focused outcomes
2. Cradle-to-career alignment
3. Shifts in existing processes to improve and align the system to promote student-focused outcomes
4. More learning, sharing, and communication between FMC partners.

Teams then turned their attention to the question “*How can we strengthen and rewire relationships to redesign our work together?*” Most of the energy in this conversation focused on continuing the collective impact work of the FMC through learning, sharing, and communicating. **As one participant put it “sharing best practices, collaborating, and supporting each other.”** The second biggest suggestion for strengthening the work together is to continue to improve the external communication of what the FMC is, its “value add” and standing outside SWFL through awards and brand strengthening. Specifically, one team member noted there needed to be a “better collection of and conveyance of relationships built via FMC participation, specifically

citing "what" relationships have impacted." The top themes in the question are similar to the responses on the interrelated activities. The following lists the top conversation trends among the FMC team related to strengthening our shared work in descending order.

1. More learning, sharing, and communication between FMC partners
2. Improve external FMC communications
3. Diversify coalition participation
4. Promote culture shifts in practice toward student-focused outcomes

Finally, the teams reflected on the question "*Where should this work reside in the FutureMakers Coalition?*" This conversation outlined where some specific work should reside, like in partner organizations. Additionally, it noted some areas where teams thought more participation should come from like school counselors, business leaders, student governments, chambers of commerce, and the public sector.

Survey results

Forty-six coalition stakeholders responded to the survey out of 268 coalition members. This means there is a confidence interval of 13.22 at a 95% level. When looking at the responses on the Likert scale, this provides for 0.33-point variance on either side of the reported score.

82.22% of respondents participated in a FMC activity in the past year. That means that the results of survey largely represent those that have been actively involved in the Coalition. Respondents come from all components of the cradle-to-career pathway and coalition activities. Table 3 shows the breakdown of survey respondents according to their area of FMC participation.

Table 3 - Survey Respondent Participation Area

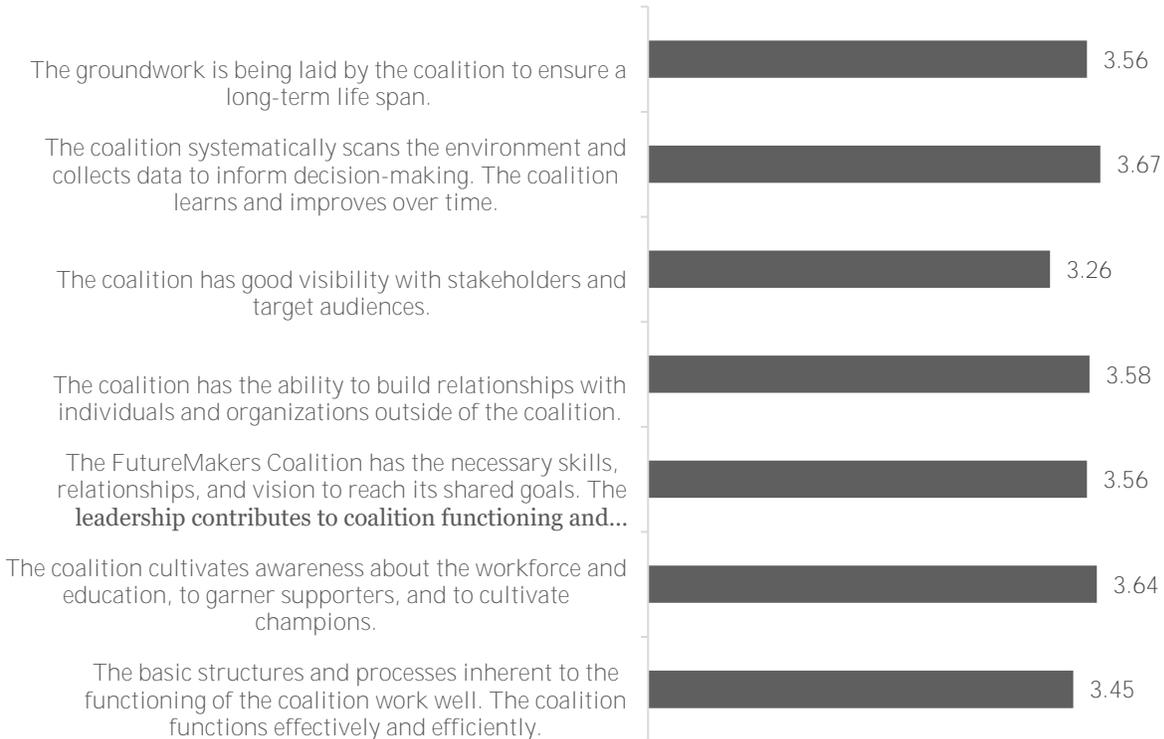
FutureMakers Activity	Responses	
Aspiration and Preparation Team	28.57%	12
Access and Entry Team	9.52%	4
Persistence and Progress Team	21.43%	9
Completion Team	16.67%	7
Data Team	9.52%	4
Champions Team	7.14%	3
Project mini-team	9.52%	4
Student Summit	11.90%	5
Lee County Action Team	14.29%	6

Most respondents are content with meetings hosted at the Southwest Florida Community Foundation offices (64.44%). However, some (20%) are interested in regionally hosted meetings,

and others (37.78%) like virtual meetings. 60.47% prefer quarterly Regional Action Team Meetings.

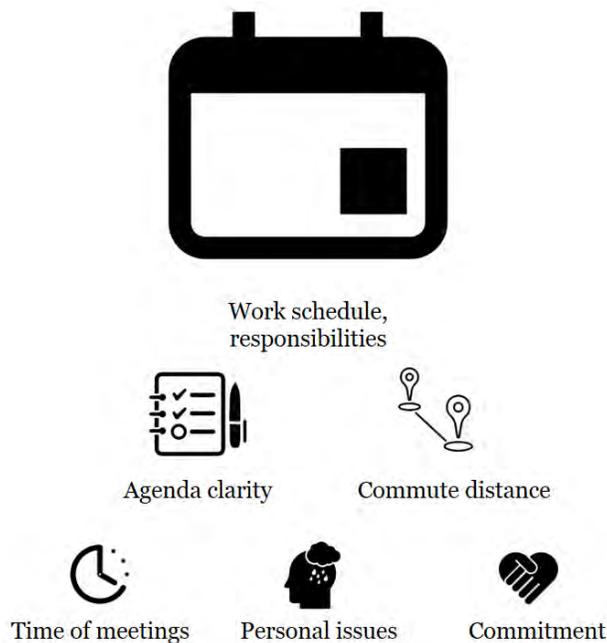
Using the coalition capacity criteria framework from the Innovation Network, survey statements were crafted for FMC participants to rate. On a scale of one to five, one being not well done and five being very well done, FMC participants rated each statement. The average weighted score for each statement is seen in Figure 4. Overall, FMC participants think the coalition is doing well according to most measures. However, the weakest rating is in visibility with stakeholders and target audiences, indicating that this could be an area of focus for improvement moving forward. Coalition effectiveness and efficiency is another area FMC participants view as less positive than others.

Figure 2 - FMC participants rating of coalition health



When it comes to barriers to participation in FMC meetings, most respondents indicated that their own work schedule and responsibilities were the biggest challenge. Other cited barriers can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Barriers to participation



Survey respondents were also asked who else needs to participate in the FMC. Many respondents did not know who else to suggest. Here is a list of suggestions that were made:

- RCMA
- School board members
- School district representatives
- State education leaders
- Business leaders
- Community supporters, mentors
- School counselors
- **Team participants' support staff**
- Teachers
- Pediatricians
- Admission specialists
- Elementary school leaders
- Early learning leaders
- Student services
- Nonprofit leaders

Most of the commentary in the final response question was positive **with quotes like:** “Please sustain this investment in the long-term success of students and in turn, our community! Thank you.” **and** “I think the general health is good-it is important to keep all of us meeting and talking.”

Suggestions for improvement include having materials available to explain the FMC to outside partners and to clarify progress toward shared vision.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Since FMC team participants think partner activities on the cradle-to-career pathway and the relationships between coalition partners are working well, these will be good places to emphasize positive outcomes and build trust.

FMC participants recognize that more paradigm shifts in practice will improve the cradle-to-career system. This lends itself to the continuation and expansion of system alignment projects and rapid-cycle testing of promising practices that can have system-wide implications.

From the participants' perspective, there needs to be more and improved internal communications on coalition meetings and activities. This is an area of improvement that can be strategized and improved upon by the backbone organization.

Given that the team discussion and the survey note a need for improvement in external communication on and visibility of the FMC, this is another area where the backbone organization can focus improvement strategies.

Although ultimately not the responsibility of the FMC and its backbone organization, there are some potential ways to address the most cited barrier to participation in coalition activities, participant schedules. One way to address this is to continue to acknowledge the work of participants and honor their time spent on FMC activities through clear agenda-setting and communication on progress and deliverables. Additionally, discussing this barrier with the Champions Team and encouraging them to emphasize the importance of participation in the FMC and freeing up staff to commit portions of time to coalition activities, could serve to reduce this barrier.

With the results of this assessment in mind, the following coalition capacity building goals are suggested:

1. Improve external visibility and messaging
2. Improve internal communication on coalition activities and meetings
3. Increased progress on shifting culture toward student outcomes-focused procedures.

Some corresponding strategies to meet these goals include:

1. Enhance comprehensive branding and communications strategy
2. Incorporate praise of **cradle-to-career organization's work and individual workload into** regular communications
3. Consider coalition processes and re-design for efficiency and effectiveness
4. Encourage more rapid-cycle testing on procedures and system alignment practices.

References

- Civic Lab. (2017). *Stakeholder Engagement Process*. Retrieved from http://www.educationcoalition.com/assets/documents/document_1487612906.pdf
- Pankaj, V., Athanasiades, K., & Emery, A. (2014). *Coalition Assessment – Approaches for Measuring Capacity and Impact*. Innovation Network. Retrieved from <https://www.innonet.org/news-insights/resources/coalition-assessment-approaches-for-measuring-capacity-and-impact/>
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