

Los Angeles Workforce Funders Collaborative (LAWFC)

Sustainability Assessment
Key Highlights & Findings from
interviews with funders & partners
April 2013



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What's the purpose of this assessment?

Since 2007, the Los Angeles Workforce Funders Collaborative (LAWFC) has invested more than \$3.2 million to support sectoral workforce partnerships, capacity building, and systems change efforts in the region. The ultimate goal is to contribute to a thriving workforce system that meets the needs of both employers and community residents. Given changes in leadership, staff turnover, and shifts in funding priorities, the LAWFC is assessing key questions and concerns about how it will focus and sustain its work.

In early 2013, the United Way contracted Harder+Company Community Research to help the collaborative assess the overall commitment and interest among funders and explore what it will take to build upon and sustain the work in the future. This assessment is based on interviews with funders including Bank of America Charitable Foundation, The Boeing Company, the Carl and Roberta Deutsch Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, and The California Endowment. We also spoke with United Way staff (past and present), and a representative of the Los Angeles Workforce Systems Collaborative (LA Chamber of Commerce). Last but not least, we interviewed several other workforce collaboratives to better understand their challenges as well as best practices and strategies for sustaining their work. This document presents key themes and findings from those interviews.

How will the information be used?

The information gathered through this assessment will be used as a catalyst for strategic discussions about the future direction of the collaborative. Key questions and areas of inquiry included:

- **Reflection on Achievements & Challenges:** What have been the collaborative's key milestones and accomplishments to date? What have been the main challenges and lessons learned?
- **Purpose & Commitment:** Is there sufficient interest and commitment from funders to sustain the work of the collaborative? If so, what is needed to move forward?
- **Governance/Operations:** What type of collaborative do we want to be moving forward? Who should lead and convene the group? What resources are required to sustain operations?
- **Future Strategy and Plan:** What are the opportunities and priorities over the next 2-3 years?

Key Themes & Findings

Collaboration: *What motivated funders to form a collaborative? What's the value?*

1. Share knowledge & information Opportunity for Thought Leadership

All funders and partners were motivated by the opportunity to share information and discuss trends and opportunities. One funder commented that it's very helpful to know what others are doing and funding noting "you don't see this happening often enough. It's about gaining a better understanding about who is doing great work." Another member was motivated by the opportunity for funders to be **thought leaders** and invest in innovative approaches. "We care about workforce development [and] wanted to see the best of the best in terms of generating jobs in low income communities [...] and to be a thought leader." Another echoed, "personally I was able to learn about what are the up and coming trends; are we investing the right way; thought leadership aspects ... it's great to know what other funders are investing in and how we can work together." Others spoke of... "sharing trends and information about grantees [and] identifying issues where dollars can make the most impact."

The LAWFC created an "opportunity to come together and talk about the work which I think is valuable. We often invest in the same organizations and it's helpful to coordinate and leverage. There is a lot of need and we need partners."

~ LAWFC Member

2. Collective Impact on Systems, Policy and Workforce Landscape

The opportunity to have a positive and collective impact on the workforce system was another key theme. Convening and "bringing together key stakeholders and players like EDD, corporate and private funders ... this is really important if want to have any impact at a systems level." Others talked about the need to **break down silos** and avoid the tendency to work in isolation. "We tend to be isolated. It was great to work together collectively to address an issue and look at systemic change." The collaborative "allows us to develop a common strategy - to be more cognizant and strategic - and ultimately make a better investment." In reflecting on the collaborative's inception, a founding member reflected, "We felt there was a need to have more dialogue and discussion between these types of organizations. The United Way had the courage to take it on."

"We wanted to see what other funders are doing in terms of workforce. We are small and look for ways to collaborate with other funders.... to **share the risk** in terms of supporting a project or organization knowing that there are other funders out there that are willing to take a risk also sharing and learning about other organizations."

~ LAWFC Member

Achievements & Successes: *What do you regard as the collaborative's greatest success?*

1. Convening Funders to Align, Pool and Leverage Funds

"Being able to convene this group is a success,"

one funder noted "..... starting something from scratch, getting people involved and getting the right people at the table." Other funders appreciate the opportunity to co-fund with funding agencies they'd never worked with before as well as the opportunity "to gather a diverse group of funders with representation at state and county level." Another key leveraging opportunity was "being a recipient of larger grants from National Workforce Solutions" which helped to bring new money to LA County.

2. Using Data and Trends to Make Decisions and Assess Impact

Some funders appreciated the opportunity to collectively evaluate the work and gain a better understanding of their impact. "The longitudinal tracking to collect data and to determine if the investments are making a difference..."

3. Systems Focus & Thought Leadership

The ability to have greater impact at the systems level was mentioned by nearly all funders and stakeholders. “We were interested in the systems collaborative piece having someone convene the various players and talk about the needs and priorities” and reflecting on what’s working and not working; we [our foundation] focus a lot on policy change.

Several funders mentioned the importance of a “collective impact approach versus the isolated approach” and finding ways to break down silos. The funders collaborative was also instrumental in promoting the sectoral (focus on demand driven industries) and regional approach “which is now pushing our work both at the state level as well as the federal level; now they are working collectively with one another and other systems partners.”

Challenges: *From your perspective, what have been the biggest challenges the collaborative has faced?*

According to Neil Silverston, President of Boston-based Worksource Partners, “workforce development is a different approach to philanthropy,” and as another LA funder noted “the nature of workforce is complex ... [but] there are a lot of great organizations in LA County doing innovative work; it is a dynamic place to do business and affect change.” Three key challenges that emerged from funder interviews include:

“I give [the funders collaborative] credit for being the impetus behind the systems collaborative. Resources have more impact when their invested in systems (as opposed to services) but it’s also harder to assess the impact....it takes longer to see the outcomes”
~ LAWFC Stakeholder

1. Getting and sustaining involvement

- “I am sure there other funders concerned about workforce development” ... and it takes a lot to bring them in and keep them engaged.
- “Bringing other funders to the table”
- No recruitment strategy; a brochure that never went out
- “Challenges around group of funders collaboration is hard”
- “Funders just seemed to be doing their own thing- where is the collaboration?”
- “I wasn’t clear as to what the goal was and maybe because I came in mid-way [...] I would have liked to see more of a mix of funders.”
- Funding came from National Fund and when the grant ended it was hard to sustain the work (operationally); no one brought up the issues of getting local support or funds to help sustain the staffing
- “Since the last 2 people have left it seems like its defunct – need a clear understanding what we can do as a group- why is Untied Way taking it on.”

2. Complexity of workforce development & lack of clear advocacy agenda

- The nature of workforce development is complex. There needs to be more advocacy. For example in education, arts is always the first to get cut so there is a well-organized group that advocates for keeping arts in the classroom; we don’t have that in workforce development; its cyclical and depends on employment trends. When unemployment is high there is more advocacy but when there isn’t a crisis the advocacy fades. There is not enough sustained effort to promote and ensure that the job markets are vibrant and that there is ongoing advocacy at the state-level.
- Had to follow the national funds lead but –never had a national policy agenda – there wasn’t a national strategy and that lessens the grass roots /local efforts
- Green energy didn’t pan out well – jobs didn’t exist

3. Stuck in meeting minutia rather than big strategic discussions

- “We were too close to the trees to see the forest” (too internal)

- Could do more externally on messages, never told the story externally to get more funders involved; get the message out; no media outreach; didn't share our results
- Spent many meetings talking about why we are here; didn't get to action; need to demonstrate why we come together
- Look at other successful collaboratives – why are they still sustainable and we are not?
- Meetings were not well attended; maybe only 2 or 3 funders would come
- Felt like that more could have been done to do a landscape analysis to identify emerging opportunities – something to guide the thinking; experts to come in and talk about emerging opportunities, things to build on, strategic discussions – data and information should drive decision.

Sustainability: *Is there sufficient interest and commitment to sustain the work? If you are no longer actively participating, can you share the reasons why? Do you foresee any alignment with workforce development efforts in the future?*

Several LAWFC members acknowledged that sustaining the collaborative is hard work, with one LA funder noting that “studies prove most collaboratives fail.” Even collaboratives identified as successful models (interviewed as part of this study) said they continually struggle to sustain the active engagement and commitment of funders. All of them were in the midst of strategic planning processes and were asking many of the same sustainability questions. **All the LA funders interviewed in this study expressed some level of interest and commitment to sustaining the work of the LAWFC**

- Workforce development has not gone away; economic development is still one of our 10 major outcomes; many of the sites are focused on pipeline programs and health workforce
- “We are still willing to be an active participant but it seems to have become defunct.”
- We are going through our own development of a workforce strategy right now but still think it will align with the workforce collaborative because it aligns with knowledge sharing.
- Still focused on health workforce and diversity as well as quality
- Would like to see it continue; it's a place to share strategies and develop strategies together; to assess trends; Initial the funding is what brought people together but not the primary motivation.
- I'd like to know who is going to carry forward as the lead; it didn't sound like the UW has the manpower to ... I thought things would just be shut down I would hate to see it end but we need to answer a lot of questions to see how to get it on track and move forward.
- Would be unfortunate if the collaborative did not continue –lots of concentric circles that are converging and complementing one another; there is lots of synergy right now (Chamber of Commerce)

What is needed to move forward? *As one of the founding members of the collaborative, what would you like to see happen with the funders collaborative?*

The funders expressed interest in re-invigorating the work of the collaborative while acknowledging that there are critical questions and resource issues to be addressed. In general, funders don't want to see the collaborative sunset.

1. Well Connected Leadership and Champions:

- At one point ... we went through a process with a consultant to help us grow and expand our activities, but then things slowed down after that due to staff transitions and turnover.... Marguerite Womack moved to a new job within UW, then came back to help reinvigorate and ultimately left for another organization. Justin Munoz left too. Then I got the sense that there was a general lack of manpower to sustain the work.

- We need well connected leadership... it takes someone with knowledge and connections ... someone who can help get more people involved ; we know that the mayor was a supporter and having EDD involved is important; need someone with contacts to bring folks to the table;
- Need someone - a leader, a champion - at UW or elsewhere that really understands workforce, how it's governed and how to move it forward...

2. Solid Intermediary / Infrastructure

- UW may still be best to manage but open to other options; UW deals with a lot of non profits and corporate funders so they can work that network in a bigger way – their network is amazing
- Having UW as lead helped to keep us together
- Having a dedicated staff member who could drive us towards our goals; Used to have 3 staff, then 2, then 1. Not clear whether their interest in funding a staff position

3. Funders are particularly interested in supporting systems and policy change

- “would like to see greater emphasis on systemic change”
- I think there is a place for this; as far as I know it's the only funders collaborative that focuses on workforce but its not attracting other players; what that role is I'm really not sure; it could be we can learn from each other about trends or systemic change that we can work on together. It would have to be something above and beyond just supporting programs; it needs to be different than what we do already – something bigger like policy or systems change; attracting new resources to the region
- .. “would still see value in knowledge sharing or learning, policy and systems change.”
- Still interested in ways to leverage other regional opportunities and to build on existing work
- The LA Workforce Systems Collaborative (which was funded by LAWFC) still has strong momentum; according to Jessica Pitt (Bay Area Funding Collaborative) from her outside perspective that is where the action is.
- “LA misses out on opportunities because it's so segmented.” Both Weingart and Annenberg Foundation have been supportive / interested in collective action and supporting the Workforce Systems Collaborative.

Governance / Operations: *Tell me more about the collaborative's governance structure and decision making process. Based on your experience, what has worked well?*

Overall, funders had **positive things to say about the governance structure, decision-making process, and leadership of the United Way.** A few said they were relatively new to the collaborative (either as a funder or staff member) and felt the governance structure was unclear. Comments included:

- The group voted on what funds would be given to specific organizations based on the quality of program and proven outcomes; In some cases funders would pool funds and others chose to align funds in ways that filled gaps; Decision on what was funded came from the group and was managed by the United Way
- Very democratic; UW would put forth recommendations; But over time, it became a ratifying body rather than decision-making body of leaders
- Difficult to answer – not clear to me
- Decisions were made collectively; had to have one organization that coordinate the efforts – very thankful to UW for keeping things moving and on-track – that definitely worked
- Good question ... I'm not really clear.... Seems like majority rules and the UW implements
- I think the collaborative operated well; there were external forces we had no control over; staff turnover when funds ended
- Communication wasn't bad but there probably could have been more of it... not a lot between the meetings; would be nice to bring in experts and consultants to provide supports

Funding Strategy: *What funding strategy or priorities should the LAWFC pursue? Previously the LAWFC adopted a “sector” approach focusing on healthcare and allied health, logistics/goods movement; and construction/building trades. In what ways do you think this approach has been successful? What do you think the future funding focus of the LAWFC should be and why? [Probe: sector or specific population like veterans?]*

While the funders supported the sectoral approach, there appears to be an interest in having more dialogue on the topic. In general, most funders support the sectoral approach, but with a strong emphasis and meeting the needs of underserved populations.

1. Sectoral Approach

- Frankly I think this [sectoral] is the right approach; there are sectors that just aren't hiring and it is not a good use of time and recourses to focus on areas where there isn't work or growth;
- UW did a good job looking at sectors that were hiring, there is good data available to help understand these trends and that information was used to identify which sectors to focus on;
- There was also an effort to be responsive to the funding interests of participating funders but it was still a relatively small group
- It was hard enough to bring diverse funders together around a common cause; we focused on sectors with highest potential; if we focus on population specific we would marginalize other funders; better to be broader; financial stability – like jobs first concept with homeless collab; Someone was interested in place-based but that alienates other. Want to see more funders rather than less
- We should consider taking an employer approach of looking at the pipeline; take a demand approach – this would be interesting.

2. Other Priorities

- At the time, the sectoral approach worked well because we could only focus on healthcare; could we have chosen better sectors? That would be my question....We also focus on capacity building; worked with WIBs
- I think it's worth exploring other priorities; I understood the reason for focusing on sectors but don't honestly know if it was successful
- In terms of clarity, it helps to know what they are trying to accomplish Like the Home for Good Campaign... even though the goals are ambitious, it's very clear what we are trying to accomplish and what it will take to get there.
- When you deal with this topic in a big picture way, its hard to show you moved the needle; if you do some kind of local project that is smaller in scope, its easier to track outcomes and see impact; there is some validity to that and we talked about it at some level; veterans makes a lot of sense but there are very few organizations that have been successful with the veteran issues.... There are so many factors involved in this ... veterans have been through a lot and are facing many challenges – trying to transition into a general workforce – you need to work through all these issues before you can get them employed. ... what are organizations doing beyond the training to help them transition and actually get jobs; the best way to do it is if companies have a lot of open; would love to see it but its hard to do ...
- Would need more information to determine what's the best route and how to best target resources and energy; our focus is on underserved communities and communities of color; men of color – narrowing the gap; If the focus of the collaborative is too narrow, may lose people.
- There are pros and cons to focusing on specific populations. While I see value in supporting populations that have bigger barriers, I wonder if that is the right investment? Could also focus on incumbent workers vs non-incumbent workers but the strategies are different. Which is the best investment and what will produce success story?
- Yes, we should be open to considering specific populations; other possibilities might be by community or focus on youth, veterans, re-entry, foster youth (something our foundation has been focusing on too)

What's next?

- **Talk to and engage other key leaders and systems stakeholders:** Specific suggestions included talking to the EDD (Michael Delfin) and others who can help funders better understand and influence the government players and public policy landscape. One funder asked, "If we want to develop a wide scale approach, what will it take? How much money will it take ... what are we going to do strategically to make systemic change?" Also talk to the Chamber of Commerce and to the WIBs as well as universities and technical colleges and other institutions that are critical to the dialogue.
- **Use data, best practices and lessons learned from other collaboratives to inform next steps:** Data and information should drive and inform decision. Several funders suggested examining other successful collaboratives to better understand how they've sustained their work. "What are they doing and what works? How are they able to leverage and draw down funds state and federal funds?"
- **Reconvene and refresh:** Most funders see job creation as a way to climb out of poverty and expressed a desire to "reconvene and refresh our approach to workforce development." One funder noted "it's important for us and it's a problem that not one agency can solve on its own. There are lots of ways to allocate money in a collaborative but we never really sat down and examined what needs to be done and what can be funded, and what the projected outcomes would be. ... not in a big picture way." Another funder commented that they'd like more clarity about what the collaborative is trying to accomplish and the "change they want to make."
- **Consider different scenarios:** Several funders and stakeholders pondered different scenarios, with one saying "people need to step-up – but will they? Could it look different? Could it be about learning together and not necessarily funding together? This might be an opportunity [for the collaborative] to redefine itself." While disbanding was one option, it was not suggested by anyone we interviewed. Two options that were mentioned included:
 - **Affinity or Learning Collaborative:** Group decides to focus on learning and sharing. This might include quarterly meetings where they bring in experts and diverse stakeholders from the field but not necessarily focus on funding together.
 - **Pool and Align Funding:** Re-visit the strategic plan (2011-14) and re-invigorate the funding collaborative; recruit new funders and bring others back to the table; will need to identify a key leader and convener - may or may not be the United Way.

What can we learn from other workforce collaboratives?

Interviews and conversations with other experts and collaboratives including Boston, Cincinnati, Seattle, Bay Area and San Diego.

Key Success Factors

What is it that makes your collaborative successful? What factors have been most important in sustaining your work?

- **Solid & diverse funder base:** Having a consistent and diverse group of funders was clearly advantageous but was highly dependent on the depth and breadth of funding resources in each region. Some regions have a larger pool of funders while others are highly depending on one or two anchor funders that could pull their money out from one year to the next. All the collaboratives we spoke with struggled with some level of attrition and worked hard to bring new funders to the table. One collaborative director said "having enough resources to do a couple of multi-year pilots" was particularly critical and provided the opportunity to test and hone their approach.

- **Relationship and fluid communication:** Several collaborative directors said that building strong relations was a fundamental aspect of their work, further noting that it “takes time to build trust.” Another said, “sustaining funders is all about relationships ... even those funders who have moved on, I still try to maintain those relationships.” Fluid communication and transparency were also mentioned as key to their success. This included freely sharing information and financial reports. “Everyone knows who contributes what,” one director said.
- **Collaborative structure & strong governance model:** Having a strong and collaborative governance model was considered one of the most important keys to success. One director spoke of the “one funder, one vote” model which “levels the playing field” and promotes a spirit that “we are all in this together.” She also noted how they give funders the opportunity to step up and lead. Neil Silverston (XXX) emphasized the importance of strong board leadership and referenced Cincinnati as the “gold standard” when it comes to collaborative structure. In Cincinnati, the *Partners Council* - key systems stakeholders that meet quarterly - has been essential to their efforts to set strategic direction and track progress. Their model also includes a *Strategy Cabinet*, with approximately eight people that serve as a leadership team that dives deeper into issues.
- **Focus on results - data and evaluation:** Several directors mentioned the results-orientation as a key success factor. One director reflected, “[in the beginning] we were trying to be kind and gentle with our community partners and this didn’t really work. We couldn’t add things up and know what our impact was. In the second 5 years we invested in a database and there were some issues with that too ... but it got the funders excited because they could start to see the impact of their investments.” Another director reiterated that “focusing on and delivering results” is central to their success.
- **Strong convener and institutional support:** All the collaboratives have several full-time staff members that support their work. Most directors have been in their roles for 5 or more years, providing continuity in leadership and support to the funder group. One interviewee noted it’s important to have strong and connected site directors (“leaders not just coordinators”) who really understand the workforce system. Directors typically report to their collaborative in the same way an ED reports to a board, but there was some variation in the convener models and reporting relationships among the directors we interviewed.
- **Nimbleness and ability to assess and adapt to changing environment:** One director emphasized that their ability to be “nimble, flexible and responsive to emerging needs” was paramount. In some cases, the changing nature of their work is reflective of the changing funding environment. One collaborative director said they “started with multi-year grants and are now more short-term.” Some collaboratives lost members when their respective foundations shifted their grant-making to other issues, but they continue to stay connected and support common policy/systems agendas. One director noted the “need to understand the culture of geography” and regularly conduct environmental scans. Collaboratives on the West Coast (Seattle and Bay Area) have focused on community colleges, given their important role in the regional educational system. One commented, “... we have almost exclusively focused on community colleges. We have always been an outlier in the national fund for that reason – we think this is important because we are interested in systems change and to really move the dial on the biggest educational and training system – the community colleges.”

- **Clear vision and strategic plan:** All the funders said they had engaged in various rounds of strategic planning and felt it was critical for keeping their work focused. At least one expressed a desire for more discussion about sustainability and succession planning. One director also mentioned that the National Fund is going through its own strategic planning process and is re-thinking its role. “It won’t be the same type of funder as it has been in the past. It may be less of a funder and more of something else.”

Challenges

From your perspective, what have been the biggest challenges your collaborative has faced?

According to one director, “it’s all challenging” but several key themes rose to the top. All the collaboratives said they were struggling with many of the same sustainability issues and questions that the LAWFC is currently facing. They hope LA will share whatever is learned through this process.

- **Governance / Funder Leadership:** While governance and leadership were identified as success factors, they also pose an ongoing challenge. “We need more funder leadership and engagement around sustainability planning and succession planning,” one director said. “We need to build-in funder leadership and institutional knowledge at the funder level.” Another collaborative that is currently grappling with leadership transitions noted “we need to get the governance right first and then figure out what else we might do moving forward. Role clarity has been sketchy.”
- **Funder Recruitment / Engagement:** While successful collaboratives have been able to keep funders engaged, all interviewees saw it as an ongoing challenge. One director noted that “some funders think wide and an inch deep” and it’s difficult to keep them focused and engaged over the long haul. Another spoke about the challenges of managing relationships, funder fatigue, and their continuous struggle to get multi-year commitments and to help cover our core operating expenses. He stressed the importance of tracking the results and share the credit but noted that it’s always a challenging balance.
- **Leadership / Staffing – Managing Transitions:** Several collaboratives have or anticipate experiencing staff turnover and transitions in staff leadership. Many transitions resulted in the loss of institutional knowledge and momentum, with one stakeholder noting “with transitions in staffing and turnover of funders, the funder governance over the process was weakened tremendously. The funders lost the connection and communication was weak.” One director contemplated the importance of succession planning but said her funder group had not yet seriously discussed it.

Key Findings from Other Workforce Funders Groups

Workforce Collaborative	Key Features/Description	Key Success Factors for Sustaining Collaboratives (based on interviews)
<p>SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce (Boston, MA) Loh-Sze Leung, Director www.skill-works.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convener: SkillUp entity founded in 2003 as a multi-year initiative ▪ Staffing: Full-time director for last 7+ years as well as one staff support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuity in leadership ▪ Large anchor funders ▪ Transparency and communication ▪ Demonstrated results - data and evaluation ▪ Governance model - one vote per funder regardless of financial contribution. It “levels the field” and creates a culture that “we are all in this together.”
<p>Partners for a Competitive Workforce (Cincinnati, OH) Ross Meyer, Exec. Director Ross.Meyer@uwgc.org www.competitiveworkforce.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convener: United Way ▪ Staffing: Full-time ED since 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-year funding & core operating support ▪ Partners Council & Strategic Council ▪ Broad stakeholder engagement ▪ Demonstrated results
<p>SkillUp Washington (Seattle, WA) Susan Crane, Exec. Director susanC@skillupwa.org www.skillupwa.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convener: The Seattle Foundation - formed in 2008 ▪ Staffing: One full-time director with 2 support staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessing environment and responding to opportunities and challenges ▪ Resources for a couple of multi-year pilots that could be tested and honed ▪ Relationship building
<p>Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative Jessica Pitt www.sff.org/programs/core-program-areas/community-development/bay-area-workforce-funding-collaborative/</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convener: The San Francisco Foundation ▪ Staffing: 1 full-time coordinator with part-time support (currently in transition) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relationship building - keeping steady group of funders at the table (some drop and new one come) ▪ Assessing environment and responding to opportunities and challenges ▪ Focus on community college system
<p>San Diego Workforce Funders Collaborative Nancy Jamison nancy@sdgrantmakers.org www.sdgrantmakers.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convener: San Diego Grantmakers / San Diego Workforce Partnership (WIB); established in 2006 as a public/private partnership of funders ▪ Staffing: Have had full-time coordinator with part-time support (currently in transition) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding from NFWS and SIF ▪ Strong funder leadership and staffing but have struggled with transitions and continuity