COORDINATING COLLABORATION TO END HOMELESSNESS

A Mid-Point Learning Assessment of the
Reaching Home Campaign and Opening Doors—Connecticut

Building Movement Project
Equipping Nonprofits to Advance Social Change

About The Building Movement Project

For over a decade, The Building Movement Project (BMP) has been working at the national level to support and advance the potential for nonprofit organizations to be sites for progressive social change. We develop research, tools, and training materials that bolster nonprofit organizations' ability to support the voice and power of the people they serve.

Acknowledgements

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PARTNERSHIP
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COMMUNITIES
A Safe, Affordable Home:
The Foundation of Opportunity

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INTRODUCTION

> "By pooling all our resources, I believe Connecticut can be the first state in our country to end homelessness."
>
> —CAMPAIGN PARTICIPANT

IN CONNECTICUT, the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC) and a group of advocacy organizations, government agencies, and community providers are leading a campaign to end homelessness in the state. Guided by the vision that *"No one should experience homelessness,"* the Reaching Home Campaign and Opening Doors—Connecticut (the "Campaign") emphasizes housing as an essential platform for human and community development. The Campaign brings together a broad spectrum of partners representing diverse sectors to collectively build the political and civic will to end homelessness.

In just three years, the Campaign has already achieved remarkable success advocating for and securing over $300 million in funding for programs to end homelessness and to create permanent supportive and affordable housing. Among its many accomplishments, the Campaign conducted the state's first study of youth experiencing homelessness and released the *Opening Doors for Youth* plan to end youth homelessness. The Campaign is also closing in on the goal of ending homelessness among Veterans, as well as launching a pilot program to connect families receiving rapid rehousing with employment supports and implementing a successful pilot that identifies and connects frequent users of emergency departments at hospitals to housing and supportive services.[1]

To support the Campaign's work at this important juncture as it moves past planning and towards implementation and sustainability, the Melville Charitable Trust—a private foundation and longtime partner of the effort—approached The Building Movement Project (BMP) to conduct a mid-point learning assessment. One goal of the assessment was to help the Campaign take stock of its internal structures and processes. Another goal was to share insights on what it means to *coordinate* collaboration, given the growing use of "collective impact" as a strategy to address social problems.[2]

This report shares key findings from the learning assessment. It begins with some background information on the Campaign, and then examines the effort's five main areas of internal development over the past several years: *(1) Finding a Shared Purpose; (2) Identifying Key Strategies; (3) Engaging Stakeholders; (4) Structuring and Organizing Collaborative Work; and (5) Developing Processes for Communications and Feedback.* The report concludes with next steps to support the effort's work moving forward, which may also serve as lessons for other broad collaborative efforts tackling some of the most vexing social issues in communities across the country.

Methodology

The report primarily draws on two data sources: interviews with Campaign participants and a survey of a cross-section of Campaign stakeholders. During October and November 2014, BMP conducted fourteen one-hour phone interviews with individuals currently involved in the Campaign. These individuals reflected the diversity of the Campaign, in sector representation, geographic location, issue area, and history and level of involvement. Interviewees were asked to discuss their participation in the Campaign, perception of purpose, assessment of the impact thus far, and general recommendations for greater impact in the future.

For the survey, BMP worked with a small team of PSC staff and core Campaign partners to design an online survey to seek feedback from a broader group of stakeholders that included: (1) individuals who are currently involved in the effort; (2) individuals who were previously involved in the effort; and (3) individuals who have never been involved in the effort but are working on issues of homelessness. The survey asked respondents about their organization and work, awareness of and involvement in the Campaign, feedback on the effort's goals, strategies, stakeholder engagement, leadership, and communications, and personal demographic information. BMP and PSC worked together to distribute the survey to current Campaign participants, local Continuums of Care, and local Coordinated Access Networks in February 2015.[3]
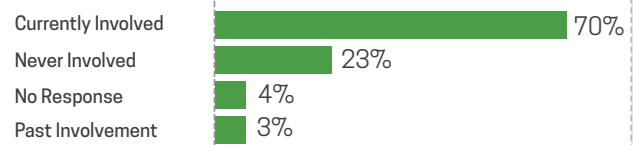
A total of 185 individuals representing 120 organizations completed the survey. The survey respondents—like the interviewees—represented a broad range of organizations, issue areas, target populations, and geographic locations. The vast majority of survey respondents self-identified as currently involved in the Campaign. Close to half of all organizations that took part in the survey were community providers, though there was also strong representation of government agencies and advocacy organizations. These organizations identified working on diverse issue areas with many focusing on permanent supportive housing, emergency shelter services, and non-housing issues such as health and economic security. The sidebar on the right shares additional information about the survey respondents. Unless otherwise indicated, findings from the report mainly draw upon survey responses from individuals who are currently involved in the effort (70% of all survey respondents).[4]

PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Total: 185 individuals | 120 organizations

Individual's Campaign Involvement

Currently Involved	70%
Never Involved	23%
No Response	4%
Past Involvement	3%

Organization Type

Community provider	48%
Government agency	14%
Advocacy organization	12%
Other	10%
Funder	5%
Community organizing group	5%
Coalition	3%
Housing developer	3%
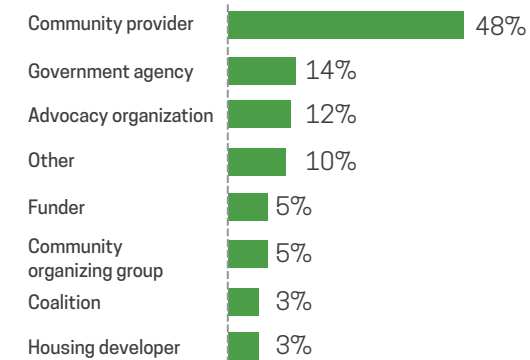
Organizational Issue Areas

Permanent supportive housing	30%
Emergency shelter services	20%
Non-housing issues	16%
Affordable housing	12%
Homelessness prevention	11%
Transitional housing	7%
Street outreach	3%
Rapid rehousing	3%
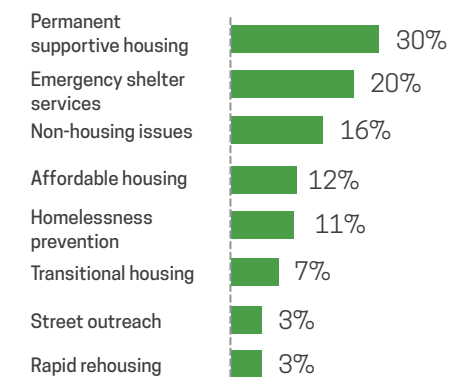
BACKGROUND:
The Reaching Home Campaign and Opening Doors—CT

IN 2004, the Partnership for Strong Communities and a statewide group of advocacy organizations, government agencies, and community providers launched the Reaching Home Campaign with the goal of ending chronic homelessness in Connecticut through the creation of 10,000 units of permanent supportive housing in 10 years.[5] Reaching Home partners worked to educate policymakers and the public about the effectiveness of supportive housing in helping individuals who have experienced homelessness for a long time and/or live with a disability in achieving housing stability. These efforts ultimately helped to create more than 5,600 units of supportive housing in the state.

While the Reaching Home partners were experiencing great progress, the 2010 release of the federal government's strategic plan for ending homelessness—called "Opening Doors"—compelled them to reflect deeply on their work. Created by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Opening Doors was the nation's first comprehensive plan to prevent and end homelessness. The plan was an unprecedented roadmap for joint action, calling on federal, state, and local agencies to align housing, health, education, and human services to prevent individuals and families from experiencing homelessness.[6] Through a series of listening sessions and a survey of stakeholders, the Reaching Home partners sought feedback from practitioners and policymakers representing diverse sectors on how to adapt the federal plan to fit the needs across the state of Connecticut. Based on this feedback, the partners developed the Opening Doors—Connecticut Framework, and in 2012, they revamped Reaching Home to advance the state's own version of the federal plan.
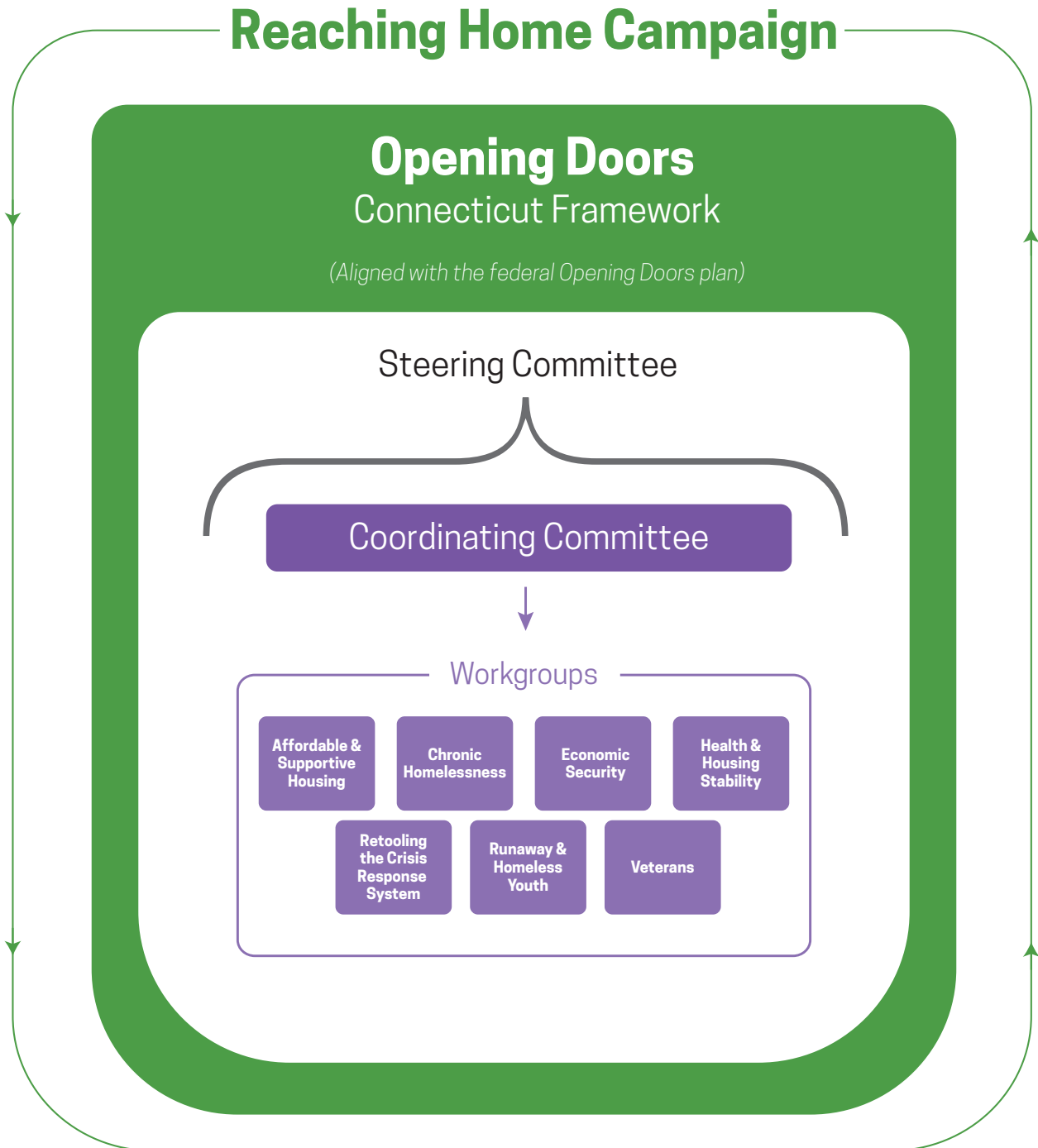
The expanded and recommitted Reaching Home Campaign shifted from a focus on chronic homelessness towards seeking to end all homelessness in the state of Connecticut. The Campaign sought to advance the four main goals outlined in the Opening Doors—CT Framework: (1) end homelessness among Veterans by the end of 2015; (2) end chronic homelessness by the end of 2016; (3) end homelessness among families, youth, and children by the end of 2021; and (4) set a path to ending all types of homelessness.[7] Currently, more than 240 individuals from over 130 organizations throughout the state are involved in the Campaign. These organizations include community providers, advocacy organizations, housing developers, and foundations, as well as government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Connecticut Departments of Housing, Children and Families, Education, Public Health, Labor, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Social Services, and Veterans' Affairs.

Figure 1 presents a diagram of the Campaign's organizational structure as of winter 2014. The effort is coordinated by PSC and guided by a Steering Committee comprised of over 60 individuals representing diverse sectors in the state. The Campaign's work is spearheaded by seven workgroups, each of which is comprised of 38 individuals on average, reports quarterly to the Steering Committee, and addresses different and interrelated issues requiring attention to end homelessness in the state.[8] The Campaign is also organized by a Coordinating Committee representing 14 organizations, including PSC staff, workgroup chairs, and key state agency representatives.

Figure 1. *Internal Organizational Chart of the Reaching Home Campaign*

Reaching Home Campaign

Opening Doors
Connecticut Framework

(Aligned with the federal Opening Doors plan)

Steering Committee

Coordinating Committee

Workgroups

Affordable & Supportive Housing	Chronic Homelessness	Economic Security	Health & Housing Stability
Retooling the Crisis Response System	Runaway & Homeless Youth	Veterans	

KEY LEARNINGS

WHILE COLLABORATIVES ARE often focused on influencing external actors and bringing about changes in the broader environment, effective collaboration requires strong internal capacity and operations. For collective impact efforts where diverse partners are developing a common agenda to address a specific social problem, *how* partners approach their work indelibly shapes what they do and what they are ultimately able to accomplish.[9] In recognition of this, the Reaching Home Campaign and Opening Doors—CT has worked for the past three years to establish a strong foundation for their collaborative effort.

This section discusses the Campaign's internal development work over the past several years, which clusters into five main areas: (1) finding a shared purpose, (2) identifying key strategies, (3) engaging stakeholders, (4) structuring and organizing collaborative work, and (5) developing processes for communications and feedback.

Finding a Shared Purpose

Developing a common purpose is one of the most fundamental yet challenging tasks for a collaborative effort. Just three years in, the Campaign has established the common goal of eliminating homelessness, rather than continuing to respond as if it would always be a chronic social problem. This shared vision brings participants together and generates genuine excitement. One participant expressed unequivocally that *"The purpose of [the Campaign]*

"The purpose of [the Campaign] is to end homelessness… We hear that message loud and clear, and it's exciting to set targets and start to see results."

is to end homelessness—period." Another noted similarly: *"The purpose of [the Campaign] is to end homelessness… We hear that message loud and clear, and it's exciting to set targets and start to see results."*
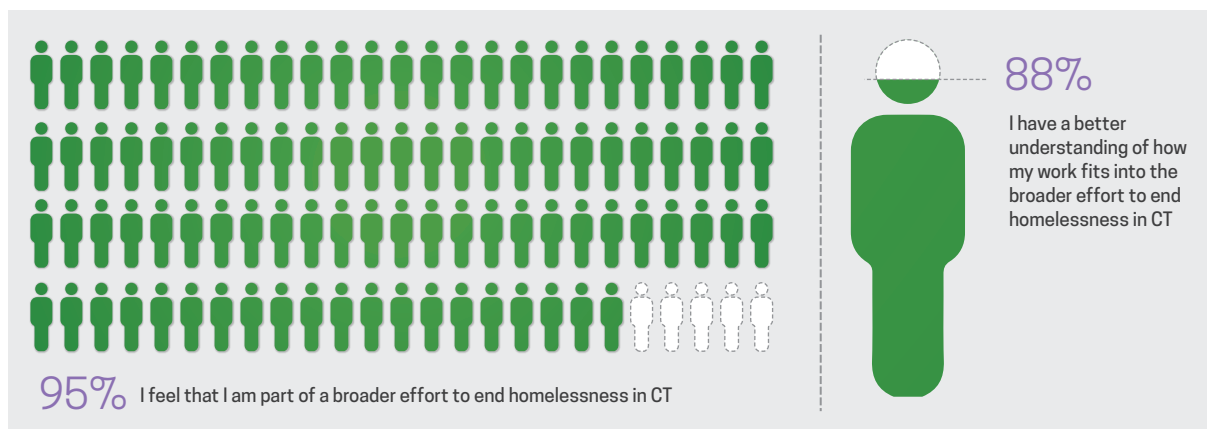
This strong sense of shared purpose will continue to guide the Campaign's work moving forward and there are signs that this collective understanding is already beginning to affect the effort in positive ways. This sense of common endeavor seems to help participants feel less isolated in their work. Of survey respondents, 95% described feeling part of a broader effort to end homelessness in Connecticut as a result of their past or current participation (see *Figure 2*), while 88% shared that they have also gained a better understanding of how their work fits into broader efforts to end homelessness in the state. Participants explained that being involved in the Campaign enables them to "*understand the big picture*" and draw motivation from the sense that "*we are going to end homelessness.*"

Coalescing around such a broad and ambitious purpose also seems to spur and reinforce collaboration. Several participants shared that in other coalitions less attuned to the full range of issues surrounding homelessness, some members tend to focus on advocating for their own organizational interests. In contrast, that sense of competition is largely absent—and even discouraged—in the Campaign. One participant explained that when working with the Campaign, "*I look at the big picture, look outside of [my own organization], look for what's best for the whole community and see who could best serve the people that we serve on a daily basis.*" Similarly, another interviewee remarked: "*There is a collaborative spirit on housing and homelessness that I have not found any where else… There are good people at the table who put partisanship at the door… If someone is in [the Campaign] to 'get mine,' they will not find a welcoming environment.*"

Figure 2. *Increased Connection to Broader Effort to End Homelessness in CT*

95% I feel that I am part of a broader effort to end homelessness in CT

88% I have a better understanding of how my work fits into the broader effort to end homelessness in CT

Identifying Key Strategies

In addition to finding a common purpose, members of a collaborative effort must identify shared strategies for advancing that agenda. Campaign participants were determined to end homelessness in Connecticut, but acknowledged that they had many different ideas of what this entailed in terms of specific strategies and goals, and how all of these things should be prioritized. Over the past few years, the Campaign has focused on three distinct areas of work: (1) advocacy, (2) provider coordination, and (3) increasing public awareness.
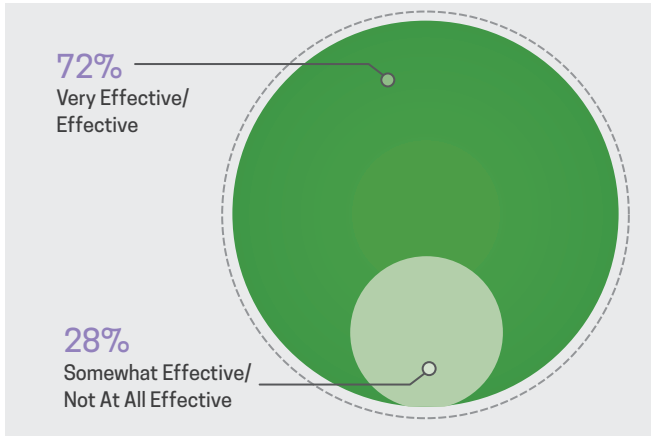
Advocacy

A primary strategy that has emerged from the Campaign is legislative and administrative advocacy at the state level. In interviews and survey responses, participants described the Campaign as assuming a strong leadership role in the state, advocating for both improvements that make systems more responsive to people experiencing homelessness, and resources so that state agencies and community providers are better able to support these individuals. Indeed, 84% of survey respondents considered the Campaign's legislative advocacy strategies to be "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" (see *Figure 3*). Over 70% of survey respondents assessed the Campaign's strategies for increasing resources to address homelessness as being equally effective (see *Figure 4*).

Figure 3. *Perceived Effectiveness of Campaign's Legislative Advocacy Strategies*

84%
Very Effective/
Effective

16%
Somewhat Effective/
Not At All Effective
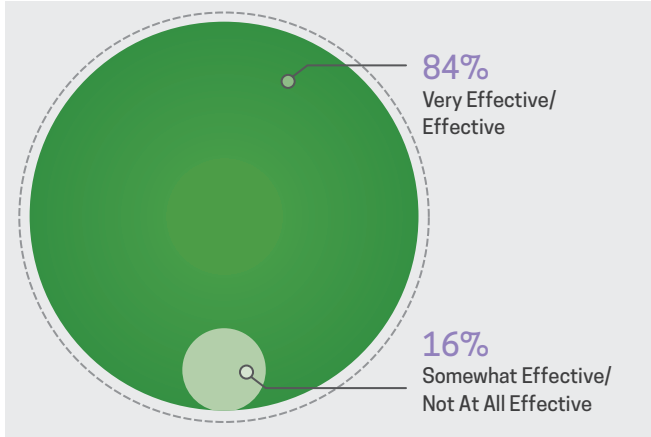
Figure 4. *Perceived Effectiveness of Campaign's Strategies for Increasing Resources*

72%
Very Effective/
Effective

28%
Somewhat Effective/
Not At All Effective

Participants identified several distinct features of the Campaign's advocacy work which have contributed to their success thus far. Participants viewed the Campaign as being especially adept at building, maintaining, and leveraging strong relationships with legislators and other political leaders. For instance, 83% of survey respondents described the Campaign's engagement with policymakers and government officials as *"Effective"* or *"Very Effective."* One person argued that the Campaign has been *"best at steering and leveraging political support"* to garner the political will needed to address issues of homelessness.

> "Once our [state agency] budgets are developed, there is no way of lobbying [for more funding]—but the nonprofit members, they can… The state can't do it on its own—it needs nonprofit groups. And the nonprofit sector can't do it without the state. The Campaign is bringing us all together."

2015 Advocacy Days, State of Connecticut Legislative Office Building.

Participants stated that the Campaign's skill in building these relationships is directly due to the policy experience and expertise of the Partnership for Strong Communities. They also pointed out that nurturing responsive partnerships with state government is an essential part of the Campaign's design and structure, as evidenced by the numerous state agencies represented on its committees and workgroups. One participant who represents a state agency asserted that the Campaign's ability to *"ally"* with state agencies has been instrumental to its success in administrative advocacy. Another person representing a government agency characterized the Campaign's partnership with state agencies as *"a very nice marriage,"* noting: *"Once our [state agency] budgets are developed, there is no way of lobbying [for more funding]—but the nonprofit members, they can... The state can't do it on its own—it needs nonprofit groups. And the nonprofit sector can't do it without the state. The Campaign is bringing us all together."*

Approaching advocacy—and legislative asks in particular—with one unified voice is another defining element of the Campaign's advocacy work. Several

interviewees explained that in the past, organizations and coalitions working on issues of homelessness would each go to legislators with different asks. Recognizing the ineffectiveness of this approach for the issue of homelessness as a whole, the Campaign works instead to develop shared priorities among participants so that they can channel their collective strength to advocate for the same demands. One person explained the value of this approach: "*Going to the legislature and the governor with a boatload of priorities doesn't work. We have to prioritize and [the Campaign] has done a great job of achieving clarity.*" Another participant remarked, "*It's been very powerful for so many of us to be part of the Campaign and to have a single advocacy agenda—we'd be in big trouble without that voice.*"

However, one of the key challenges of approaching advocacy with a unified voice is the continuous and ongoing work of defining the slate of priorities. Interviewees shared that developing the Campaign's annual legislative agenda is a time-intensive process that involves considerable dialogue and "*healthy debate.*" Participants often differ in what they think the Campaign should ask for in terms of which target populations to support and which interventions to promote, as well their estimates of the necessary resources. While participants recognized that this type of dialogue is integral to developing a unified voice, they were interested in establishing processes that would enable stakeholders to weigh in on the Campaign's priorities in a manner that is both equitable and efficient. These processes are particularly important given the size and the diversity of the Campaign. As one person noted, "*There are 125 groups involved. We can't vote on everything.*"

> "It's been very powerful for so many of us to be part of the Campaign and to have a single advocacy agenda— we'd be in big trouble without that voice."

Provider Coordination

In addition to advocacy at the state level, the Campaign has focused on increasing coordination among community providers. Participants remarked that the Campaign has become a "*tremendously useful*" forum for connecting community providers and helping them to "*get on the same page,*" especially considering that Connecticut tends to be a state where "*everything happens locally*" and "*there are 160 different towns and most are very independent.*" Although participants ac-

knowledged that continued efforts should be made to strengthen this work, 65% of survey respondents described the Campaign's strategies for increasing coordination among community providers as "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" (see *Figure 5*). Ratings were even more positive among community providers themselves; 72% felt that the Campaign has been "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" in supporting them to increase coordination.

Participants appreciated the Campaign's work in helping community providers think about how various systems, structures, and services that address homelessness are functioning as a whole. Having space and time to connect all of these different pieces has been especially useful given that community providers tend to operate in contexts where they are often responding to a multitude of federal, state, and local directives that are frequently in flux. Participants explained that the Campaign helps them reflect on their work, enabling them to "*figure out how things work and figure out holes and gaps in services*" and ultimately improve services for people experiencing homelessness.

Participants particularly valued the Campaign as a unique forum to share and learn about best practices. In interviews, several people described the Campaign as being skilled in "*engaging communities in creative thinking about what best practices should be promoted*" and continuously "*energizing*" community providers through ongoing exposure to new and innovative ideas from around the country. For instance, one interviewee was inspired to think more creatively about the linkages between increasing employment and ending homelessness after attending a recent presentation by a Massachusetts-based organization during an event organized by PSC and the Melville Charitable Trust. This person's experience is just one example of how the Campaign has helped participants gain the knowledge and insights needed to strengthen their work; over 80% of survey respondents felt they had learned best and innovative practices to support people who are experiencing homelessness.

Figure 5. *Perceived Effectiveness of Campaign's Strategies for Increasing Provider Coordination*

65%
Very Effective/
Effective

35%
Somewhat Effective/
Not At All Effective
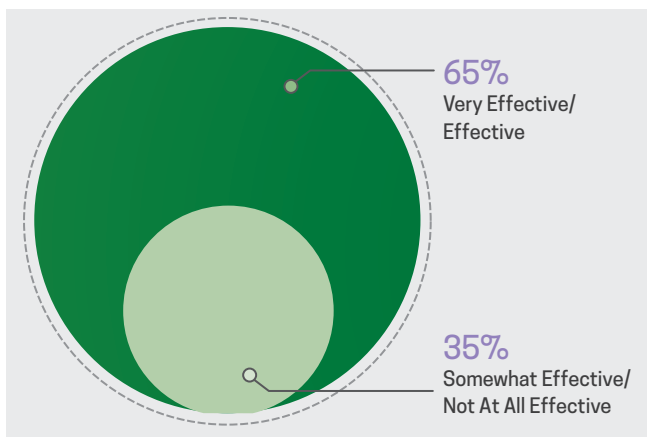
Increasing Public Awareness

Advocacy and provider coordination are critical, but participants also recognized that ending homelessness requires changing the public's understanding of the issue and its causes. A convincing majority of survey respondents (68%) viewed the Campaign's strategies for increasing public awareness as "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" (see *Figure 6*). However, almost all participants—particularly those who were interviewed—acknowledged that the Campaign has much more to do in or-der to engage the public. Many who were interviewed commented that the pub-lic generally does not know very much about homelessness. They remarked that "*people don't get that homelessness can happen to anyone*." Interviewees shared, for instance, that LGBT youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth popula-tion because of family rejection, and many people experiencing homelessness are over the age of 65. Several participants noted that part of the challenge is that they are trying to not just increase awareness but also change public perceptions on a deeply stigmatized and misunderstood issue. Several interviewees shared that the issue of homelessness in Connecticut and elsewhere is beset by a mindset that "*blames the victim.*" It is evident to participants that this work of "*changing hearts and changing the way we think about each other*" is certainly long-term in nature.

Some interviewees noted that the Campaign has already made important progress in challenging the discourse on homelessness. By framing its target population not as "homeless people" but as people who are experiencing homelessness, the effort is beginning to change both how people talk about homelessness and also their perception of the problem itself. One participant elaborated on the impact of this shift in framing by arguing that the Campaign "*has done a good job at mov-ing the conversation from homelessness to housing… We've divorced the person from the condition. We don't even talk about 'homeless people' anymore; we talk about people experiencing home-lessness.*"

Figure 6. *Perceived Effectiveness of Campaign's Strategies for Increasing Public Awareness*

68%
Very Effective/
Effective

32%
Somewhat Effective/
Not At All Effective
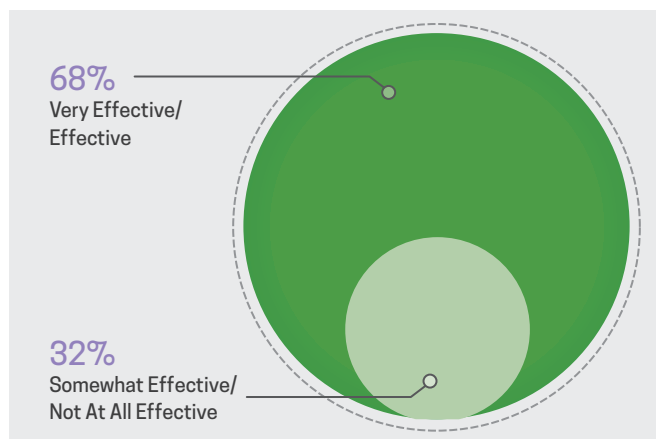
> "I think [the Campaign] has done a good job at moving the conversation from homelessness to housing… We've divorced the person from the condition. We don't even talk about 'homeless people' anymore; we talk about people experiencing homelessness."

Nevertheless, participants pointed out that while increasing awareness and changing public perceptions requires time, it also requires clear and intentional strategies. Interviewees described several different messaging strategies that the Campaign might consider exploring. Some thought that the Campaign should emphasize the cost-effectiveness of ending homelessness, while others suggested providing the public with statistics on the diverse populations experiencing homelessness. Still others felt that the public stands to be most moved by hearing stories directly from those impacted by homelessness. Participants felt that determining which messaging strategies to pursue—and whether and how these strategies might mutually support each other—is a key next step for the Campaign as it looks to expand its impact.
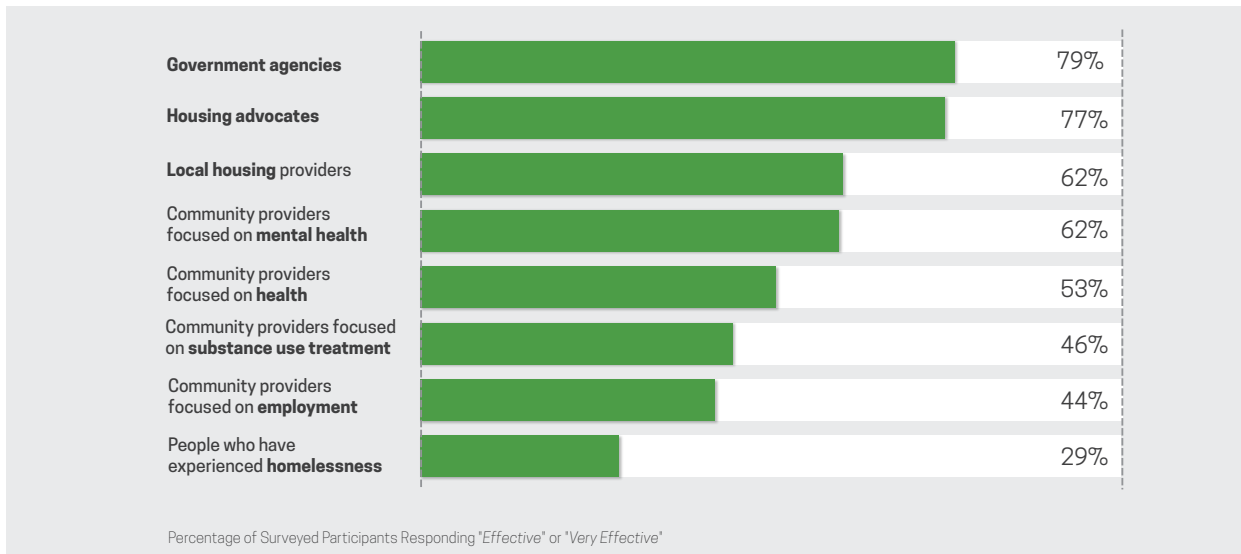
Engaging Stakeholders

While collaborative efforts often engage individuals and organizations within a sector, an issue area, or a geographic region, the Campaign is working to mobilize what one participant described as a "*broad umbrella*" that spans all of these dimensions. In their interviews and survey responses, participants remarked that the Campaign is distinct not only because it approaches homelessness as a complex issue that requires the involvement of a wide spectrum of individuals and organizations, but also because it is quite effective at bringing the needed stakeholders and actors together. Indeed, many described the Campaign as a uniquely inclusive forum that "*convenes the most diverse and broad range of members to address and collaborate on this issue,*" and where "*new entities are always welcomed and accepted.*"

Within the "broad umbrella," participants felt that the Campaign was making considerable progress in engaging diverse sectors to address homelessness. Survey respondents perceived the Campaign as making particular inroads with government agencies, with 79% of them responding that the effort has "*Effectively*" or "*Very Effectively*" engaged government agencies (see *Figure 7*). This assessment is somewhat unsurprising given the Campaign's intentional efforts to engage state agencies in the implementation of the Opening Doors—CT framework. Similarly, 77% of survey respondents felt that the Campaign has been equally as effective in engaging housing advocates, and 62% also rated the effort's involvement of local housing providers as "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*". Although participants acknowledged that there is more to do to engage different sectors, they felt that the effort was already helping to break down silos; over 65% of survey respondents viewed the Campaign as having "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" strategies for increasing coordination between different types of organizations, such as community providers, advocacy organizations, and government agencies.

Participants were similarly confident in the Campaign's ability to engage individuals and organizations working on diverse issue areas. Of survey respondents, 75% considered the Campaign to be "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" in engaging stakeholders focused on diverse housing issues, such as permanent supportive housing, emergency shelter services, and affordable housing. This assessment is notable given the original Reaching Home Campaign's emphasis on permanent supportive housing, demonstrating what one interviewee observed as the Campaign's full

Figure 7. *Perceived Effectiveness of Campaign's Engagement of Various Stakeholder Groups*

Stakeholder Group	Percentage
Government agencies	79%
Housing advocates	77%
Local housing providers	62%
Community providers focused on mental health	62%
Community providers focused on health	53%
Community providers focused on substance use treatment	46%
Community providers focused on employment	44%
People who have experienced homelessness	29%

Percentage of Surveyed Participants Responding "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*"

embrace of "*the idea that you have to work along every inch of the spectrum to make it work.*" However, many participants would like to find more ways to involve community providers that are not focused on, but could help to address, issues of homelessness. For instance, while only slightly over half of survey respondents felt that the Campaign effectively engaged community providers focused on health, many shared that they are excited about the effort's growing and innovative work around collaboration with emergency departments at local hospitals (described in the introduction).

Moving forward, many participants would like to better involve people who have experienced homelessness in the Campaign's work. Only 29% of survey respondents considered the Campaign to be "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" in engaging people who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness. While participants recognized that it can be challenging to involve individuals with lived experience in meaningful ways, they felt that

> "We need to do a much better job of including people with lived experience into our work."

this level of engagement was important to prioritize. One person noted that, "*We need to do a much better job of including people with lived experience into our work.*" Another interviewee shared: "*The folks that are homeless, the folks who are looking for housing—they don't have as much input in this as they should.*" The interviews and survey also suggest that the Campaign would not necessarily need to start from scratch: participants recommended different avenues of engagement (i.e., workgroups, task forces, surveys, focus groups), and nearly a dozen people self-identified as having personally experienced homelessness.

◄ *2014 Forum on Ending Chronic Homelessness, Lyceum Resource and Conference Center.*

Structuring and Organizing Collaborative Work

Collaboration requires structure, particularly when the task at hand is complex and requires the skills and expertise of many different individuals and organizations over a long-term period. The Campaign is no different in this regard, and it has worked over the past several years to develop internal structures and processes that will enable its participants—some of whom had never worked together before—to work towards their shared goal of ending homelessness in Connecticut.
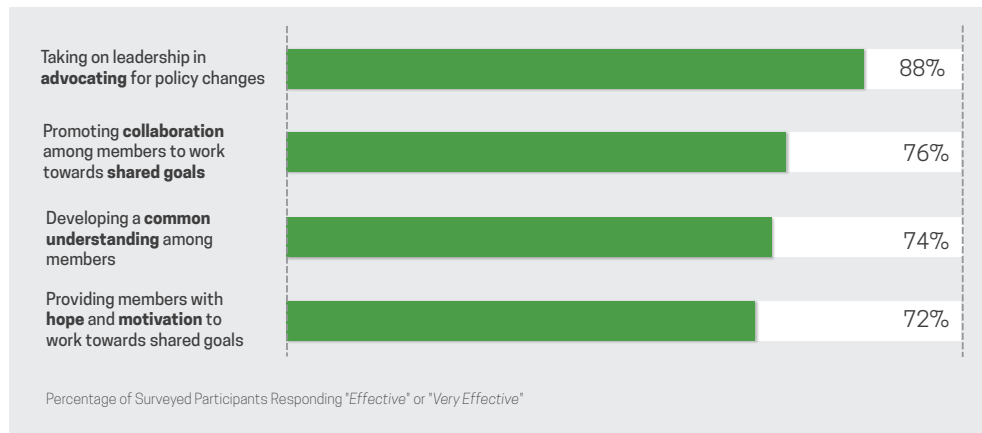
One way that the Campaign has been able to organize its collaborative work is by forming topical workgroups. At the time of the learning assessment, there were seven workgroups and one sub-workgroup. Each of these groups meets regularly—either monthly or bi-monthly—and is led by one or more chairs from partner agencies. Participants generally felt that these workgroups are functioning effectively, in that they have engaged leadership and members, strategies that guide their work, and sufficient logistical support (i.e., scheduling, sharing meeting notes). However, development remains uneven across the workgroups. For instance, in the survey, respondents assessed the workgroups they are currently or have previously been involved in on a range of measures. Based on these assessments, six out of eight workgroups and sub-workgroups were seen as having an effective strategy for advancing their priorities, and five out of eight workgroups were assessed as having both the right people at the table and a chair that effectively engages all members.

To provide broader leadership and oversight for the workgroups, the Campaign has also established a Steering Committee and a Coordinating Committee. The Steering Committee is a broad-based coalition comprised of over 60 individuals representing diverse sectors and systems in the state, while the Coordinating Committee is a smaller group made up of workgroup chairs, PSC staff, and key state agency representatives.[10] While participants tended to perceive the Steering Committee as playing more of an information-sharing role in communicating progress with local, regional, and state leaders and the Coordinating Committee as assuming more agenda-setting responsibilities, some felt that the distinctions between the two could be better communicated to ensure appropriate expectations for the two committees. Current and former members also felt that the two committees could
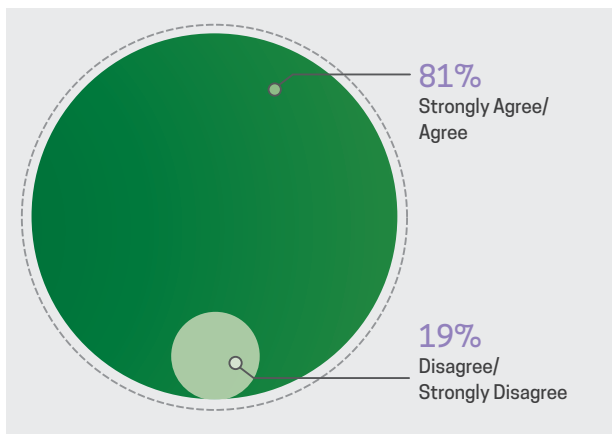
Figure 8. *Perceived Effectiveness of PSC's Leadership*

Taking on leadership in **advocating** for policy changes — 88%

Promoting **collaboration** among members to work towards **shared goals** — 76%

Developing a **common understanding** among members — 74%

Providing members with **hope** and **motivation** to work towards shared goals — 72%

Percentage of Surveyed Participants Responding "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*"

work to make their decision-making processes more transparent to their members. Steering Committee members felt that they have an effective process for setting meeting agendas, regular communications with other committees and workgroups, and sufficient logistical support. Coordinating Committee members felt that they could use support in continuing to develop these capacities.

The Partnership for Strong Communities has assumed the role of "backbone support organization" to ensure that the Campaign has dedicated and ongoing coordination.[11] Among its many responsibilities, PSC facilitates committee and workgroup meetings, conducts research to inform advocacy efforts, and communicates progress to participants and external stakeholders. Survey respondents generally viewed PSC as an effective leader and appreciated its efforts to coordinate the Campaign. As seen in *Figure 8*, more than 70% considered PSC to be "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" in promoting collaboration among members, developing a common understanding among participants, and providing people with hope and motivation to work towards shared goals. Participants were particularly confident in PSC's policy experience and expertise, with 88% of survey respondents describing the organization as being "*Effective*" or "*Very Effective*" in taking on leadership in advocating for policy changes.

Figure 9. *Agreement Among Participants That Campaign Is Collaboratively Led*

81% Strongly Agree/ Agree

19% Disagree/ Strongly Disagree

> "It can be challenging to understand how it works.
> If they asked how it would look on an organizational chart,
> I couldn't do one in terms of how we related to each other
> and all the committees and how they fit together."

With these multiple and interconnected components, the Campaign has developed a sophisticated structure that thoroughly organizes its collaborative work in a way that is comprehensive yet targeted, and efficient yet interactive. Structuring its work in this way also seems to foster a sense of shared ownership among participants, with 81% of survey respondents viewing the Campaign as being collaboratively led (see *Figure 9)*. However, many people shared that this intricate structure can be difficult to understand—even for those who are actively involved. One interviewee commented: "*It can be challenging to understand how it works. If they asked how it would look on an organizational chart, I couldn't do one in terms of how we related to each other and all the committees and how they fit together.*" Another person remarked similarly that s/he does not know how everything works together, noting: "*I really don't know who's thinking about the big picture and how it all fits together.*" Participants acknowledged that while much of their time has been devoted to developing this elaborate structure, it would now be worthwhile to both consider and communicate how everything comes together in the Campaign.

Developing Processes for Communications and Feedback

An important thread that keeps a collaborative effort intact is ongoing communication. This is especially true of the Campaign, where many different individuals and organizations are involved and there are often multiple activities happening simultaneously. The Campaign's involvement in the dynamic environment of state-level advocacy makes effective communication especially important.

Figure 10. *Proportion of Individuals Who Currently Receive Campaign Communications Among Participants and Non-Participants*
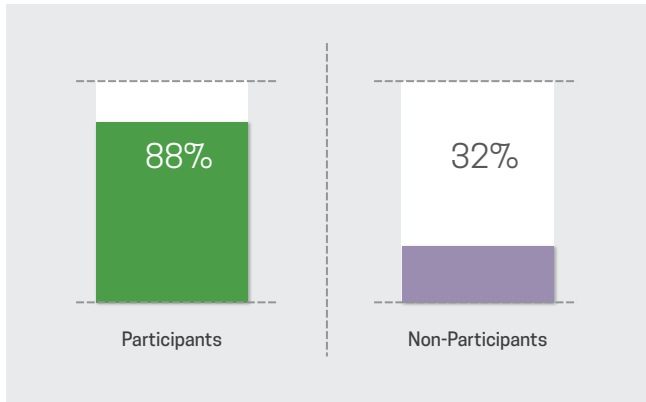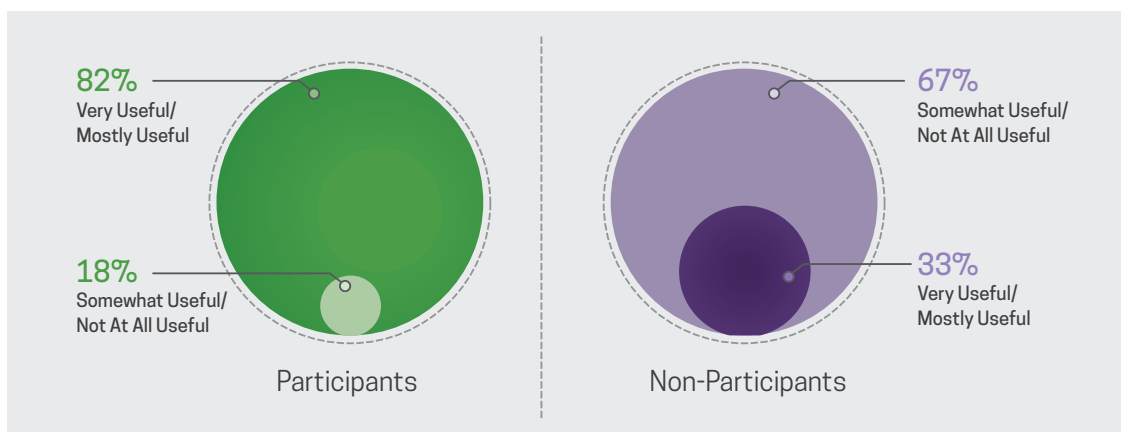

The Campaign provides regular updates on its work by preparing a bi-weekly e-newsletter and an annual progress report, among other communications. These updates—particularly those that are shared via email—tend to have good reach among participants, as 88% of survey respondents reported receiving communications on the effort (see *Figure 10)*. While survey respondents were not asked about how often they open these communications, internal data from PSC's communications team shows an average "open rate" of 18% for the Campaign's bi-weekly e-newsletter.[12] Participants also tended to regard these communications as being relevant, as over 80% of survey respondents who are currently involved in the effort and receive communications considered the updates to be "*Mostly Useful*" or "*Very Useful*" (see *Figure 11).*

However, participants acknowledged that more could be done to inform individuals and organizations that are not involved. One interviewee observed: "*The further away you get from the committee folks, the less knowledge people have about [the Campaign].*" Survey responses show that the Campaign has made some progress in reaching out to non-participants; 32% of survey respondents who have never been involved reported receiving regular information about the effort (see *Figure 10)*, and 56% of these respondents considered the updates to be "*Somewhat Useful*" (see *Figure 11).* Participants pointed out that it will be important to build upon these efforts as they look to expand their impact.

Figure 11. *Perceived Usefulness of Campaign Communications*

82%
Very Useful/
Mostly Useful

18%
Somewhat Useful/
Not At All Useful

Participants

67%
Somewhat Useful/
Not At All Useful

33%
Very Useful/
Mostly Useful

Non-Participants

> "It would help the Campaign dramatically if there was bottom-up organizing where we go to clients and direct line staff to get at how all of this is going to play out."

Moreover, participants emphasized that meaningful communication entails not just providing updates on progress but also seeking feedback on their work. For instance, across all ten committees and workgroups, survey respondents consistently gave the lowest ratings to communication processes involving committees and workgroups. This suggests that the groups would benefit from improved feedback loops. Several interviewees shared that allowing committees and workgroups to vet each other's decisions helps to ensure alignment, and that they would like more opportunities to learn about and weigh in on the work of other committees and workgroups.

Looking at survey respondents' self-assessments of all ten committees, workgroups, and sub-workgroups, it seems that members of only half of these groups agreed that their group currently has an effective feedback loop with community members. Participants noted that although the Campaign engages a diverse array of local organizations, it should continue to prioritize the involvement of local community providers whose buy-in is critical to the success of the effort. In their survey responses, participants suggested developing stronger relationships with local Coordinated Access Networks, local "Community Care" teams, and regional coalitions, as well as increasing the Campaign's presence at strategic planning groups and other local tables.

It is worth noting that people tended to speak about the Campaign's involvement of local communities and people who have experienced homelessness in the same breath. While participants recognized that the Campaign is intended to be and works effectively as a centralized effort to end homelessness in the state, they felt that the effort would be bolstered by an increased emphasis on "bottom-up organizing." One interviewed participant shared: "*It would help the Campaign dramatically if there was bottom-up organizing where we go to clients and direct line staff to get at how all of this is going to play out.*"

NEXT STEPS

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, the Reaching Home Campaign and Opening Doors—Connecticut has made tremendous progress towards its unprecedented goal of ending homelessness in the state. The Campaign has established strong internal structures and processes, developed distinct areas of work, and most significantly, energized and motivated a diverse group of stakeholders to work together to respond to a significant social problem in their state. As the Campaign shifts from planning to implementation, its focus and work moving forward will also shift from the internal to the external. Collaborative efforts at this stage of development expand from internal activities such as developing vision and strategy to external activities such as building public will.[13] To support the Campaign with its next phase of work, we offer three recommendations.

1. Refine and activate collaborative infrastructure to advance shared goals.

The Campaign's focus on internal development over the past few years has now united its many diverse participants under a strong sense of shared purpose, identified key goals and strategies, and established a comprehensive infrastructure. While these are considerable accomplishments, interviewees and survey respondents noted that the Campaign could strengthen its internal structures and processes, such as by ensuring that all committees and workgroups have sufficient capacity to be effective and establishing feedback loops between these groups. Continuing to recognize and respond to these types of internal improvements is vital to maintaining the health of any collaborative effort.[14]

At the same time, it is important for the Campaign at this stage of development to begin to find ways to use its internal structures and processes to work towards its external outcomes and shared purpose of ending homelessness in Connecticut. For example, some considerations for the Campaign include: how might the Steering Committee, the Coordinating Committee, and the seven workgroups coordinate so that their work is mutually reinforcing? What specific roles do particular stakeholders have in advancing the goal of ending homelessness in the state, given their distinct skills and expertise? How might communications support the Campaign's efforts to not only keep participants updated but also engage allies and influence public perceptions of homelessness? To answer these questions, a helpful first step for the Campaign is to go through a logic model development process. Through this process, Campaign participants could collaboratively identify resources/inputs (i.e., human, financial, organizational, and community resources available), and then define how these resources/inputs support key activities that ultimately contribute to the changes they hope to achieve in terms of ending homelessness in the state.[15]

2. Expand stakeholder engagement beyond the core.

The Campaign has effectively galvanized a core group of participants primarily comprised of housing service providers, housing advocates, and government agencies focused on housing to work towards ending homelessness in the state. However, to increase its impact, the Campaign will need to expand *and* deepen its engagement of stakeholders beyond this core group. The inclusion of new stakeholders may require some creative thinking about how to structure the engagement process.

For example, interviewees and survey respondents noted that one priority for the Campaign moving forward is to work with individuals who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness to identify ways in which they could be meaningfully involved and supported to do so. Interviewees and survey respondents also identify line staff as another stakeholder group that the Campaign could better involve, given their unique expertise and direct connections with those most affected. In addition, the Campaign may want to consider how it might deepen its engagement with local community providers, particularly those located in smaller towns throughout the state. In the future, the Campaign could expand its stakeholders to include groups that do not work directly on issues of homelessness. These might include new workforce partners as well as business and faith communities.

3. Amplify communications.

As the Campaign works to leverage its internal development accomplishments to advance external goals and engage a broader group of stakeholders, it will need to be more strategic in its communications. For the past few years, the Campaign has mainly used its communication materials to inform participants about the effort's progress, and interviewees and survey respondents noted that the Campaign was not well-known outside of those already involved. In the next few years as the Campaign nears its goals, it can turn its attention to attracting new participants, garnering support from allies, and contributing to the public discourse on homelessness and the individuals affected by it.

In employing communications in this expanded way, the Campaign will likely need to tailor the *content* of its messages so that they are accessible to a broader audience that may have a limited understanding of homelessness and housing policy. For example, while the general public may not understand the nuances of different housing interventions such as permanent supportive housing and emergency shelter services, people may more readily connect with the ambitious goal of eliminating homelessness entirely within a state. The Campaign may also need to explore new communication *formats* that are more engaging to a broader audience. Infographics and short videos, for instance, are more conducive ways of sharing work with the general public as compared to traditional reports. In addition, as the Campaign increases its communications, it will be important for the Campaign to ensure that its messaging and branding are clear, succinct, and consistent.

Ultimately, this mid-point learning assessment of the Reaching Home Campaign and Opening Doors—Connecticut provides participants with some insights that reflect on their progress thus far and helps them to consider ways to build upon and advance their work moving forward. This assessment may also provide useful information to groups beyond the Campaign. While funders and organizations are increasingly engaged in collective impact work, the Campaign—as an initiative that grew from an effort that preceded much of the existing literature on collective impact—is an exciting and innovative form of collaboration in many ways. There is much to learn from this evolving story of how a group of dedicated organizations are working together across sectors, geography, and issue areas to address a social problem once thought to be intractable.

Endnotes

1 For more information on the Campaign's successes over the past three years, its annual Progress Reports from 2013 and 2014 are available at: http://www.pschousing.org/publications

2 John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG define "collective impact" as "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem." For more information, see: Kania, John and Mark Kramer. "*Collective Impact.*" Stanford Social Innovation Review. Winter 2011.

3 Continuums of Care are local planning bodies for defined geographic areas that are charged with addressing homelessness in those areas. There are also eight Coordinated Access Networks in Connecticut, each of which helps community providers within a designated geographic area to coordinate service delivery to individuals experiencing homelessness in that area.

4 It is also important to note that respondents completed the survey to varying degrees. As such, survey responses cited in the report reflect recorded responses; respondents who did not record a response for a particular question are omitted from the response results for that question.

5 The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness defines permanent supportive housing as "decent, safe, affordable, community-based housing that provides tenants with the rights of tenancy and links to voluntary and flexible supports and services for people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness." Additional information is available at: http://usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/permanent_supportive_housing

6 Additional information on the federal Opening Doors plan is available at: http://usich.gov/opening_doors

7 Additional information on the Opening Doors-Connecticut Framework is available at: http://pschousing.org/files/RH_OpeningDoorsCT_Framework_8-13-12.pdf

8 The Campaign had seven workgroups at the time of this learning assessment, including two sub-workgroups: the Hospital Engagement/Connecticut Hospitals Association Sub-Workgroup and the Data and Estimated Needs (DEN) Sub-Workgroup. The DEN Sub-Workgroup was not included in the scope of this learning assessment.

9 Kania, John and Mark Kramer. "*Collective Impact.*" Stanford Social Innovation Review. Winter 2011.

10 Current data on Steering and Coordinating Committee members is gathered from the Campaign's website: http://pschousing.org/reaching-home-steering-committee

11 In their initial article on collective impact in Stanford Social Innovation Review, John Kania and Mark Kramer define "backbone support organization" as "a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative." These organizations typically "plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly."

12 Internal data from PSC's communications team shows that nearly 1,700 individuals receive the Campaign's bi-weekly e-newsletter, which has an open rate of about 18% on average.

13 Turner, Shiloh, et al. "*Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact.*" Stanford Social Innovation Review.

14 Preskill, Hallie, et al. "*Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact: Assessing Progress and Impact*." Collective Impact Forum.

15 The W.K. Kellogg Foundation defines a logic model as "a systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate your program, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve." For more information on logic model development, see: W.K. Kellogg Foundation. "*Logic Model Development Guide.*" January 2004. Available at: https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide

Building Movement Project