CREATING AFTERSCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS TOOLKIT

2023

ACTNOW

Afterschool for Children & Teens

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Introduction

Welcome, Readers! This toolkit was developed by the Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now) Coalition to support Illinois providers of afterschool and youth development programs in their efforts to collaborate with various stakeholders within their communities. ACT Now recognizes the importance of **a community-wide investment in the positive development and well-being of youth** and believes that developing partnerships are an effective way of creating community stake in youth success.

ACT Now is a diverse, statewide coalition that works to ensure that all youth in Illinois have **equitable access** to high-quality, affordable programs after school and during out-of-school time (OST). Our main areas of work are shown below:

Policy & Advocacy
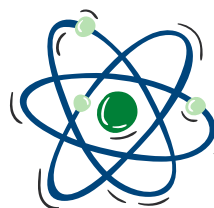
Professional Development

Quality Improvement

Community Schools

STEM

All resources can be accessed through the QR codes throughout the document for easy access. QR codes can be clicked or scanned to access linked resources.

Toolkit Overview

Identification Phase	The **identification** phase of partnerships will help you determine what types of partnerships to look for by identifying your community's needs. Included in this section are templates for needs assessments and asset maps.
Building Phase	The partnerships **building** phase will be the creation of the partnership, including researching agencies, creating partnership agreements, and outlining services to be provided. You will also find outreach and memorandum of understanding (MOU) templates in this section.
Implementation Phase	The **implementation** phase is the execution of the partnership, or the partnership in action. This section discusses management practices important to the successful implementation of a partnership.
Sustainability Phase	The **sustainability** phase identifies key strategies in ensuring the longevity of partnerships. This section will also include strategies to fund partnerships.

Identification Phase

The **identification phase** of establishing partnerships is the exploratory aspect of this process.

During this phase, you will take time to learn the needs of your community,[1] as well as what assets are available in your area. Further, you will evaluate the internal capacity of your team to assess the possibilities of a partnership.

[1] For the purposes of this toolkit, "community" will refer to the group being served by the established partnership. This can include students, caregivers, and the community at large.

Needs

Evaluating the needs of your community is essential when establishing any program, but especially so when partnering with another entity to deliver services. The development of a successful partnership rests on the principle that **what is being established is actively addressing a gap within the community**. Through assessing your community's needs, you can ensure that the partnership you are building is appropriate for those being served and that the partnership being established will be long lasting. High-quality afterschool/out-of-school time (OST) and summer programs play an important role in students' academic, social, emotional, and physical success. Therefore, it is essential that when needs are being assessed, all of these growth areas are being accounted for and addressed. Within each of these areas are specific metrics that are crucial to identify and are universally addressed in needs assessments.

Needs Assessment

The method of collecting and assessing the above information is known as a **needs assessment.** A needs assessment evaluates the current status of your target population and reviews what key areas of intervention exist in your community. This is important because it will help you **identify any existing gaps within the services available that contribute to the lack of growth of the community**. The structure of your needs assessment can take whatever form makes sense to you; however, it should clearly identify the community you are working with, the areas of community need, and the data backing your observation.

Needs Assessment Data Points

Academic

- Standardized test scores
- Homework completion rates
- Attendance trends
- High school graduation rates
- Quantity of English Language Learners and students with special needs

Social-Emotional

- State rank of mental health
- Accessibility and attendance for mental health interventions
- School discipline rates
- Results of SEL assessments
- Perception of school climate
- Exposure to violence

Physical

- Substance use rates
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Income level
- Access to preventive healthcare
- Inadequate housing
- Incarceration rates
- Food insecurity

Resources for Data Collection

Academic Data

- ISBE Report Card
- School district website
- Continuous improvement plans
- Teacher and principal surveys

Wellness/Health Data

- CDC
- Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT
- Department of Public Health
- Local hospital
- 5Essentials survey
- Local law enforcement agencies

Demographic Data

- Census
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)
- University databases

Needs Assessment Template

Guiding Question	School/Community Level Data (Current Standing)	Data Source (Where will you gather evidence?)	Priority (High, Medium, Low)
When looking at school day data, what are the overall trends? What is needed for improvement?	*Only 70% of third-grade students met standards on math state assessment.*	*State assessment results*	*High*
When looking at behavior reports, what trends do you see that need to be addressed?			
What activities. do students say they want? Which activities can you accommodate during program time?			
What family need can OST programs help to address?			

View and print your own Needs Assessment Template by scanning or clicking the QR Code!

Assets

As you are assessing the needs of your community, you will undoubtedly also uncover available resources and opportunities that are already present within your community. These are **community assets—the resources available within your community that can be leveraged to meet the identified needs.** Asset data is typically compiled and communicated through an asset map, or an inventory of the strengths and resources within a community. The goals of creating an asset map include: (i) **understanding** the resources, relationships, and structures within a community to bring change; and (ii) **promoting** community involvement, ownership, and empowerment. Once your community's strengths and resources are inventoried on a map, you can more easily think about how to build on these assets to **address community needs.**

Community Assets

Community assets can be anything that improves the quality of community life, such as:

Capacities and abilities of community members

A physical structure or space

A business that supports the local economy

Association of citizens

Local private, public, and nonprofit institutions

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Community Asset Mapping Template

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Community Asset Mapping Template

Use this template to review community data and identify opportunities to leverage assets.

Community Opportunity	Type of Asset	Service Area	Program Need	Outcome
The public library offers computer literacy classes for youth and adults twice a week.	○ Individual ○ Association ● Institution ○ Physical ○ Connection/Exchange ○ Culture	● Career and Technology ○ Art ○ STEM ○ Literacy ● Family Engagement ○ Mentoring	*Students need to learn safe internet use strategies. Students would also benefit from learning how to identify credible sources online for research practices.* *Caregivers and families need basic computer skills classes.*	*The public library will send staff to program once every other week to provide joint technical literacy classes to youth and caregivers for 12 weeks.*
	○ Individual ○ Association ○ Institution ○ Physical ○ Connection/Exchange ○ Culture	○ Career and Technology ○ Art ○ STEM ○ Literacy ○ Family Engagement ○ Mentoring		

View and print your own Community Asset Map Template by scanning or clicking the QR Code!

Community Asset Mapping Template

ACTNOW
Afterschool for Children & Teens

Community Asset Mapping Template

Use this template to review community data and identify opportunities to leverage assets.

Associations

Physical Space

MY COMMUNITY

Individuals

Institutions

Local Economy

View and print your own Community Asset Map Template by scanning or clicking the QR Code!

Capacity

An important consideration to make during the identification phase of partnerships is the **capacity of your current program**. Measuring the capacity of your program includes assessing your location, supplies, number of youth being served, number of staff, abilities of your staff, and project management strategies. Assessing your agency's capacity allows you to begin **making decisions about what you will need** from your partnerships and what you can offer. This is important because although partnerships have many benefits, they also take work and through assessing capacity, you can ensure that neither party is taking on too much. This **ultimately leads to the sustainability** of the partnership.

Check out this example for assessing your agency's internal capacity and creating a guide for the next phase of partnerships--building your program!

Projected # of staff	8 (1 SC; 5 YDS; 1 Academic Coord.; 1 SG)	Projected # of program areas	6	# of program hours/day	3
Student program interest level			**Change impact**		
			Low	Medium	High
Grade levels		**New programs**		**Resources**	
3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th		Conflict res., STEM, wellness		Materials Curricula Volunteers Advisory Boards	
Principal	Jane Doe	**Site Coord.**	James Cox		

Building Phase

Following the identification of your community's needs and resources, you will begin to build your partnership.

The **building phase** includes researching your local organizations or schools, conducting outreach, drafting partnership proposals, and outlining the parameters of the partnership.

Research

Research will be the **first step** in the building phase of partnership development. When conducting research, you will be investigating potential partners to collaborate with and **assessing compatibility**. You may research partners that came up in your asset mapping. In researching partners to connect with, you will want to consider:

1. The location of the partner agency

2. The mission and vision statements of the entity

3. The size of the agency

4. Historical adequacy

5. The ages of the youth served by the agency

6. Service offering to the families and caregivers

7. The services provided by the agency

To explore the various agencies in your area, access **ACT Now's online Map & Database!** This map is a self-reported database for providers across the state to identify themselves as high-quality youth development programs and market their program statewide. Within the database, you can filter programs by location, ages served, and services offered to ensure you are accessing the program that best fits your needs.

Research Questions

The questions you ask when considering the items on the previous page will be guided by the needs assessment developed in the identification phase. Here are some examples of questions you can ask when conducting your research:

Location

- How close is this agency to my own?
- Is this site within our community (especially relevant when thinking about gang affiliations and cultural responsibilities)?
- If necessary, can transportation be provided for students to that location?
- Is there access to outdoor environments (such as parks) near this lcoation?
- Is this agency's building large enough to host programming?

Mission and Vision

- Do our organizational visions align?
- Do our philosophies and goals for youth development align?

Size

- Is this agency large enough to help us build capacity?
- Can this agency serve all of our youth?
- Will this agency prioritize this partnership appropriately?

Services Provided

- Does this agency offer services needed by our community?
- Does this agency offer multiple services we are looking for?
- Does the implementation style of this agency align with the cultural values of our community?
- Are there additional services being offered that we can take advantage of?

Families and Caregivers

- Can this agency meet the needs of our whole community?
- Does this agency work with adults?
- What family offerings does this agency have?
- Are there volunteer opportunities for adults?

Historical Adequacy

- Does this agency work with the ages we serve?
- What has been their success rate with partnerships?
- What are their qualifications as an independent organization?
- Has this agency engaged in community/school partnerships previously?

Partnership Proposal

A partnership proposal is an initial draft of a partnership agreement. This proposal should outline the basics of what is expected from the intended partnership so that both parties can reflect on the partnership parameters and decide whether to move forward. It is important to keep in mind that the partnership needs to benefit both parties—this should be reflected in the partnership proposal. The proposal will include the following pieces:

- Proposed length of partnership
- Proposed services to be provided by each entity
- Proposed schedule of service sessions (i.e., three times a week for nine weeks)

Outreach

The type of outreach you conduct when initiating contact with a new agency is an important factor to consider in your partnership journey. It is important that in your outreach you set a collaborative tone and ensure that outside entities can recognize your organization's willingness to work together in establishing a partnership. Outreach can be conducted by phone call, through an email, or in-person; however, your outreach should always include these main components:

- Personal and organizational introduction
- Identification of your community and their needs
- Partnership request or proposal
- An opportunity to discuss further

Use this QR code to access an outreach letter template!

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

A **memorandum of understanding (MOU)** is a document which outlines the conditions of a relationship or partnership between two entities. The purpose of this document is to **help organizations develop a shared perspective and shared goals**. Your drafted partnership proposal will serve as an outline as you and your partner work to develop this contract. There are six components within an MOU; however, depending on the nature of your partnership, you may not need to include all six parts. The sections of the MOU are introduced and detailed below and continued on the following pages:

Component	Description	Questions to Ask	Mandatory or Optional
Introduction	Describe the need for this partnership, the organizations involved, and why these organizations need to work together.	Why is the MOU being created? What agencies are participating? Why is this MOU necessary?	Mandatory
Purpose	Discuss the intention of the partnership which makes the MOU necessary. Briefly explain the goals of the MOU as well as how and when the document will be used. Be specific!	What are the goals of the MOU? How will these goals be carried out? When will these goals be carried out?	Mandatory

Component	Description	Questions to Ask	Mandatory or Optional
Roles and Responsibilities	Establish expectations for each entity within the agreement. List the staff dedicated to this partnership, what their responsibilities would be (such as hiring, training, reporting, evaluations, etc.), and list any resources that will be shared throughout the partnership (i.e., classroom spaces, technology, reporting documents, handbooks or training materials, staffing) and who is responsible for providing those resources. Also include the description of program services and length of partnership in this section.	Which duties will each organization take lead on and which will be carried out collaboratively? What do each organization's staff need to be successful (i.e., trainings, resources, supervision, etc.)? What resources need to be shared between organizations? What services will be offered through this partnership?	Mandatory
Oversight	Describes how the partnership will be implemented. Things included in this section include the dates of the MOU (start and end date), what entity will enforce the requirements of the MOU and hold parties responsible for their duties. This section will also list the measures of success for this partnership, which do not have to be the same as the success measures for the project.	What are the dates governing this document? What entity oversees and enforces the requirements of the MOU? How will both sides measure success? How will initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels be incorporated? When will both sides amend the MOU if circumstances change (include this here if not including a separate "terms and conditions" section)	Mandatory

Component	Description	Questions to Ask	Mandatory or Optional
Funding	Describe how funding will be used and the methods for reporting on funding.	How will funding be split? How will funding be distributed? What fiscal reporting is required? What financial documentation is needed? How long do partners need to retain financial records?	Optional
Terms and Conditions	Address any other legal clauses you may want to include in terms of how to enforce or modify the contract. You may want to consult your attorneys for this section or use sample language from example MOUs.	How do you expect communication related to the agreement to proceed? Should a cooperation/standard of performance agreement be included? What is the process for amending the agreement?	Optional

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Template

[ORGANIZATION] will partner with the **[PARTNER NAMES]** participating in the **[PROGRAM NAME]** and commits to do the following:

1. If the organization is committing volunteers, list the number of volunteers it is willing to commit, how many hours per week, and for how long. If you will provide some training for those volunteers, list it here as well; for example: "The **[PARTNER]** commits to provide 5 hours of volunteer service per week. Volunteers will go through a brief onboarding training program offered by **[ORGANIZATION]**."

2. If the organization is committing supplies, list that commitment here if known; for example, "**[PARTNER/ORGANIZATION]** will provide tables, chairs, and other office supplies to the Program as they are available."

3. If the organization is committing services, list the activities and time commitment here; for example, "**[PARTNER]** will provide STEM activities to all program youth for 1 hour per week."

4. If the organization is committing time by providing one of its representatives to sit on your Advisory Board and attend all meetings, list that commitment here.

5. List any other commitments that each partner is willing to make to the out-of-school time program. These commitments could include advertising, community relations, and solicitation of further funding opportunities.

[PARTNER] sees its role as assisting **[ORGANIZATION]** in reaching its goals and will be as flexible as possible to accommodate any special needs or changes.

In turn, **[ORGANIZATION]** will be flexible in accommodating the concerns of **[PARTNER]**.

Signed this _____ day of _____, 20_____:
Agency/Organization Representative School/Program Representative

Use this QR code to access the MOU template!

Implementation Phase

The **implementation phase** of partnerships can be thought of as the execution of the signed MOU. In other words, this is the partnership in action.

The implementation phase will include putting into practice the roles and responsibilities outlined in the MOU, providing the approved services, engaging in project management strategies, and enforcing accountability measures for both parties.

Management Practices

Throughout the implementation of the partnership, each entity will need to engage in management practices to:

- Keep the partnership **on track**
- **Document** relevant and important information
- Maintain clear **communication**

The management roles for each party should be delegated in the MOU and in turn be performed during the implementation phase. It is important that these responsibilities are designated appropriately amongst each entity and that each party **respects the boundaries between roles**. Some management practices to consider include:

- **Documentation**: registration, attendance, medical forms, receipts, field trip forms, schedules and calendars, hiring documents, background checks
- **Supervision**: providing one-on-one and team supervision to staff on a consistent basis, conducting bi-annual or annual evaluations of staff
- **Scheduling**: creating weekly or monthly programmatic schedules, planning events, staff schedules
- **Site Management**: maintaining supplies and materials of the space, identifying space for program time, safe space measures, ensuring security will be available

Partnerships vs. Vendorships

It is crucial that throughout the implementation of the partnership, the relationship between both entities remains **collaborative and equal.** Oftentimes, execution of the partnership can begin to change the relationship to reflect that of a vendor and payer. The main difference between a vendor and partner is that a **vendor will do exactly the work they are paid to do**—they are not always invested in the other goals of your agency or in the further development of the project—whereas **partners work with your organization to help you reach your goals** by strategizing, identifying resources, presenting new ideas, engaging with your community, and integrating into the culture of your program. Being mindful of how you are cultivating your relationship will ensure that both parties are stakeholders in the success of the partnership and ensure that the partnership is reaching its full potential.

Program Services

During the implementation phase, the proposed services to be provided will be executed by responsible parties as defined in the MOU. The proposed services should **align with the needs** defined during the identification phase and should be relevant to the community being served. Further, the schedule of service should reflect the **parameters identified in the partnership agreement**.

The services offered can be adjusted throughout the partnership period, however, **changes should be agreed upon by both parties**. Review the MOU chart to identify where these processes should be included in your agreement.

Grant Parameters

If your partnership has been established through a grant or funding stream, it is important to consider the grant parameters as the partnership is being executed.

If your partnership agreement includes **paid services**, ensure that the budget allows the use of contracted services.

Review the enrollment and attendance requirements of the grant to encourage creative approaches for **recruitment and retention strategies**, and to make sure numbers are being met.

Review evaluation requirements included in the grant and **work collaboratively** to assess the program and analyze results.

Sustainability Phase

The **sustainability phase** relates to the longevity of the established partnership.

This could either refer to ensuring the partnership lasts through the agreed-upon length, or it could mean working to continue the partnership past the original end date. In either case, there are a few things to think about when working toward a successful, sustained partnership.

Sustainability Practices

Sustainability practices can be unique to the nature of your organization and your partnership. However, there are some practices that should be reflected in your program in some capacity. These are also good starting points as you create your own methods of sustainability!

Institutionalizing the Partnership

What this means is to integrate this partnership into the **bones of the program** to avoid loss of institutional knowledge when there is staff turnover, or with the passing of time. It is important to increase **buy-in and suppor**t from each of your staff members so that there is dedication to the work and the **longevity** of the collaboration. A good way to do this is by holding joint training sessions to establish a shared culture and all gain an understanding of what the partnership will look like and how it will add to the **quality of the work** already being done. Another way to do this is to ask all staff for feedback about the partnership and use their **expertise** and suggestions to tailor the partnership to better fit your organizations.

Strategic Planning Between Entities

It will be important to **learn from each other** about what the pressing needs are within your community, what is and is not working in programming, how goals should be drafted or amended, and how effective the execution of the partnership is. Throughout the partnership, work together to **establish** short-term and long-term **goals** to keep initiatives moving forward. Additionally, think about **involving the community** in the planning process. Partnerships do not only present an opportunity to improve student outcomes, but also to assist families and **strengthen the community's relationships**. In order to do that, prioritizing their involvement in decision-making is crucial.

Collective Impact

Striving towards collective impact means working towards **systemic change**. The important elements of this include centering work around **data**, community **outreach**, and maintaining a backbone entity that helps **guide the strategy** of the partnership.[2]

Collaborative Leadership Practices

Collaborative leadership is a management practice in which members in a leadership team **work together** to make decisions and offer **transparency** amongst the organization.[3] Bringing this notion to partnerships, collaborative leadership means decision-making, supervision, hiring, evaluation, budgeting, etc. should include **equal participation** from both entities.

Accountability

A crucial piece to the sustained longevity of a partnership is keeping partners **accountable**. Partnerships are successful because of the shared responsibilities of each party and each party upholding those responsibilities. Holding each other accountable is a key practice in **maintaining the partnership relationship** (versus a vendor relationship) and is important in making sure all partnership deliverables are met. Accountability measures can be included in the MOU if parties decide to do so, or they can be decided upon privately.

Funding

Understanding the funding that supports the established partnership is an important step to sustaining the partnership. It is critical that **both parties are informed regarding the length of the funding period and how that impacts the collaboratio**n, as well as **how the funding stream supports the partnership** (i.e., paying salaries, supplying materials, providing meals, accessing technology, etc.). Knowing the full scope of how funding supports the partnership will allow your agencies to identify other funding sources to leverage following the end of the grant period.

When identifying supplemental funding sources, it is important to keep in mind that **blending and braiding funding sources may be necessary to fully support the program's longevity**. This can mean thinking about funding sources each entity has individually and then identifying how they can support various components of the program. This also may look like utilizing public and private funding sources throughout the duration of the partnership to ensure that the program continues.

To learn more about public funding sources:
- ACT Now and the Illinois Collaboration on Youth's (ICOY) Capacity Building website

To keep up to date on private funding opportunities:

- Forefront
- Foundation Directory Online
- Philanthropy Digest

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Continuous Quality Improvement is a framework in which programs and staff are focused on developing and providing activities and resources that are **responsive to their communities** and are oriented to improve the lives of those being served.[4] CQI practices ensure that activities and staff are evolving to meet the needs of the community.

Evaluations can be a useful tool in CQI strategies. An **evaluation** is a systematic investigation of how effective employed strategies are in getting where we want to go. In other words, an evaluation helps **identify if what is being done is working**. Utilizing an evaluation during the partnership period means that areas of success and improvement are identified throughout the duration of the agreement, allowing for adjustments to be made consistently and promptly. Allowing your partnership goals, implementation strategies, and services to grow alongside the community being served is a thoughtful strategy in **successful collaboration.**

Testimonials

The section below is a collection of **testimonial narratives*** shared by various afterschool and OST providers regarding their partnership experiences.

ACT Now thanks and appreciates the agencies who shared their expertise and hopes you can identify with these stories as you begin your own partnership journey!

*Emphasis added in quotes below.

Valley View School District 365

"

Our afterschool program at Valley View School District 365 (VVSD) is called "Valley View Connections powered by 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC)." **The strength of our program comes from the partnerships we have created throughout our community**. We have been able to partner with 17 different organizations and are in the process of adding almost 5 more. Some of our community partners include: Lewis University, Bolingbrook Park District, Bolingbrook STEM Association, Romeoville Police Departments, and Bolingbrook YMCA.

At VVSD, we believe that the **key to a successful school-community partnership is clear communication**. It is important that we have a sense of openness and honesty to ensure that we meet program goals. We also see this as a key strategy to sustainability and offer opportunities for our partners to convene and share ideas, strategies, and opportunities for growth during our quarterly community meetings.

Ultimately, our partnerships have strengthened our afterschool programs and have helped us provide quality enrichment opportunities for our students!

Alfred Morales (he/him), *Administrator for Family and Community Engagement*

The Children's Discovery Museum

"

The Children's Discovery Museum has a lot of different kinds of partners. We are very deeply partnered with our local universities and we have multi-faceted partnerships with our OST programs (YMCAs, YWCAs, BGA, Unity Community Center). Additionally, we recently expanded our connection with our early education centers and are currently serving 67 classrooms in the region with early childhood STEM education. We also work with a lot of the other **informal education institutions** in our community. [For example,] our history museum, our local historical house, our nature centers... and we will regularly partner together to serve other service sector organizations. So, we are a very well-connected community in that sense. The reason these connections are so vital is because there **aren't enough dollars in the community** to serve all of the needs. The best way to meet those needs is to **multiply our impact by partnering together** with our other community organizations.

We start [our partnerships] with a need; I think that is very important. [With this in mind, it is important to recognize that] the savior complex type of work is not successful. I am not going to go out into the community and say "I know everything, and I am going to fix your problems" because the thing is, I don't and I will not. I think this is really important when working with community and community partners, and especially coming from a cis-gendered white woman, I need to be really aware and cognizant of when I am working with my community partners. **I have all of these biases and lived experience** that is different from them that I need to be aware of. So, having those conversations, finding out what the needs are in the community, and figuring out "is my organization the best one to solve this problem" and, if not, who in the community can do that better is where all partnerships need to start.

Rachel Carpenter (she/her), *Director of Education*

Resources

- **ACT Now Map & Database (pp. 14):**
  https://map.actnowillinois.org/map
- **Capacity Building Website (pp. 12):**
  https://indd.adobe.com/embed/10404fcd-5c29-42e3-aa0d-2fa91a1c5098?startpage=1&allowFullscreen=true
- **Forefront (31):** https://myforefront.org/
- **Foundation Directory Online (31):**
  https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/?gclid=CjwKCAjw8JKbBhBYEiwAs3sxN8K8ukAAcGXtwifWegW3ntvaXP4i0zozdXwUR4olKIkEjJoILqKn4RoCZzcQAvD_BwE
- **Philanthropy Digest (31):**
  https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/

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[2] DiFranza, A. (2019, October 16). Northeastern University Graduate Programs. Retrieved from Northeastern University: https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/collaborative-leadership/

[3] Lyons-Warren, A. (2018). How to Sustain Partnerships. Retrieved from Elements of Success: https://elementsofsuccess.rpkn.live

[4] Minnesota Department of Health. (2023, 2 15). Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). Retrieved from Minnesotta Department of Health: https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/fhv/cqi.html

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