

Introduction

In 2016, TCC contracted with the Washtenaw Coordinated Funders to conduct an outcomes evaluation of the initiative to date, with the goal of assessing the impact of the Coordinated Funding Model on the community in the selected priority areas for funding (Aging, Early Childhood, School-Aged Youth, Housing and Homelessness, and Safety Net Health and Nutrition). Progress towards desired outcomes were assessed at the system, grantee, and funder levels. In this summary, we present the high level findings at each level and priority recommendations that came out of that report. Sector specific data and the entire list of recommendations can be found in the full report.

Findings

For each level of outcomes, we separated findings by what was found to be working well, what was not working well, and what had mixed evidence of success.

System Outcomes

What's working well?

Despite some concerns about the outcome process, grantees have generally coalesced around priority outcomes. Grantees reported that the Coordinated Funding Priority Areas do represent the areas of greatest need in Washtenaw County. Additionally, grantees are clear on what the outcomes mean and how to direct their services to meet them.

What has mixed evidence of success?

Though there is some evidence of increased integration of services as a result of the Coordinated Funding model, there was mixed data available on the improvements made towards the community-level outcomes prioritized by the Coordinated Funders. Publicly available data such as local and state department records and reports show that there was variation among the sectors in the availability of comparative data over time. This made it harder in some cases to assess the progress that has been made in certain Priority Areas. Despite this, trends did indicate that the broader Washtenaw County population was experiencing some positive outcomes in each of the Priority Areas, which Coordinated Funding grantees have likely contributed to in some way. A summary of key findings are listed below.

Priority Area	Program Quality Findings	Community Progress Findings
Housing and Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40% of survey respondents felt they increased their learning around how to better serve participants as a result of Coordinated Funding 80% of survey respondents felt they were better able to decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness as a result of Coordinated Funding The Sector Leader is viewed as having good information on best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in the number of people counted during the annual homeless count
Aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 76% of survey respondents felt they were better able to increase or maintain independent living factors for vulnerable low- income adults over age 60 as a result of Coordinated Funding Increased collaboration and sharing of best practices across grantees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in social support among participants Unchanged rate of poverty Some decreases in life satisfaction
Early Childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of survey respondents felt that, as a result of Coordinated Funding, they were better able to increase the developmental readiness of children with high needs so they can succeed in school at the time of entry 100% of survey respondents felt like they were better able to serve their participants as a result of Coordinated Funding 66% of survey respondents felt Coordinated Funding increased service integration among grantees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased participation in early childhood programming Increased proportion of children meeting or exceeding socio-emotional expectations Unchanged rate of childhood poverty
Safety Net Health and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreased perception of service integration as a result of Coordinated Funding Increased collaboration and sharing of best practices among grantees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreased percentage of uninsured Increased percentage of low-income adults reducing food intake due to cost Unchanged percentage of people who are food insecure

Priority Area	Program Quality Findings	Community Progress Findings
School-Aged Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased learning and sharing of best practices among grantees 75% of survey respondents felt organizations in their sector are more deliberate and strategic about measuring program outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved graduation rates (overall and low-income youth) Little to no increase in absenteeism Little to no increase in rates of abuse Increased percentage of youth who report often feeling safe in school

Grantee Outcomes

What’s working well?

Coordinated Funding grantees are finding capacity-building support to be useful for their organizations and easy to access due to its simple application process. Those who received capacity-building funding felt that it provided them with additional resources to improve the effectiveness of their work. Grantees are also finding that as a result of Coordinated Funding they have gotten more familiar with other organizations and are now better able to coordinate services county-wide. They see this as a real improvement from the isolated settings that existed previously.

What has mixed evidence of success?

Though grantees greatly appreciated that services in the Priority Areas were becoming more coordinated, some felt that the emphasis coming from funders for nonprofits to collaborate indicated a push towards mergers. This was also raised in the previous evaluation. Additionally, grantees struggled to articulate the impact of Coordinated Funding in achieving the targeted outcomes. While they understand the purpose and structure of the Coordinated Funding model, it remains debatable among grantees that the amount of money being provided by funders is adequate to truly achieve impact.

There were also mixed feelings around outcomes, their measurement, and grantees ability to collect the right data for reporting. There is a perception among grantees that the Coordinated Funding outcomes selected are not the most meaningful for their sectors and they struggle with the lack of alignment between Coordinated Funding outcomes and those of other funders. As such, there a varying levels of grantee ability to meaning fully engage with the data collection. Related to this some grantees are experiencing significant challenges with measuring and reporting on these outcomes such as:

- Required data is considered to be output tracking as opposed to evaluation and as such doesn’t facilitate learning

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- Coordinated Funding reporting requirements are not aligning with data grantees collect at their organizations
- Data not being collected in a uniform way across the sector
- Demographic data required for reporting to the Coordinated Funders are not aligned with the way other funders request it

What is not working well?

The grant process (e.g., the grant application and reporting) is seen as overly cumbersome by many grantees. Grantees had the expectation that applying for Coordinated Funding would provide a streamlined process, especially for those who were applying for funding in multiple Priority Areas. However that was not the case and grantees felt the administrative burden of the applications was too much given the actual grant amounts they received. Though both the application and reporting documents have been updated since our previous evaluation, grantees still viewed the reporting process as a big challenge. Grantees don't see the six-month reporting process as having a clear strategic purpose, as the results don't seem to be audited or reviewed by the Coordinated Funders.

In addition to the burden of the reporting process, grantees experienced confusion around the funding process. Receiving separate checks from each funder, as opposed to receiving one Coordinated Funding check, made grantees question whether or not the funding was coming from the Coordinated Funders themselves or just an intersection between Coordinated Funding and the individual grant provider that may be authorizing the grant award. However, there seemed to be much less confusion around this than what was reported in the previous evaluation, indicating some improvement around clarity of Coordinated Funding operations. Lastly, grantees are seeing the Sector Leader role as preventing a meaningful relationship between themselves and the Coordinated Funders. Grantees' perceive the Sector Leaders to be middlemen that enforce the desires of the funders but without providing grantees with a location or process for airing their concerns.

There were also mixed feelings about the Sector Leader roles and their meetings with grantees. Sector Leaders expressed their interest in the aspects of their role related to understanding and communication the broader context of their sector, but have concerns about their ability to offer meaningful assistance to grantees. As such, the Priority Area meetings are not always viewed as helpful. Sector Leaders perceive a greater emphasis on data rather than current trends, needs and concerns in their given Priority Area. This poses a challenge for them to create cohesive and meaningful meetings for all grantee, as the focus on data can seem to be serving as an accountability mechanism rather than a learning opportunity. Additionally grantees funded in multiple areas found little consistency among the different Priority Area meetings.

Funder Outcomes

What's working well?

The organizational impact on Funders as a direct result of participating in this model is working well. Funders are seeing improvements within their organizations in multiple areas. These include increased sector area knowledge, increased adaptive capacity, improved grant systems and a changed strategic perspective. The sense of collaboration across the group of funders is also working well. Funders felt there was a high level of collaboration among all funders with roles being more collaborative and increased sharing of knowledge across the group of funders. Funders also perceived the Coordinated Funding model as better positioning them to leverage and sustain their funding through external factors that might normally effect funding such as staff transitions and recessions. The Coordinated Funding model is also received to have a positive impact on elected officials by helping to provide them with a better understanding of issues in the health and human services sector, which has resulted in stronger commitment to sustain public funding for services that address those issues.

What has mixed evidence of success?

There was limited evidence to prove that this model has had an impact on the philanthropic field outside of the funders that are involved. External foundations were not able to speak to the improvements the Coordinated Funding model has brought to the field. There is also some uneasiness around the lack of clarity about how funding decisions are made, as grantees and sector leaders reported that they did not have a solid understanding around the factors that influence how dollars are allocated. Additionally, there were some concerns by grantees that the model does not allow for redirection of funds in rapid response to emerging issues.

What is not working well?

Grantees felt their relationship with funders have declined as a result of feeling less connection and trust with funders. This was a reverse of findings from the 2011 evaluation, during which they expressed an improved relationship with funders as a result of the Coordinated Funding collaborative. Because of this strain on the relationship with funders, grantees are experiencing more anxiety around reporting and handling challenges in outcome attainment. In relation to this, funder communications were not viewed as transparent by both grantees and Sector Leaders as they felt that communications about key changes to the model such as Priority Area groupings and Sector Leader transitions were not shared with them in a helpful way.

Recommendations

TCC Group provided a full list of recommendations in the main report, again organized by Funder, Grantee and System level. For this executive summary we have highlighted specific recommendations that are suggested priorities to improve outcomes in the future.

- **Consider adding a pool of money that can be used for responsive grants.** These grants would still be tied to the community outcomes, but would be used to respond to any community events or needs that may shift what different sector areas need.
- **Work to increase transparency in relationships.** The Coordinated Funders may want to work on improving their own transparency with grantees by more clearly communicating around changes to grant making (i.e., changes to the amount of funding available), sharing other relevant information, such as evaluative findings (i.e., findings from this evaluation), and more candid assessments with grantees about the weaknesses of the model and how the Coordinated Funders hope to strengthen those areas.
- **Use the findings of this report to better articulate the value of Coordinated Funding.** Funders may need to reframe the benefit of Coordinated Funding to grantees (and other human service organizations in the community) based on a more realistic assessment of the grantee experience and a more candid description of the benefits of Coordinated Funding for the participating funders.
- **Clarify Sector Leader roles.** The Coordinated Funders may want to create something akin to a job description for Sector Leaders that includes all of their roles, and a feasible plan for performing the associated tasks.