

2026

**Backbone Leaders**

**LEARNING LAB**





# Agenda for Today's Overview of the Backbone Leaders Learning Lab



- About the Collective Impact Forum
- Why the Backbone Leaders Learning Lab?
- Program Overview
- Topics & Learning Outcomes
- Who Should Join?
- Sample Session Outline
- Program Logistics and How to Join
- Q&A

*Today is an info session on the program to help you determine if you'd like to participate; this is not a training on playing the backbone role.*



## Collective Impact Forum Team and Advisors



FORUM FOR  
COMMUNITY  
SOLUTIONS  
 aspen institute

The Collective Impact Forum is co-led and managed by FSG and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions.

The Forum's raises its own funds for its programming, while knowledge and learning is shared bi-directionally with our home organizations.



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# FSG and the Aspen Institute Learn and Support the Field in Several Ways

## INSPIRING AND SUPPORTING THROUGH FIELD BUILDING

The **Collective Impact Forum** inspires and supports people to use collective impact approaches to advance community-driven solutions that achieve equitable outcomes for individuals and communities



## HANDS ON SUPPORT WITH COMMUNITIES

- ✓ Youth mental health in Cincinnati
- ✓ Childhood obesity in Dallas
- ✓ Substance abuse on Staten Island
- ✓ Cradle to career in King County
- ✓ Preterm birth in Fresno
- ✓ Health in the Rio Grande Valley
- ✓ Diabetes in Minnesota

## CATALYZING CHANGE THROUGH IMPACT NETWORKS

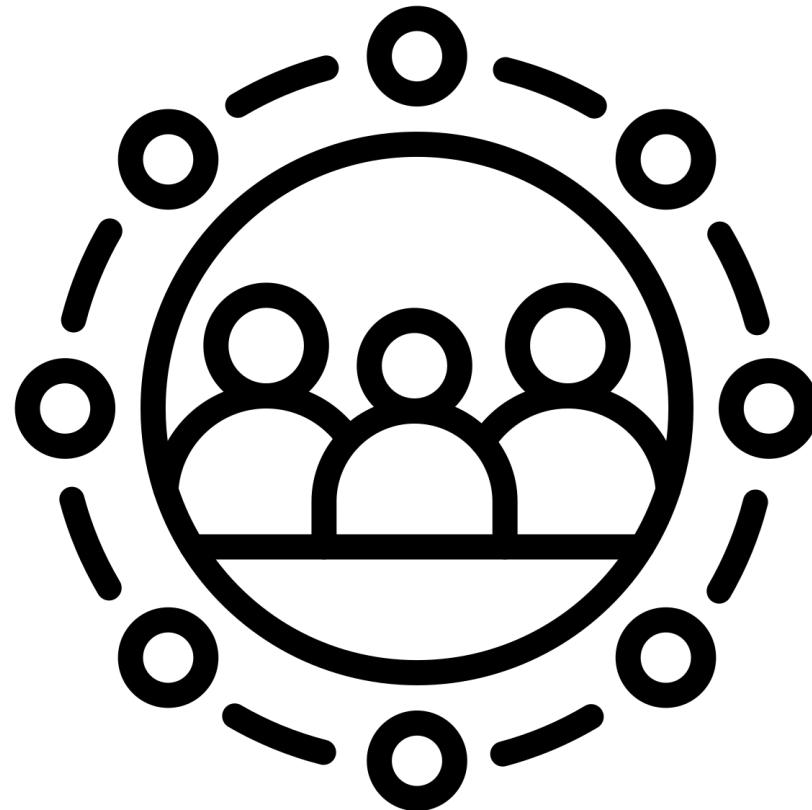
The **Aspen Forum For Community Solutions** hosts the Opportunity Youth Forum (US based) and Global Opportunity Youth Network –impact networks of over 60 communities working to advance outcomes for opportunity youth through a collaborative, centric place based approach

## ADVANCING PRACTICE THROUGH THOUGHT LEADERSHIP





## Why This Matters: The Backbone Role Today





# Core Topics & Learning Outcomes

## Topics will include:

- Strengthening backbone leadership
- Sustaining momentum in long-term collaborative work
- Understanding and advancing systems change through place-based collaboration
- Moving your work forward in today's environment

## Learning Outcomes:

- Leadership tools for advancing systems change
  - Improved clarity about the backbone role how to execute it with confidence and influence
- Strategies for navigating uncertainty and community dynamics
- A nationwide peer network of leaders facing the same challenges and barriers



## Program Overview

Four interactive virtual sessions over combining

- Instruction
- Reflection
- Small-group peer learning
- Coaching

Small cohort (space limited to 25) for high-touch experience



## Example Virtual Three-Hour Session

- Enter with music!
- Welcome and grounding exercise
- Small group activity to build connection
- Training on sustaining collaboration from the CI Forum faculty
- Small group peer-consults on sustainability challenge
- Full group share out
- Individuals record commitments for action between meetings
- Close and review suggested readings



## Foundational Materials

- [Collective Impact \(original 2011 article\)](#)
- [Centering Equity in Collective Impact](#)
- [The Water of Systems Change](#)
- [Backbone Leadership Is Different](#)
- [A Guide for Building a Sustainable and Resilient Collaboration](#)
- [Responding to Threats and Challenges Planning Tool](#)



## Who Should Join

- Individuals playing the backbone role
- Leaders of emerging or established place-based collaborations (e.g., collective impact, multi-sector collaborations, place-based partnerships)
- Practitioners who want to deepen their systems-change practice and connect with peers

***Enrollment is first come, first served***



## Program Logistics

**\$2,000 per participant**

Registration includes

- **4 Learning Lab sessions** February 25 – April 10
  - *Session recordings will be shared after, for future reference*
  - **Cohort 1: Feb. 25, March 11, April 8, and either March 24 or 25 for coaching**  
*(This cohort is now full.)*
  - **Cohort 2: Feb. 27, March 13, April 10, and either March 26 or 27 for coaching**  
*(This cohort has spots available.)*
- **Facilitating Collaborative Meetings Workshop**, March 17 - 18, 2026 (\$249 value)
- **2026 Collective Impact Action Summit**, April 14 - 16, 2026 (\$449 value)

Space is intentionally limited to **25 participants** for each Learning Lab cohort to create an intimate, high-touch learning environment

**Registration closes February 20, 2026. As one cohort is already full, we recommend registering for Cohort 2 soon to save your spot.**



How to Join!



Sign Up Here!  
[Registration Page](#)



## Q&A





# REGISTRATION IS OPEN FOR THE 2026 ACTION SUMMIT!

- **Opening Keynote** conversation with Emmy-Nominated storyteller and thought leader, **Baratunde Thurston!**
- **Over 30 practical sessions**; recordings of most available for up to 3 months post event
- **Connect with over 1,000** backbone leaders, practitioners, funders, and partners from around the world
- **Earlybird prices available through March 13!**  
[Register now.](#)





## Upcoming Learning Opportunities

### **The Pursuit of Systems Change (February 2026)**

- February 19, 1pm - 4pm ET
- *Faculty: Jennifer Juster and Courtney W. Robertson*

### **Facilitating Collaborative Meetings (March 2026)**

- **Part 1:** Tuesday, March 17, 1pm – 4pm ET
- **Part 2:** Wednesday, March 18, 1pm – 4pm ET
- *Faculty: Courtney W. Robertson*



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## APPENDIX: Key Definitions



## Leadership Framing



### Individual Leadership



### Collaborative Leadership



### Collective Leadership



# Leadership Framing Defined

- **Individual Leadership:** The values, lived experiences, and skills of individuals that shape how they assume formal and informal leadership roles. Individual leadership is self-driven, autonomous, and does not have to be negotiated.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** The embodiment and practice of your individual leadership. The way an individual brings their full self, including their values, lived experience, and leadership skills, to create the conditions for a group to work together in pursuit of a common goal. It is about building trust, cultivating alignment, and enabling others to step into leadership. It is a relational and adaptive practice that helps a group move beyond individual agendas towards a collective vision and action.
- **Collective Leadership:** What becomes possible when strong collaborative leadership has created the trust, structure, and alignment needed for leadership and power to be distributed across a group. It is both a model of shared leadership and an approach to sustaining it. The group shares responsibility, decision-making, and accountability, and members lead from where they sit, both within the collaborative and across their systems and networks, to advance a common agenda. The leader's role shifts to holding the container lightly, sensing where coordination is needed, and supporting others to lead from their spheres of influence in service of systems change.