THE
IMPACT
HUB
FIELD GUIDE

By Gordon LaForge and Charles Euchner

Contents

A Guide for Impact

We live in a time of polycrisis, overlapping and urgent geopolitical and global threats. The world has always experienced conflict and catastrophe, but human beings have never before had the capacity to alter the climate, biodiversity, and quality of air, water, and soil on a planetary scale. These threats demand cooperation, collective action, and new ways of organizing and acting in global politics.

New America is committed to help develop and shape a paradigm for global politics that prioritizes human security and planetary sustainability. Nation-states and their governments have many roles to play in this system. They act on behalf of their populations, but they also act alongside and in conjunction with a host of "global actors" – the countless NGOs, businesses, civic organizations, faith groups, and others that work across borders to address global problems. All these actors come together to create institutions, tools that enable them to pool their efforts and resources to understand, mitigate, and solve risks and problems.

The multilateral institutions created as part of the international order established after World War II were built for a bygone era, when an exclusive group of countries held power and were charged with the responsibility of maintaining peace, security, and prosperity. Those institutions still have a role to play if their members can find the political will to reform, update, and expand them to reflect a very different configuration of global power and to develop the habits and practices of inclusion.

Impact hubs can be created by multilateral institutions, but also by national and subnational governments, civic groups, corporations, philanthropies, faith groups and others. They represent an institutional model that can harness the talents and capabilities of all these actors in the service of solving specific public problems. Their success or failure is measured by the extent to which they have a direct and measurable impact on people's lives. It's a model designed for action and results.

A number of impact hubs already exist, whether or not they use the terminology. Our hope is that by identifying their common elements and developing a common vocabulary to capture their attributes, we can offer a template to inspire the creation of many more. That is the purpose of this guide.

We also hope that this guide will be a conversation-starter. As individuals in communities all over the world seek to participate in addressing threats and opportunities at the local, national, provincial, or global level, they can adopt and adapt this model to fit their needs. Amendments, improvements, questions, and suggestions will all be welcome. Any reader of this guide can create or participate in creating a hub: follow the steps to find and pull together partners to pursue a mission with measurable impact. We cannot build a new global politics focused on people and planet without you.

Anne-Marie Slaughter
CEO, New America

A Guide for Action

In the face of complex challenges, organizations often instinctively respond by forming committees or agencies in an attempt to comprehend and address the issues at hand. More frequently than not, this leads to increased administrative workload and institutional bloat. Recognizing the need for a more nimble and impactful approach, the Chandler Institute of Governance (CIG) is keen to identify more effective ways for governments, communities, businesses, and citizens to collaborate. We set out to find alternatives to the creation of permanent entities that may outlive their usefulness.

Founded on the belief that good governance is the foundation for building strong nations, CIG is committed to unlocking a nation's potential through excellence in national governance. Our work spans training programs, technical projects, and knowledge creation and sharing. As a trusted partner to public sector leaders around the world, CIG strives to provide highly practical solutions and hands-on knowledge of governance required by practitioners.

This guide is born out of a fundamental question: How can entities coordinate more effectively and mobilize resources without resorting to conventional committees? We advocate for a paradigm shift, emphasizing the importance of achieving specific policy goals over broad agendas. These platforms should not only discuss issues but actively contribute to the solutions, offering the knowledge and expertise necessary to tackle complex problems. Institutions can learn from various impact hub models, such as the successful Alliances for Action (AfAs), convened by the Government of Singapore, which demonstrates the power of mobilizing multiple parties to further national priorities.

While the guide is intended to be used by practitioners across the public and private sectors and civil communities, our experience working with governments in Africa and Southeast Asia leads us to believe that fellow government practitioners will find specific sections particularly useful. These include Formulating the Impact Hub Mission (page 9), Finding and Engaging Partners (pages 11-13), Orchestrating the Work (pages 19-21), and Folding Up the Impact Hub after it has completed its mission (page 27).

CIG is eager to explore collaborations with government leaders and officials who are keen to utilize the impact hub methodology as a practical and effective tool to address pressing challenges and advance shared priorities. By embracing the practical frameworks and ideas outlined herein, we can forge new pathways to collaboration, innovation, and sustainable development.

Wu Wei Neng
CEO, Chandler Institute of Governance and Dean, Chandler Academy of Governance

- A CLEAR, SINGULAR, AND LIMITED MISSION.
- A CORE TEAM THAT ORCHESTRATES THE PARTNERS AND MEASURES IMPACT.
- MEASURABLE, VERIFIABLE IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S LIVES.
- IMPACT HUB
- ACTION ORIENTATED FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS, NOT STUDY OR ANALYSIS.
- COLLABORATION OF PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND CIVIC PARTNERS.

INTRODUCTION

What is an Impact Hub?

An impact hub is a special initiative that brings together partners from across sectors to address a specific, clearly defined policy challenge by implementing a solution and employing metrics to track the impact of its actions.

Why is an Impact Hub Different?

Impact hubs address a wide range of problems in areas ranging from public health to public safety, farming to climate adaptation, and housing to environmental protection.

Some impact hubs limit their work to a locality or region, others operate at a national or even global scale.

Whatever its focus, an impact hub addresses a specific, concrete problem, uses clear metrics for success, and brings in partners from across sectors. It does not spread itself too thin and avoids the temptation to broaden its mission and become a permanent fixture in the political system.

An impact hub is a time-bound institution, intended to solve a specific problem and then close or transition into something else. It is meant to complement, not replace, existing efforts and institutions; indeed, it can pull them together. A nimble, networked institution, an impact hub adapts and responds to a changing environment to accomplish its mission.

Who Can Build an Impact Hub?

The first step toward building an impact hub can be taken by anyone searching for an innovative approach to solving a public problem. An official in a national government. A local community leader. An international philanthropist. A corporate CEO. A professor at a university. A faith leader. The head of a United Nations agency. Or any individual citizen who wants to make a difference.

When are Impact Hubs Built?

Leaders create an impact hub when a single organization or sector cannot solve a public problem on its own. This may be due to limited bandwidth, political pressures, inadequate resources, organizational constraints, or legal or jurisdictional limitations. An impact hub gathers in the expertise, resources, and capabilities of partners from the public, for-profit, and civic sectors.

How to Read this Guide

This field guide is a step-by-step manual for building an impact hub. The process, strategies, and tactics it describes are informed by research into successful impact hubs and a broad, multidisciplinary literature. The guide is intended as general guidance and a compilation of best practices, with the understanding that every challenge is distinct and every impact hub is uniquely tailored to the nature, scale, and context of the problem.
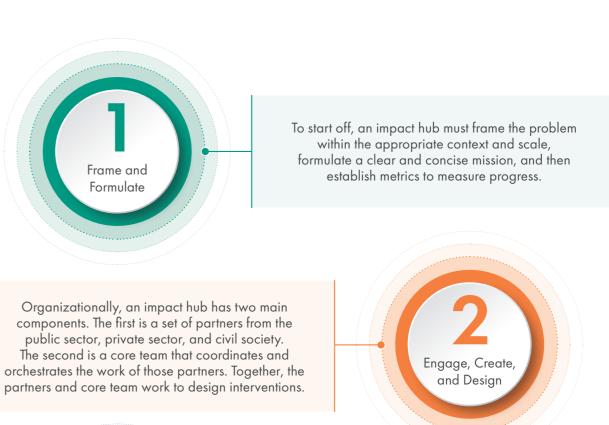
Impact Hubs in Action

	Gavi The Vaccine Alliance	Center for Civilians in Conflict	SG Together	apopo SAVES LIVES	The Carter Center	Sanitation and Water for All	Partnerships for Parks
Problem	Millions of people die each year from preventable infectious diseases because they lack access to vaccinations.	Tens of thousands of innocent civilians die in armed conflicts every year.	Complex economic, social and environmental issues in Singapore that require a whole-of-society response, and citizens' growing aspirations to co-create solutions with the government.	Landmines in post-conflict zones cause thousands of deaths and injuries each year but removing them is dangerous and expensive.	Millions in Africa suffered from an untreatable parasite called Guinea Worm.	Half the world's population lacks access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, leading to nearly 1 million disease-related deaths per year.	Neighborhood parks in the outer boroughs of New York City were in disrepair and neglected.
Mission	Pool funding and capabilities to obtain and deliver vaccines to the world's poorest populations.	Prevent harm to civilians in conflict areas by forging agreements between warring parties.	Create short-term, ad-hoc collaborations across government, community and businesses to tackle clear challenges, from online harms to climate action.	Train and deploy rats to sniff out landmines for removal in post-conflict zones.	Closely engage local communities to eradicate Guinea Worm.	Support national governments, build coalitions, and raise investment to ensure all people have access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene.	Implement plans and build coalitions to improve parks and increase their use.
Partners	National governments, philanthropies, UN agencies, local NGOs, vaccine manufacturing and distribution companies.	National governments, military staff colleges, security forces, local leaders, civilians.	Government agencies, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and grassroots associations, and citizens.	Neuroscientists and other academics, national governments, local governments, international NGOs, local NGOs, UN agencies.	International NGOs, tribal leaders, local NGOs, national governments.	Governments, utilities, regulators, donors, financial institutions, UN agencies, civil society and research organizations, and the private sector.	City government, state agencies, foundations, grassroots organizations.
Impact Metric	Number of children immunized.	Decline in numbers of civilian deaths in warzones.	Metrics varied by hub, for example: number of people involved, feedback received, capabilities developed within target groups, and completed number of projects and pilots.	Number of landmines removed and disposed of.	Number of people infected with Guinea Worm.	Number of realized government commitments and levels of financing.	Number of parks improved and measures of safety, usage, and events held at the parks.

> "An impact hub makes a measurable, verifiable impact on a problem.

HOW TO BUILD AN IMPACT HUB

Generally, building an impact hub has four phases:

1 — Frame and Formulate

To start off, an impact hub must frame the problem within the appropriate context and scale, formulate a clear and concise mission, and then establish metrics to measure progress.

2 — Engage, Create, and Design

Organizationally, an impact hub has two main components. The first is a set of partners from the public sector, private sector, and civil society. The second is a core team that coordinates and orchestrates the work of those partners. Together, the partners and core team work to design interventions.
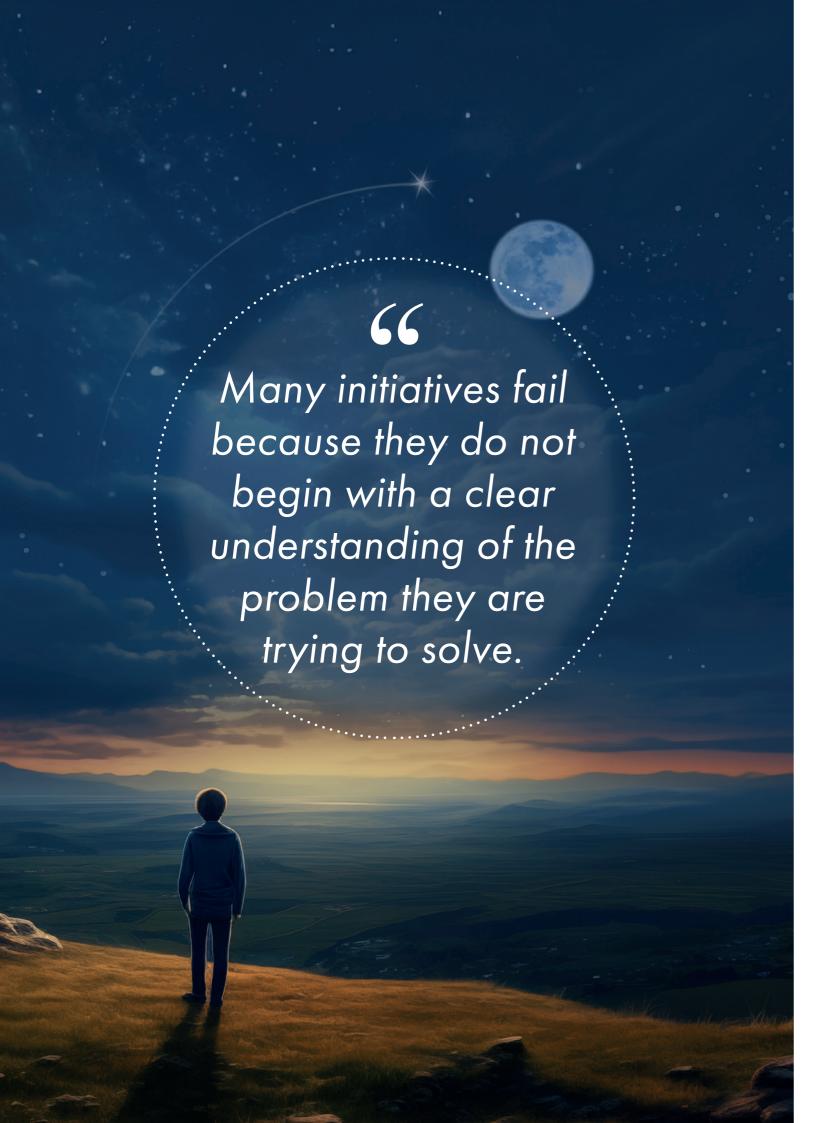
3 — Orchestrate the Work

Like a conductor directing the various players through a symphony, a core team orchestrates the partners in the impact hub." The core team makes sure everyone is sailing in the same direction, but it is the partners that do the work.

4 — Track, Assess, and Adjust

An impact hub makes a measurable, verifiable impact on a problem. To ensure that it is doing so requires three things: tracking progress, assessing impact, and making adjustments.

> "
> *Many initiatives fail because they do not begin with a clear understanding of the problem they are trying to solve.*

Phase 1:
Frame the Problem and Formulate the Mission

To start off, an impact hub must frame the problem within the appropriate context and scale, formulate a clear and concise mission, and then establish metrics to measure progress.

Step One – Frame the Problem

The first step is to clearly frame the problem. Many initiatives fail because they do not begin with a clear understanding of the problem they are trying to solve.

Whether a government ministry, international organization, or NGO, all public initiatives seek to make an impact on some sort of public problem.

But not all public problems are suitable for an impact hub. The problems impact hubs solve are:

- **Measurable:** The problem is quantifiable.
- **Achievable:** The problem can be solved with current means and has a clear endpoint.
- **Singular:** The problem is one problem, not a cluster of related problems

Unsuitable Problem Framing for an Impact Hub	Why not?	Suitable Problem Framing for an Impact Hub
Economic uncertainty	Not measurable	Homelessness in New York City
Aging	Not achievable	Polio globally
Environmental degradation	Not singular	Deforestation in the Amazon

The problem might be an ongoing systemic issue (such as homelessness) or a temporary crisis (such as the COVID-19 pandemic).

When framing the problem, consider the following three questions:

What is the scale of the problem?
Choose what scale of the problem to tackle. Is the focus on a single community? On a single city? A nation? Or is it global?

Who is affected by this problem?
Identify the populations most affected by the problem. That will help point the way toward solutions.

Why have other institutions failed to fully address this problem already?
Understand why existing or previous efforts fall short. Some possible reasons include:

- **Political will:** The problem might not be a priority for government authorities, key interest groups, and constituencies.
- **Resources:** Lack of funds, technology, equipment, personnel, or other resources.
- **Expertise:** Lack of technical expertise or practical experience to address the issue.
- **Bandwidth:** Lack of time to focus on the problem.
- **Boundaries:** The problem might cross jurisdictions or areas of authority.

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Forming a Braintrust and Engaging People on the Ground

In the first phase of building an impact hub, it helps to gather a "braintrust" of trusted colleagues and associates to frame the problem and formulate the mission. The braintrust, which can be informal or formal, invites members to share their ideas without reservation and encourages different perspectives and viewpoints so as to avoid groupthink. Research shows that teams that are diverse in identity and cognitive approach perform better at creativity and problem-solving.

Since the purpose of any impact hub is to make a measurable impact on people's lives, it is important to engage people who are closest to the problem and are most affected by it. Whether through listening sessions, focus groups, or surveys, understanding their situation will help to frame the problem and formulate the mission. Doing so will also help build community-level networks that will be important in Phase 2 (Engage, Create, and Design).

A community meeting to brainstorm climate resilience in the neighborhood, Centre for Liveable Cities, Singapore.
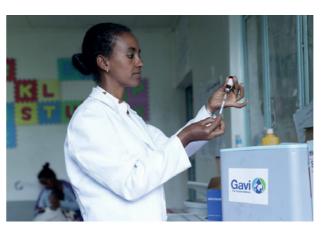
Step Two – Formulate a Mission

An impact hub addresses a problem by carrying out a clear, singular, and limited mission. **Clear** in that it is precisely defined; **singular** in that it is a single mission, not many missions; **limited** in that it does not sprawl or creep into other areas and it is time-bound and achievable.

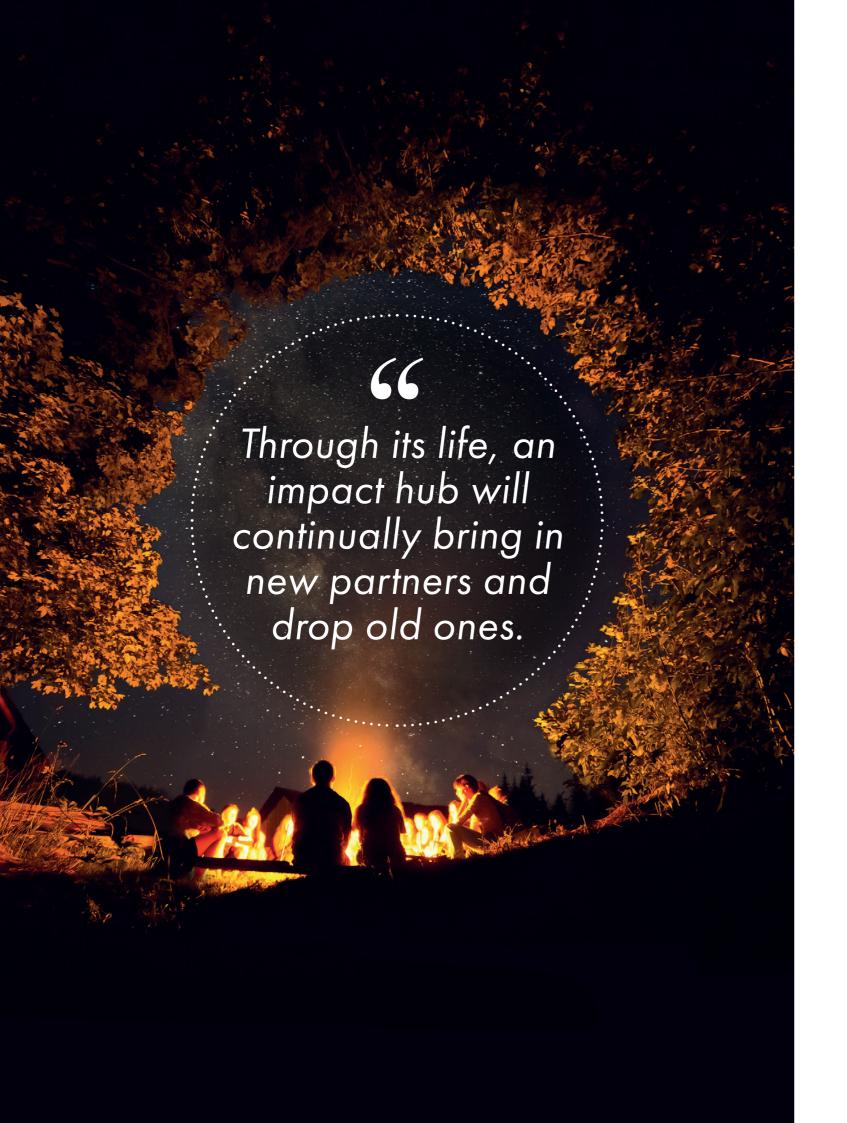| The Difference between a General Mission and a Clear, Singular, Limited Mission	
Instead of trying to rehabilitate post-conflict societies...	...APOPO deploys rats to identify landmines for disposal.
Instead of trying to end wars or even broker cease fires...	...CIVIC develops relationships with all sides in the conflict to broker agreements that protect civilians caught in the crossfire.
Instead of trying to end poverty and disease in West Africa...	...the Carter Center engages local communities to spread hygiene practices that can eradicate an extremely painful parasitic infection.
Instead of seeking to end all health care disparities...	...Gavi marshalls funding and capability to deliver vaccines to people who otherwise could not obtain them.
Instead of trying to change everyone's behavior to mitigate climate change impacts ...	...one Alliance for Action implemented a community-led action plan to build climate change resilience in one Singapore neighborhood.

Step Three – Establish Metrics

A health worker prepares to administer a vaccine provided by Gavi.

To determine whether an impact hub is making progress toward its mission, there must be metrics in place. Metrics are crucial for demonstrating that the impact hub is making a **measurable**, **verifiable** impact on people's lives.

A metric should measure progress toward the mission. If the mission is to reduce illiteracy in rural India, then the impact metric should be the percentage of people over a certain age who can read. The impact metric should not be an output, such as number of books delivered or number of courses held.

Phase 2
Engage Partners, Create the Core Team, Design Interventions

2

*Organizationally, an impact hub has two main components. The first is a set of partners from the **public sector**, **private sector**, and **civil society**. The second is a core team that coordinates and orchestrates the work of those partners. Together, the partners and core team work to design interventions.*

Step One – Find and Engage Partners

Partnerships are the engines of an impact hub. Partners work together to carry out the hub's mission. Some partners will be permanent and others will be temporary. Some will be close, and some will be loose. Through its life, an impact hub will continually bring in new partners and drop old ones that are no longer necessary for accomplishing the mission.

A. Mapping Potential Partners
First, identify potential partners through a mapping exercise. Start by making a list of potential partners that work in the problem space or that might be able to contribute to the mission.

Prioritize potential partners, and consider how to balance between the ease of administrative management and the need to ensure a diverse and broad range of contributors. Think about whether it would also be useful to include individual citizens in an impact hub.

To identify potential partners, discuss ideas with the braintrust, ask colleagues and associates, and search online. Identify both individuals and organizations and points of contact within them.

> *Note*
> An impact hub is a nimble institution. Be wary of rapid growth and the risk of spreading too thin. Greater size means the job of coordination is harder.

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The Strength of Weak Ties

In social network analysis, the strength of a tie refers to how frequently and how intimately we interact with another person. We have strong ties with family members, close friends, and work team members – people with whom we interact regularly and deeply. We have weak ties with less familiar acquaintances, such as more distant friends, colleagues on other teams, or people we may have met once at a conference or networking event.

When trying to discover new information – such as identifying partners who work on a particular problem – **it is more effective to reach out to weak ties** rather than strong ties. That is because weak ties are likely to have information that you have not been exposed to before, and they are likely to be part of social and professional circles different from your own.

> " *Through its life, an impact hub will continually bring in new partners and drop old ones.*

Potential Partners

	Public Sector	Private Sector	Civil Society
Types	Government ministries, agencies, and offices (national, subnational, local); UN agencies and intergovernmental bodies; regional organizations; public media; militaries and law enforcement.	Multinational corporations; small businesses; professional firms; media organizations; manufacturers.	NGOs (international, national, local); universities; faith groups; advocacy organizations; service organizations; philanthropies; foundations; focus groups.
Roles	Legitimacy, political support, public services, expertise.	Logistical and marketing expertise; distribution networks; and resources (financial and in-kind).	Expertise, resources, on-the-ground information, implementation support, and relationships.

*This list is not comprehensive

BEST PRACTICES

Mapping Partners
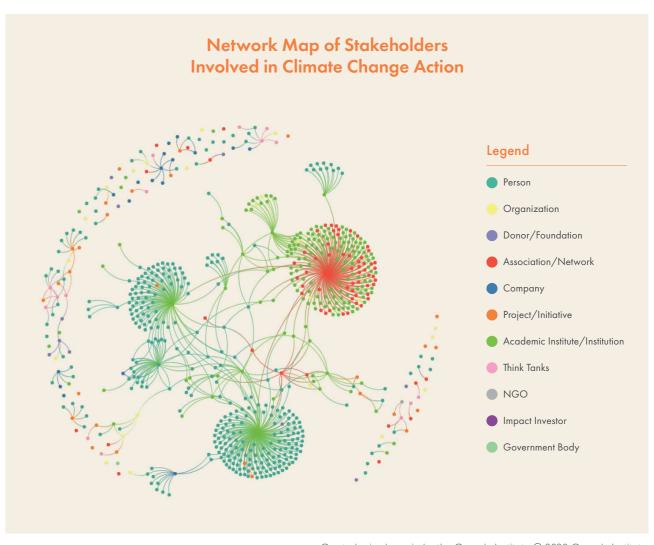
Make use of online networks such as LinkedIn.

Draw network maps or make use of network mapping software such as kumu.io to understand how different partners could be connected.

When evaluating possible partners, consider the following questions:

- What capabilities or resources can the partner bring to the effort?
- Is the partner connected to other potential partners or constituencies?
- Can they broker connections to others?
- What are the potential risks and challenges of working with a certain partner?
- What is the track record and reputation of the partner, particularly regarding collaborative work?

Evaluate partner connections as well as capabilities.

Network Map of Stakeholders Involved in Climate Change Action

Legend

- Person
- Organization
- Donor/Foundation
- Association/Network
- Company
- Project/Initiative
- Academic Institute/Institution
- Think Tanks
- NGO
- Impact Investor
- Government Body

Created using kumu.io by the Cascade Institute © 2020 Cascade Institute.

B. Recruiting Partners

Start by assembling small group of enthusiastic partners – a "**coalition of the willing**" or early adopters – that can help to notch wins and build momentum.

As the work of the impact hub unfolds and its reach and capacity expand, bring new partners in as needed. Initial success will make the hub more attractive to more partners.

From the outset, appeal to a potential partner's values and core competencies. Be clear with partners about roles, resources, and powers. Every partner should be clear on expectations and know how they fit into the division of labor: who does what, when, and how.

To formalize relationships, create memorandums of understanding and, when necessary, formal contracts for services and work. Partners should have skin in the game and feel a shared sense of accountability to the impact hub and its mission.

Use various strategies to contact partners for the first time, such as:

- **Traditional outreach**
  Make phone calls and send emails and formal letters.

- **Networking**
  Ask allies, acquaintances, and high-level contacts for introductions. Include well-connected "brokers" in the early coalition.

- **Social Media**
  Send direct messages on LinkedIn, Facebook, and other social media platforms.

Step Two – Create a Core Team

The "hub" in an impact hub is a small core team that coordinates partners and drives operations. It might take the form of a secretariat, leadership team, task force, or steering committee, but whatever the name it should be **small** and **independent**.

Think of it as the collaborative engine that makes all the parts of the machine work to drive the mission forward.

Role Areas and Responsibilities
Core team roles and responsibilities will vary depending on the impact hub, but in general might include the following.

- **Budget and Financial**
  Manage and oversee budgets and financial planning

- **Development**
  Identify and cultivate new partners, including funders

- **Communications**
  Communicate externally and liaise with media

- **Network Management**
  Coordinate, align, and de-conflict partners, and manage the flow of information internally

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**
  Track progress toward goals

- **Administration**
  Manage day-to-day administrative tasks

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> *The core team can be thought of as the collaborative engine that makes all the parts of the machine work to drive the mission forward.*

Board of Directors and Advisory Board
Either during or after building the core team, create two boards:

A board of directors makes governance decisions and includes key leaders, funders, and stakeholder group representatives.

An advisory board is a group of esteemed outside experts that can provide advice.

Both boards can help bolster the impact hub's legitimacy and credibility.

Resource Persons
Consider if it would also be worthwhile putting together a pool of resource persons, especially when dealing with more complex issues.

Resource persons are subject-matter experts who may be from relevant government agencies, academia, non-governmental or non-profit organizations, private sector etc. They can help to dispel misconceptions, unpack existing government policies, serve as a sounding board, or provide specialized or technical knowledge.

Fundraising
An impact hub requires funding to maintain the core team and carry out certain operations. Community-level impact hubs might work with minimal financing, relying on volunteers and low-cost technologies. A global impact hub might require billions of dollars to support farflung operations and high levels of expertise.

Funding comes from grants from public agencies, philanthropies and foundations, and fundraising campaigns. As much as possible, funding should be **independent** (free from outside pressures or agendas) and ideally come from **reliable**, **centralized** sources. Fundraising and reporting for multiple grants and funders can consume time and resources, and different funders might have priorities that pull the impact hub away from its mission.
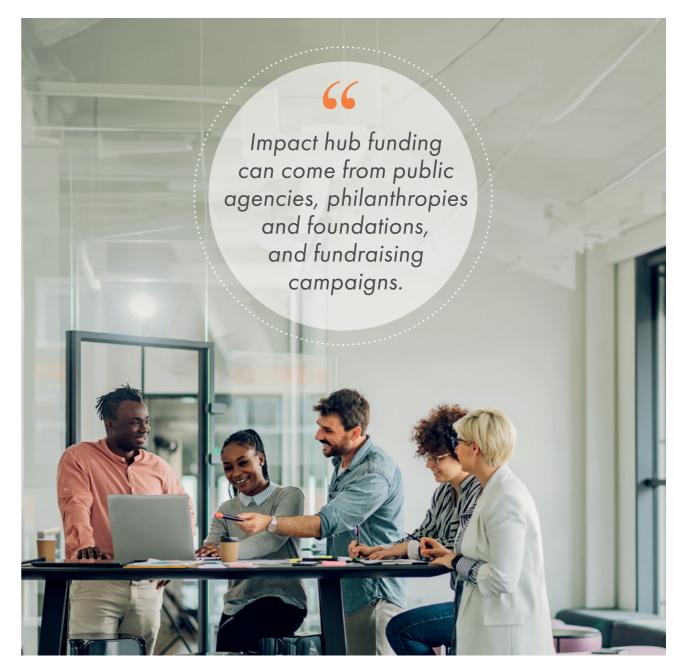
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Innovative Resourcing

Impact hubs do not necessarily need significant fundraising to be effective. For instance, most Alliances for Action in Singapore did not require high financial outlays, even for the implementation of pilots. For instance, the Lower-Wage Workers AfA sought out partnerships with the private sector to implement pilots to develop better rest areas for cleaners in retail malls.

The Mentoring AfA which focused on enhancing the mentoring landscape in Singapore, also managed to secure in-kind sponsorship from industry partners, through its members' networks.

Other AfAs roped in experts in various fields to serve as resource persons or secure in-kind sponsorships.

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> *Impact hub funding can come from public agencies, philanthropies and foundations, and fundraising campaigns.*

Step Three – Design Interventions

With a core team and partners in place, the next step is to design interventions to achieve the mission. Start by developing a clear **theory of change** to drive the impact hub's work.

A theory of change explains how an intervention or activity will produce a desired outcome. To create a theory of change, one method is to imagine that desired outcome and then work backwards.

Creating a Theory of Change

Clearly define the desired outcome

What would the world look like if the problem were solved?

If the problem is illiteracy in rural India, a desired outcome would be all children being able to read.

Understand what interventions could lead to that outcome

What interventions are possible in the given context?

Why have past or existing approaches fallen short?

(Note: Here it is crucial to test assumptions and ideas with people closest to the problem).

Interventions that could enable all children in rural India to read might be: greater access to instructional materials; more local teachers and tutors; cash transfers to families to enable children to attend school rather than work; etc.

Identify the inputs required to carry out those interventions

What kinds of resources, equipment, technology, and people would enable the desired change?

Inputs for the rural India literacy interventions might include books, course materials, laptops with instructional software; teachers and tutors; cash and the means to distribute it; etc.

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Interventions

When considering possible interventions, take note of the following concepts:

Scalability
As much as possible, seek replicable, scalable interventions.

Leverage
Identify interventions that can produce results greater than their cost or effort. High-leverage interventions often address bottlenecks or core causes of a problem, not just symptoms.

Technology
Seek out, when appropriate, digital solutions that could unlock gains, scale, or lower cost.

Disruption
Identify and experiment with new approaches or new ways of doing things outside conventional wisdom and practice.

Politics
Consider the political context and constraints. The best laid plans are worthless if blocked by political powerholders. Understanding the incentives of politicians can help enable an intervention.

Quick Wins
Interventions that rapidly demonstrate success, even if at a small scale, can build momentum and positive attention.

Flexibility
Even if an intervention is co-created with those who are closest to the problem, workshopped, tested, and initially successful, it still might fail when deployed more widely. Be prepared to shift course and adjust if necessary.

> **"**
> *Leaders determine or clarify goals for a group of individuals and bring together the energies of members of that group to accomplish those goals.*
>
> NANNERL KEOHANE
> *American political theorist*

Phase 3:
Orchestrate the Work

*Like a conductor directing the various players through a symphony, a core team **orchestrates** the partners in the impact hub. The core team makes sure everyone is sailing in the same direction, but it is the partners that do the work.*

A Clear Structure

An impact hub is a horizontal, network-based organization. It relies not on command-and-control, hierarchy, or even so much on structures and rules. Rather, it depends on voluntary association, relationships, and trust.

While an impact hub can set overall parameters and timelines, the partners should be given sufficient autonomy to conduct their own research, propose deliverables, plan their own work schedule, and secure external resources where needed.

Though an impact hub is a horizontal, collaborative institution, sometimes, top-down authority is warranted – especially when key actions involve sensitive or dangerous situations. When a single bad decision can

undermine the impact hub's work, greater control may be necessary.

These circumstances might obtain in extreme conditions such as war, environmental emergencies, and health crises.

Orchestrating Partners has Four Parts

CLARIFICATION

CURATION

CONNECTION

CULTIVATION

Step One – Clarification

The core team clarifies the impact hub's goals and strategy. That includes setting short-term and long-term goals; developing strategies; identifying needs; defining divisions of labor; and creating operating procedures.

Clarification also means aligning all the partners behind the mission and regularly reminding everyone of the big picture and why the impact hub exists.

An impact hub can form multiple teams to develop various potential solutions to address its mission. The secretariat helps to delineate the work of various teams to avoid duplication or conflict.

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OKRs

Pioneered in the 1970s at microchip company Intel and popular at firms such as Google, **Objectives and Key Results** (OKRs) is a framework for identifying goals and tracking their outcomes. **An Objective** is a significant, concrete, and clearly defined goal. **The Key Results** are three to five criteria to measure progress toward the objective.

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>
> *[A leader] creates an environment in which the plants can flourish. The work done up front, and vigilant maintenance, allow the plants to grow individually, all at the same time.*
>
> Ret. General Stanley McChrystal

Step Two – Curation

The core team continually curates the partners that are part of the impact hub. That involves identifying new partners; engaging new partners; and parting ways with partners who have completed their work or failed to contribute to the mission.

Step Three – Connection

The core team keeps all the partners actively connected. This involves communicating with partners, ensuring information flows as it needs to, and coordinating the work of the partners.

Step Four – Cultivation

The core team nurtures relationships and maintains the buy-in of partners. This is critical, as an impact hub is based on voluntary association and trust. Cultivation includes troubleshooting and resolving conflicts; setting and enforcing boundaries and divisions of labor; and maintaining repeated interaction with partners so as to build trust.

> *A Shared Sense of Mission*
>
> According to legend, during a tour of NASA, President John F. Kennedy asked a janitor what his job was. "I'm helping put a man on the moon," he said.

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Cultivation

Hold in-person meetings and retreats where partners have unfocused time to get to know each other and build relationships.

Foster transparency. The core team should be open with partners and avoid the tendency to hide bad news or gloss over disagreements.

Hold partners accountable for their commitments. Make sure every partner understands expectations and agrees to standards when they join the impact hub.

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The Art of Connection

Finding the optimal flow of information in a networked organization is more art than science. **Too much** information is overwhelming; **too little** and performance suffers and trust breaks down. Some best practices for striking the right balance include:

Appoint a dedicated "**network manager**" or "**network weaver**" whose sole job is to keep partners connected and manage the flow of information in the impact hub.

Practice "**pinging**," that is, spontaneous, informal, and frequent communication with partners. Pinging can take the form of checking in, broadcasting news, and sharing the ideas and achievements of one partner or team with others. Pinging is essential for both keeping partners connected and for gathering information, especially from partners on the ground.

Use multiple platforms and modes of communication. These could include email, phone calls, Whatsapp, SMS, Slack, or other messaging applications. There are many reasons for using multiple modes: certain partners will prefer certain platforms, different platforms are better for sharing different kinds of information, and doing so breaks up the monotony and formality of communications.

Avoid too much connection. Do not share everything with everyone. Consider whether information is useful to a partner before sharing. Partners will tune out if the flow of information is overwhelming.

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Staying Close to the Ground

Empower and engage leaders and groups who are closest to the problem an impact hub is trying to solve. Accurate and up-to-date information about what is happening on the ground and how circumstances are changing is essential. Most important, impact hubs exist to make a positive, lasting impact in people's lives. That requires building close ties with the people who are directly experiencing ill health or violence or extreme weather.

For example:

In the **Carter Center Guinea Worm Hub**, villagers manage waterways to ensure neighbors avoid contaminated sources that could lead to outbreaks of Guinea Worm Disease.

The **CIVIC** impact hub facilitates training for civilians in war-torn areas of Iraq to better equip those civilians to protect themselves during periods of conflict.

In one **Alliance for Action** impact hub, residents of the Cambridge Road neighborhood in Singapore co-design and implement climate change adaptation measures.

As part of **Gavi, the Vaccines Alliance**, new community health workers in Africa and Asia learn how to deliver vaccines to members of their communities.

Residents of underserved neighborhoods in New York City participating in the **Partnership for Parks** impact hub learn skills in advocacy and park improvement to improve their local open spaces.

> ❝ If you can't measure something, you can't understand it. If you can't understand it, you can't control it. If you can't control it, you can't improve it.

W. EDWARDS DEMING

Professor and Management Expert

Phase 4:
Track Progress, Assess Impact, and Make Adjustments

*An impact hub makes a **measurable, verifiable** impact on a problem. To ensure that it is doing so requires three things: **tracking progress**, **assessing impact**, and **making adjustments**.*

Step One – Track Progress

Put systems in place to gather data on the impact hub's performance and metrics. Data come from a wide range of places, including government agencies, research firms, NGOs, companies, academics, community groups, and journalists.

The types of data collected will depend on the mission, however consider the following distinctions:

Method:
Qualitative data comes from personal accounts and reports that reveal how people experience or perceive something. Gathered through open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and observation.

Quantitative data is numerical and countable. Gathered using scientific instruments, controlled experiments, ratings- or numerical-based surveys.

Timeframe:
If possible, gather data on **short-term**, **mid-term**, and **long-term** progress.

Recency:
Data that is as close to **"real-time"** as possible gives a more actionable picture of performance and progress.

💡 BEST PRACTICES

Community-level Data Gathering

The proliferation of smartphones and satellites around the world creates opportunities to collect data, both quantitative and qualitative, from people on the ground in real-time.

Smartphone apps gather data on everything from traffic patterns to agricultural output to weather conditions. Such data can be invaluable for understanding whether an intervention is succeeding or if adjustments are needed.

A mine removal expert with APOPO at work.

Step Two – Assess Impact

Analyze data to assess whether the impact hub's work is progressing toward its goals.

Regularly evaluate progress. For some issues, that might require daily assessments; for others, it might mean monthly or quarterly assessments.

Remember that the metrics that matter are not **outputs** but **outcomes**. If the mission of an impact hub is to reduce child malnutrition in a particular country, then bags of food delivered would be an output, whereas the number of malnourished children would reflect the outcome.

BEST PRACTICES

Side Effects

An impact hub focuses on a narrowly-defined and measurable mission, but it might also produce beneficial impacts not directly related to the mission.

For example:

- In delivering vaccines in the poorest countries, Gavi strengthens community health systems.
- In implementing concrete, neighborhood-level climate adaptation projects, one of Singapore's Alliances for Action builds community ties and social capital.
- In improving neighborhood open spaces, New York City's Partnership for Parks develops the political organizing and advocacy skills of residents.

Step Three – Make Adjustments

Regular data gathering and evaluation enables the core team not just to track progress and assess impact. It can also help to identify areas of need, reveal opportunities, and highlight shortcomings.

Use that information to make adjustments and course-correct. The fluid structure of an impact hub – based on networks of partners – allows it to be **flexible** and **nimble**. It can drop certain partners or add others as required.

When data suggest a need for changes the secretariat should devise scenarios to assess a wide range of possibilities. In discussing changes, consult partners: *If we changed our approach in different ways, how would it affect your work?*

BEST PRACTICES

Anticipatory Governance

Instead of simply reacting to past events, the most effective institutions seek to anticipate the future. The ability to anticipate depends on regular information feedback – data from the environment indicating current and likely trends.

Tools such as **strategic foresight** exercises and **scenario planning** can help solidify those indications into actionable plans.

> " *If the mission of an impact hub is to reduce child malnutrition in a particular country, then bags of food delivered would be an output, whereas the number of malnourished children would reflect the outcome.*

After Action

An impact hub is a **time-bound** institution, meaning it is not meant to exist forever. Once it has accomplished its mission, it either **pivots**, **shuts down**, or **merges** into another institution.

An impact hub might exist for as little as a few months or for as long as decades. In some cases, an impact hub can set clear and compressed timelines of one year or so, which emphasizes its action-oriented nature and sharpens the focus for all involved. It also provides an impact hub's partners with upfront clarity on how much time they would have to commit. In other cases, it can have the feel of an "ad hoc" commission or an established institution. But once it has achieved its mission it does not perpetuate its existence for its own sake, which is the natural tendency for many institutions.

1. Pivoting

Embrace a wholly new mission, drawing on the expertise, experience, and networks developed to carry out the original mission. But avoid simply "creeping" into a related set of goals or issue areas. Start at the beginning by framing a new problem and formulating a new mission.

2. Shutting Down

Its mission complete, the impact hub shuts down. Capture and disseminate the lessons learned from the impact hub's experience.

3. Merging

Fold components of the impact hub into a permanent institution, such as a government agency or nonprofit organization. Many effective government programs — in farming, job training, economic development, health care, and other areas — started as outside pilots.

Solving the challenges of our time, big and small, will require institutions. Impact hubs are one type of institution, meant to complement, not replace, others. They are designed to deliver, to generate cooperation and collective action to solve problems affecting people's lives. In doing so, they contribute to making governance more effective.

> "
> *Once an impact hub has achieved its mission, it does not perpetuate its existence for its own sake, which is a natural tendency for many institutions.*

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