

StriveTogether® 2025 Cradle to Career Network

Convening

One Voice, Many Partners:

Strategies for Unified Messaging in Collaborative Work



4 MILLION FUTURES Pathways to Opportunity

#ConveneC2C

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DO NOW ACTIVITY

On a blank piece of paper, sketch **one circle for your organization**, and **one or two circles for your closest comms partners***!

**these can be other organizations, parents/families, school districts, legislators, etc.*

We'll build on this in a later activity.





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AGENDA FOR TODAY'S SESSION

- Intro to the Minnesota Education Partnerships Coalition (EPC)
- The Problem: Statewide Alignment vs. Local Voice
- EPC Case Study
- The Solutions
- *Network Ecosystem* Activity
- *Building a Shared Narrative* Activity
- Reflection
- Q&A

Please let us know if there is anything we can do that would make this session more comfortable for you today!

9 ORGANIZATIONS. 1 VISION.

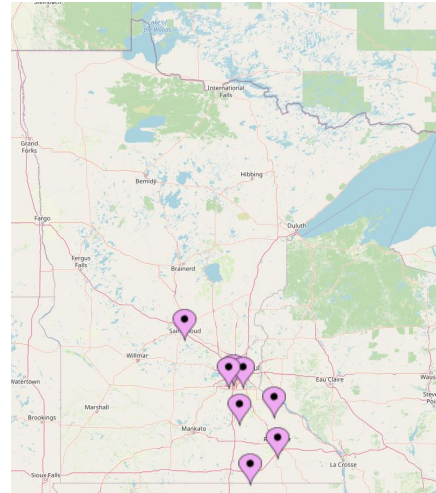
Our children succeed in school and in life.
Our communities thrive.
Our state is equitable and prosperous for ALL.



Pathways to Opportunity

MN Education Partnerships Coalition (EPC)

Our coalition engages around 310,000 children, youth, and families in the nine communities we serve across Minnesota. Our birth-to-career approach translates to barriers being broken and opportunities being created.



epc-mn.org

THE PROBLEM:

Statewide Alignment vs. Local Voice

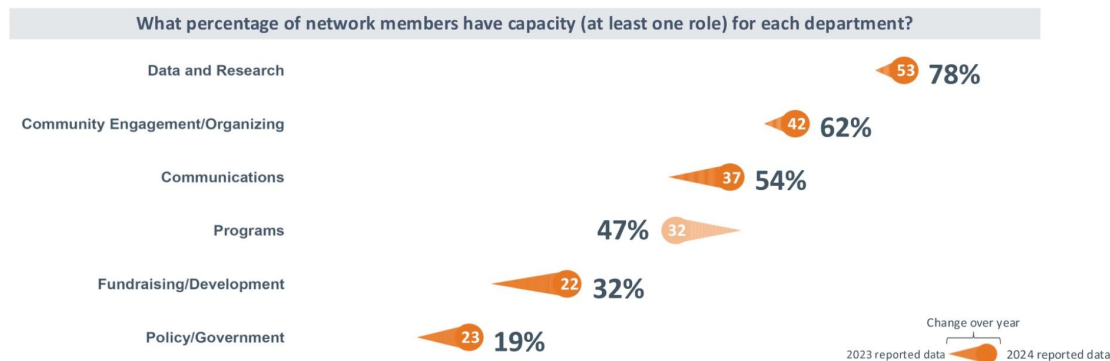
Challenges:

- Diverse coalition = diverse language needs
- Words/stances that inspire some → off-limits to others
- **Easier:** showcasing local wins (reports, highlights)
- **Harder:** one concise, unified message (website, legislative agenda)



2024 Civic Infrastructure Assessment Highlights Webinar

Communications, fundraising and policy capacity grew across the Network while data roles remained common



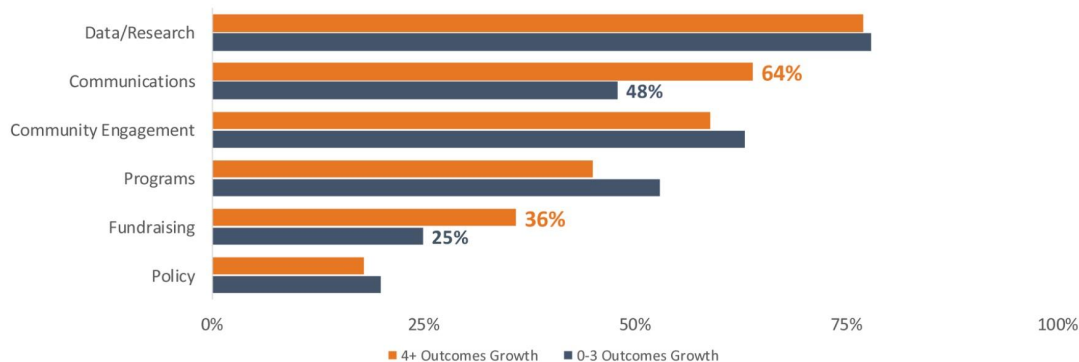
- Data roles are consistent across nearly all partnerships
- **Growth is happening in comms, fundraising, and policy**
- **Only 54% of partnerships have a dedicated comms staff** — often it's the ED or other staff doing comms
- Growing comms capacity is a positive trend, but **more orgs communicating in different ways makes unified messaging harder**

2024 Civic Infrastructure Assessment Highlights Webinar

Backbone staff and executive director – size and role capacity

Network members showing growth in 4+ outcomes are more apt to have designated capacity for **Communications** and **Fundraising** roles despite little difference in staff size.

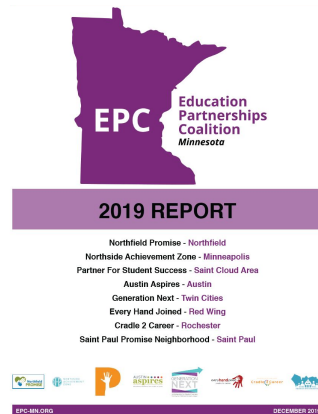
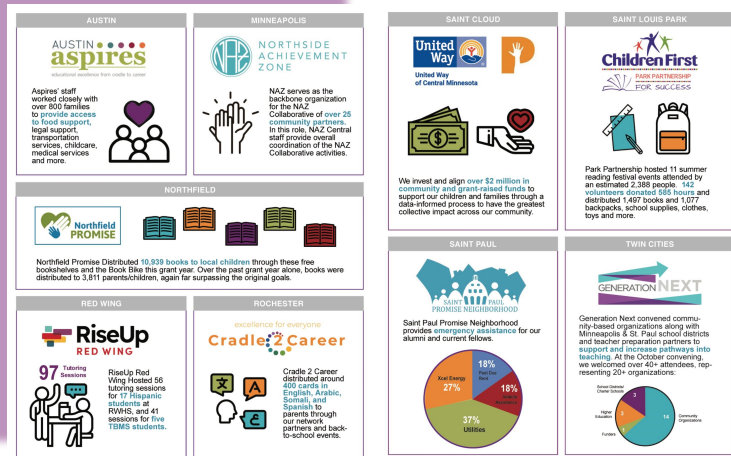
What percentage of network members have capacity (at least one role) for each department?



- Partnerships with **4+ outcomes growth** more likely to have:
 - Dedicated communications staff
 - Dedicated fundraising staff
- **Capacity in the right roles makes the difference**
- **Comms is a key differentiator in moving outcomes**

EPC CASE STUDY: MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PAST

- **All-volunteer model = low capacity**
Committee-led, no dedicated comms staff
- **Conflicting timelines**
Organizational priorities vs. coalition deadlines created bottlenecks
- **Diffuse ownership**
Everyone did “a piece” (draft, proof, edit) but no one owned the whole project
- **Unsustainable lifts**
Annual Report pulled together solo over holiday breaks → not realistic as coalition or staff demands grew
- **Impact**
Alignment suffered, voice was uneven, and the model wasn’t sustainable
- **Report Length**
In the past, EPC’s answer to comms challenges was *length* (e.g., 32-page reports) — which is not a viable solution for funders/legislators.



THE SOLUTIONS: EPC Strategies

- ★ **Committee re-set with clearer scope**
- ★ **Limited set of deliverables for 2024/2025:**
 - Website refresh (5 pages)
 - New legislative priorities document (expanded format)
 - Redesigned annual report
- ★ **Outside consultant brought in (committee vetted, EDs decided)**
- ★ **Collaboration & Ownership**

This comms shift was part of a broader organizational shift to clarify 35 priorities over 2 years — moving from a hard-to-activate strategic plan to concrete deliverables with doers and deadlines.



What a landmark year for the Education Partnerships Coalition of Minnesota (EPC)! We kicked things off by welcoming our first-ever staff member to coordinate the powerful work of our nine member organizations – and we haven't slowed down since.

When we declared 2024 our "year to accelerate," we meant business! Our new parent/caregiver advocacy program **empowered nearly 100 fresh voices to champion education from prenatal to profession** (photos above), while we laid the groundwork to amplify youth advocacy in 2025. We're also engaging our legislative partners, preparing to **lead two bills in the 2025 session** while supporting ten more through testimony and advocacy.

In 2024, we developed the strategic framework to launch "EPC 2030" – our first 5-year roadmap. We also won a pivotal grant to lead improvement efforts for Minnesota's education-to-workforce data infrastructure, **uniting 100+ data leaders across the state** and hiring our new Director of Data Leadership.

If you are interested in connecting and learning more about EPC, please reach out to John Fanning, EPC Director, at john@epc-mn.org.

Read on for more 2024 highlights from our nine member organizations.



2024 Highlights: *The Year We Hit the Gas!* 2024 Annual Report

- Many Partners → Diverse Work, Distinct Voices
- One Voice → Shared Story & Aligned Framework
- Coordinated Advocacy = Collective Voice in Action
- Building New Voices into the Coalition

EPC: ONE VOICE

**4 MILLION
FUTURES**

Pathways to Opportunity

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9 ORGANIZATIONS. 1 VISION.
ALL Minnesota Children Will Succeed in School and in Life

We are a coalition of community-driven, data-informed organizations building a bipartisan movement committed to upward economic mobility, self-sufficiency, and self-determination for Minnesota's children, youth, and families.

The return on investment in EPC includes leveraging state funds to secure an additional \$25 million in annual private and federal investment into our communities, as well as stronger alignment among both public and private investments for increased efficiency and maximized local impact.

Points of Pride

Statewide Collaboration, Local Impact

- HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**
In Austin, 91% of 2022 seniors we supported graduated.
- COLLEGE PREPARATION**
In Rochester, we supported high school seniors and current college students with SAT/ACT completion.
- K-12 EDUCATION**
In North Minneapolis, scholars who participated in our academic strategies achieved improved reading outcomes and had more consistent attendance than non-R&D scholars.
- EMPLOYMENT**
In the Twin Cities, we worked closely with the Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLDS) to visualize and share pathways to and through postsecondary education and employment.
- KINDERGARTEN READINESS**
In Red Wing, we screened 82% of enrolled children each year – either in-house or through their local school district.
- EARLY CHILDHOOD**
In Northfield, we increased access to full-day and multi-setting childcare.
- MENTAL HEALTH**
In St. Louis Park, we help middle and high school youth to thrive mentally and have hope for a fulfilled life.
- PARENT TRAINING**
In Saint Paul, we led a leadership program that increased credit income and provided financial coaching.
- AGES 0-5**
In Central Minnesota, we increased access to literacy by enrolling over 1,000 children in the Early Parent Engagement Library.

Partners: Austin ASPICS, Children First, Cradle2Career, CHSNET, HCL, RiseUp, SAINT PAUL PROMISE, United Way, MNZ.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

9 ORGANIZATIONS. 1 VISION.

ALL Minnesota Children Will Succeed in School and in Life.

- **Many Partners** → 9 orgs, 600+ partners, 310K kids & families
- **Local distinctiveness:** NAZ (reading/attendance), St. Louis Park (mental health), Red Wing (kindergarten readiness)
- **One Voice** → unified statewide platform: *9 orgs, 1 vision*
- **Flagship priorities:** expand prenatal-to-career orgs; transform education-to-workforce data
- **Broader agenda:** childcare, teacher diversity, mental health, attendance, afterschool, financial literacy

EPC: ONE VOICE

4 MILLION FUTURES Pathways to Opportunity

THE SOLUTION(S):

EPC Strategies - Lessons & Happy Accidents

- ★ Focused on 3 deliverables → clarity, deadlines, visible success
- ★ Sequencing created continuity (design + language carried forward)
- ★ Consultant = only option → forced us to maximize use of limited funds
- ★ Very successful year overall
- ★ Tough lesson: external partner still required coalition project management



WHY THIS MATTERS

This shift has already helped us strengthen EPC's one voice while still honoring our partners' individuality.

- **Alignment vs. voice shows up everywhere in coalition comms**
- **Local distinctiveness + statewide alignment = stronger impact**
- **Unified voice → more influence with funders & policymakers**

PAIR SHARE:

Turn to someone next to you:

Where have you seen this alignment vs. voice tension in your own work?

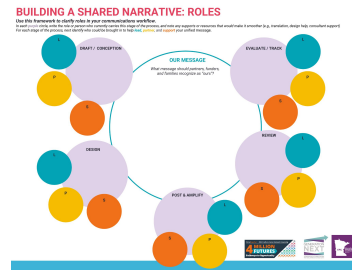
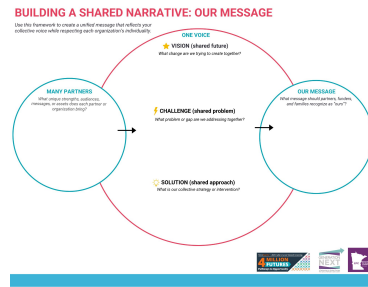
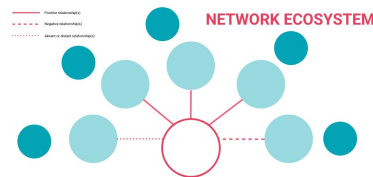


WHERE WE'RE HEADED: THREE ACTIVITIES

WHO → Map your ecosystem

WHAT → Build a shared narrative

HOW → Clarify roles & supports

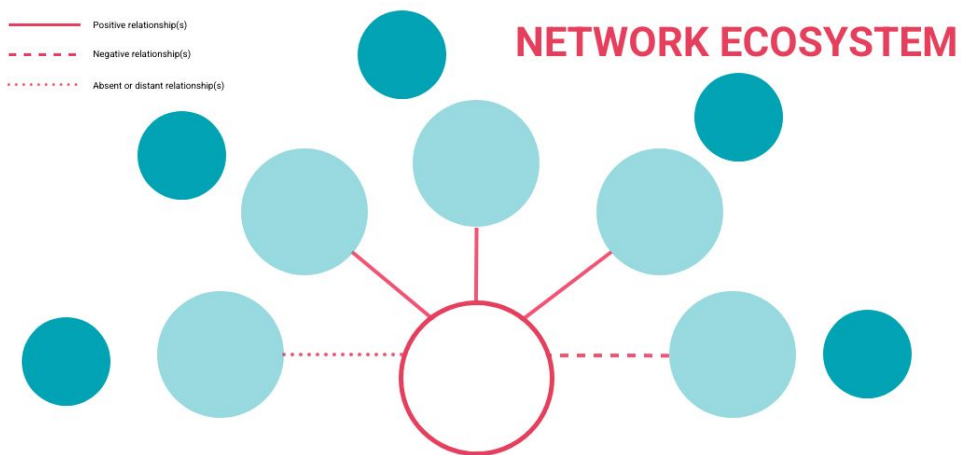


ACTIVITY: NETWORK ECOSYSTEM

Surface all the players in your communications ecosystem!

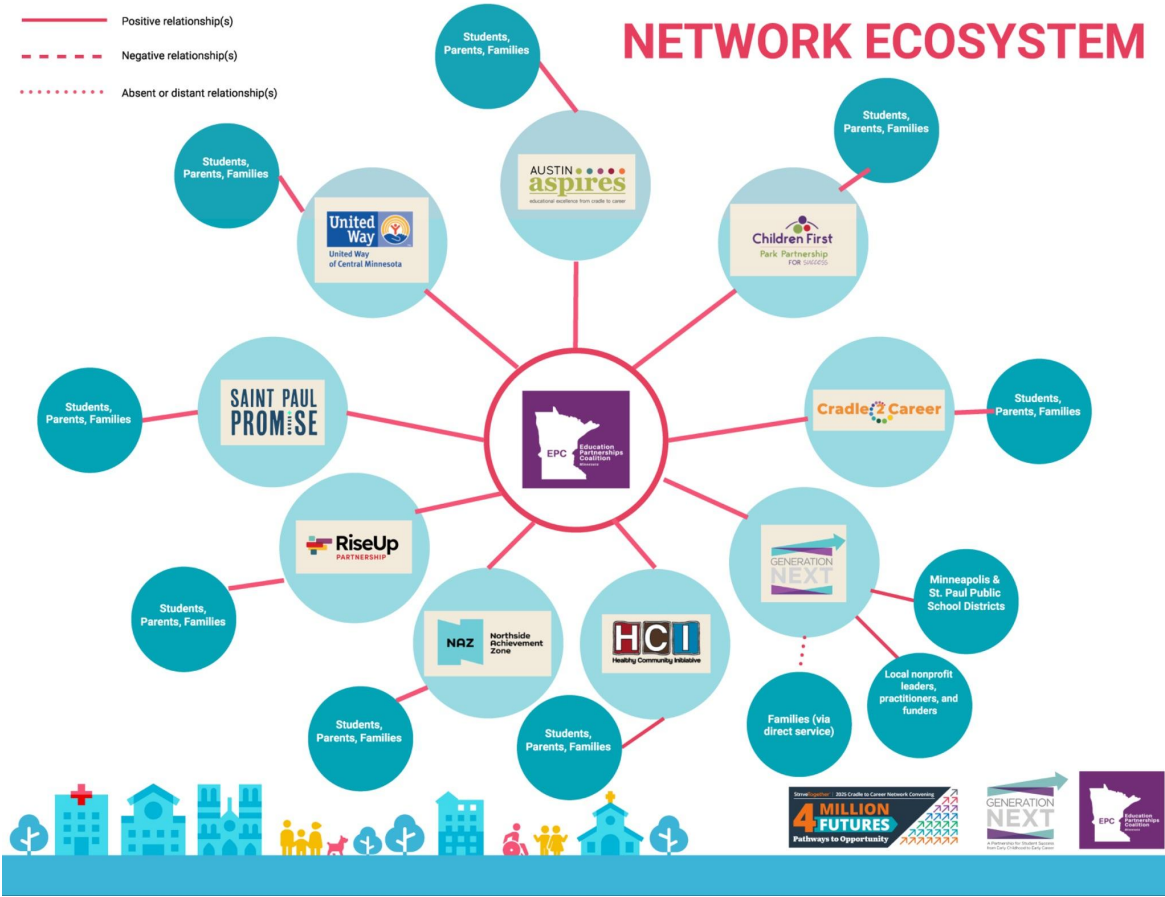
Who are they?

This isn't just your direct coalition partners — think also about the boards, funders, families, legislators, or other groups who influence how messages are shaped, approved, and/or received.



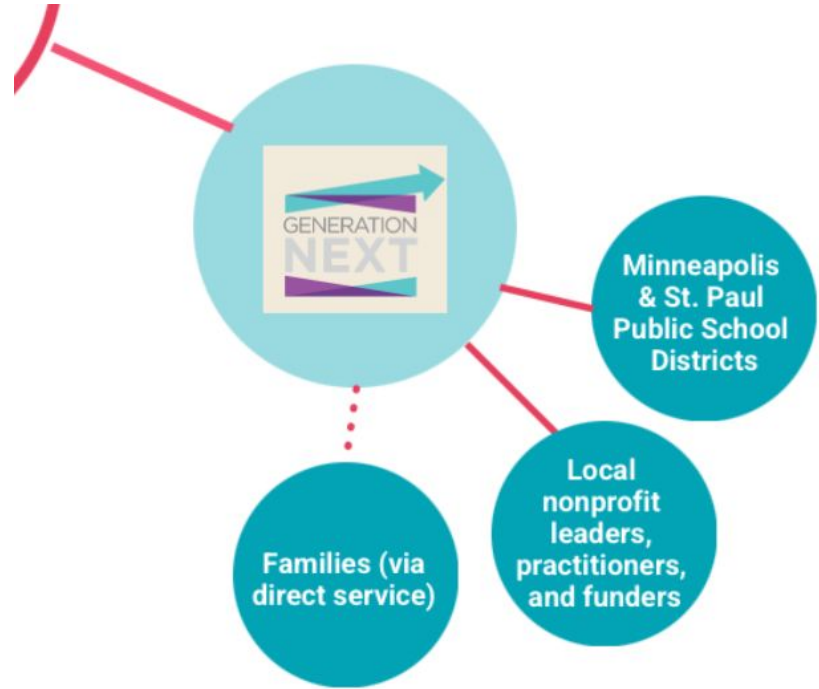
NETWORK ECOSYSTEM

EPC Example



NETWORK ECOSYSTEM

Generation Next Example



NETWORK ECOSYSTEM

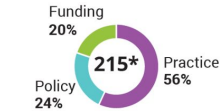
Generation Next Example

EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

There is no definitive map of the connections between organizations working for education equity in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. We began our efforts to map this ecosystem starting with organizations that are connected to Generation Next in any of the following ways:

- Members of the Leadership Council
- Participants in a work group, committee, or network
- Recipients of \$100K or more from funders included in our 2018 education philanthropy analysis

We did not include PK-12 education providers (early childhood, districts, or charters). Our intent is to focus on the systems of support around these learning environments.

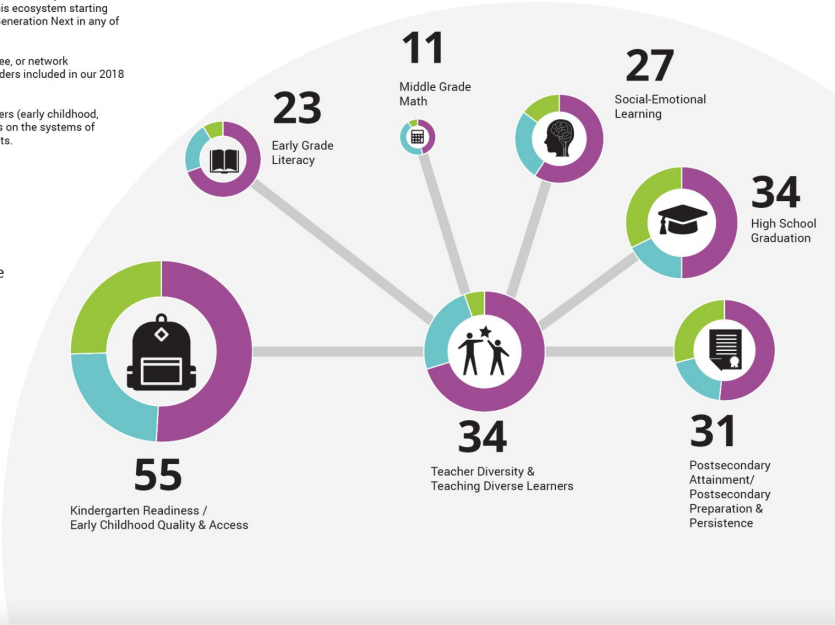


*Eighty-nine (89) unique organizations are represented in this graphic. Subtotals and percentages are calculated based on a total of 215 instances, as organizations may be counted more than once if they are working in multiple levers (practice, policy, funding).



Generation Next's coalition of leaders focuses on systems change through three strategic levers:

- PRACTICE:** Change actions and efforts that directly or indirectly impact student learning
- POLICY:** Inform and influence district, city, county, and state level decisions that impact student outcomes
- FUNDING:** Align and direct resources allocated by philanthropic and governmental institutions to activities that improve student outcomes

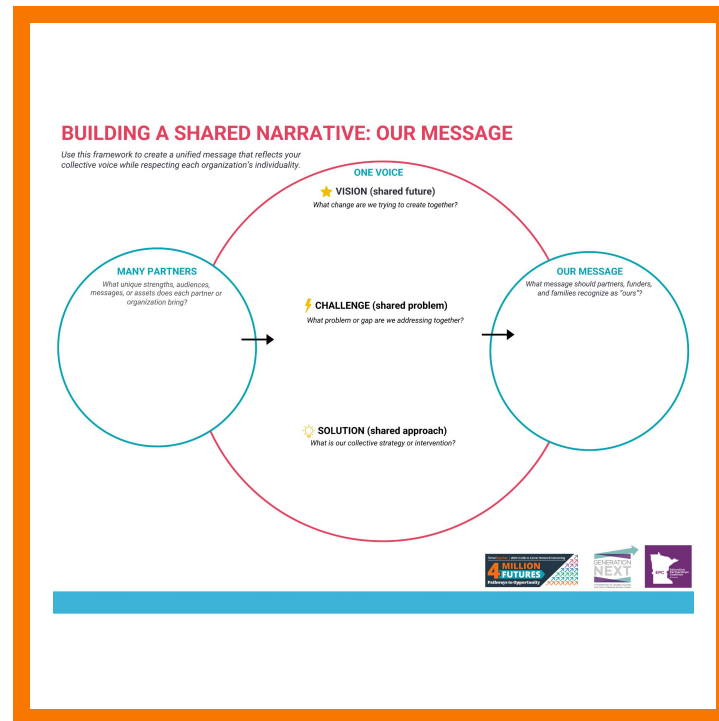


ACTIVITY: BUILDING A SHARED NARRATIVE: OUR MESSAGE

Now that we've mapped who's in the ecosystem (the **who**), let's shift to the **what**.

What do we actually say together?

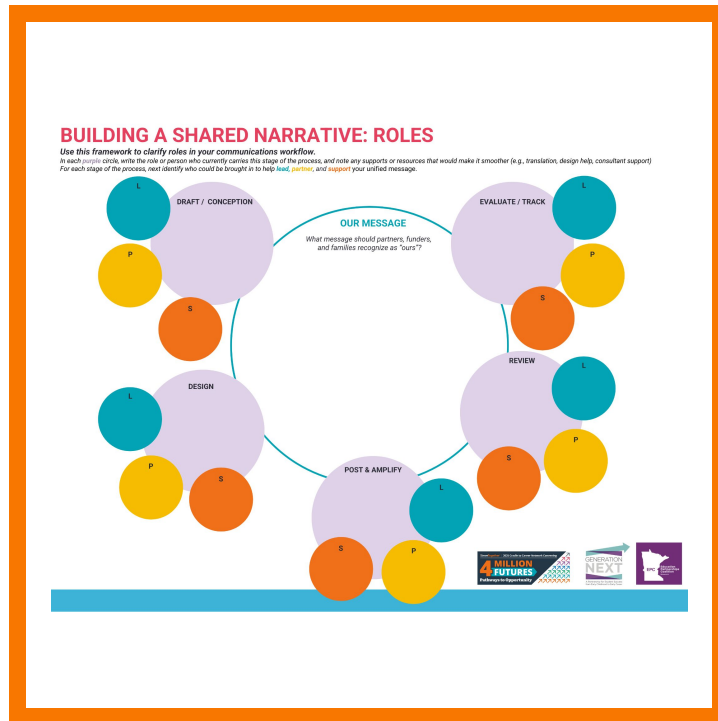
What's the story we want partners, funders, and families to hear as "ours"?



ACTIVITY: BUILDING A SHARED NARRATIVE: ROLES

We've talked about **who** is in your ecosystem and **what** your message is. Now let's get into **how** the work actually happens!

This is where things often get stuck — so we'll map it out together.



ACTIVITY: BUILDING A SHARED NARRATIVE: ROLES

Draft/Conception

Who generates first drafts of language, messages, or ideas?

Design

Who formats, lays out, or produces the visual product?

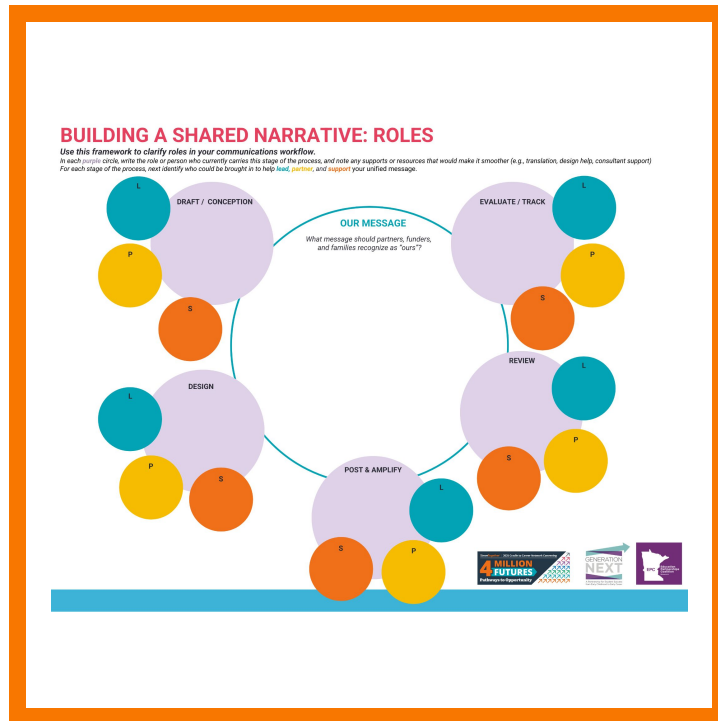
Review/Approval

Who provides feedback or formal sign-off before release?

Post & Amplify

Who shares it out and ensures the message reaches the intended audiences?

If you have time, also answer: How will personnel and production costs be covered?



REFLECTION



Q & A



Share your feedback!

Earn points in the app by completing a short survey:

1. Open the Cvent app
2. Click on the **Agenda** button
3. Click on our session in your schedule
4. Click **survey**
5. Complete the short survey and earn event app points!

