

# Data Collaboration Overview

Prepared by the [St. Louis Regional Data Alliance](#) at the University of Missouri – St. Louis for [Data Science for Social Impact](#) at Washington University's Social Policy Institute

## Why Collaboration Matters

No one person, organization, or sector can tackle critical social challenges on their own. Multiple systems show up in something as seemingly simple as a connection to shelter – beyond good service navigation, collaboration also is necessary to connect programs, policies, funding, and other processes needed to respond to individual and social needs. Collaboration requires ongoing focus and structure to be effective – especially over time and in pursuit of systems change oriented around racial and social equity.

## What Collaboration Looks Like

It is important to underscore that “data collaboration” can and should frequently be oriented to support larger collaborative efforts, which have a broader grounding in community engagement, policy, governance, and funding – ideally in deep collaboration with impacted communities and frontline providers. Such efforts (sometimes called partnerships, coalitions, or “Collective Impact” initiatives) include both place-based and issue-centered aims, including housing services, various youth services systems, neighborhood organizing, etc.

## Core Purposes of Data Sharing

The following model, adapted from the Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy (AISP)'s [Intro to Data Sharing and Integration](#) (2020), outlines how data sharing is often approached in collaborative efforts – and where it may vary if it is analysis or operations-focused.

	Analysis-Focused	Operations-Focused
Approach	Aggregate or de-identified data to produce insight	Identifiable data to support client-level service improvements
Frequency	One-time or periodic updates depending on scope	Daily or real-time updates depending on service needs
Privacy	Lack of identifiers, but still some ethical and privacy parameters	Identifiable data that needs to be carefully protected / accessed
Governance	Currently minimal, with some structures around de-identification / use	Significant, with ongoing shared processes involving all parties

## Collaboration Resources

The following resources – some data-specific, some focusing on collaboration overall – can also help you deepen your practice!

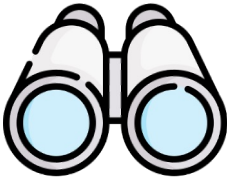
- [The Collaboration Spectrum Revisited](#). Tamarack Institute. 2021.
- [Collective Impact](#). John Kania & Mark Kramer. 2011.
- [Centering Equity in Collective Impact](#). John Kania, et al. 2022.
- [The Water of Systems Change](#). John Kania, Mark Kramer, & Peter Senge. 2018.
- [Introduction to Data Sharing and Integration](#). Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy. 2020.
- [Toolkit for Centering Racial Equity Through Data Integration](#). Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy. 2020.

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# Data Collaboration Model

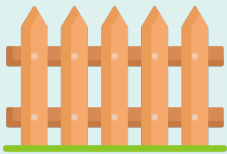
The following seeks to synthesize a variety of existing collaborative models (found on the other side of this document) into a data-specific framework that you can use in your own work

## Shared Vision



*What Are We Going to Do Together?* It's critical to start any data sharing effort by grounding stakeholders (including community members, service beneficiaries, and front-line staff members) in a common understanding of the data challenges you seek to tackle. This will help stakeholders reach beyond their individual organization in pursuit of a collective outcomes — which will help them justify the data sharing headaches to come. High-level strategies should be paired with more specific goals to guide the work ahead (i.e., a logic model in pursuit of a larger vision statement).

## Shared Parameters



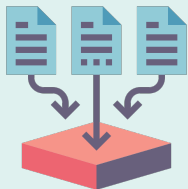
*What Constrains or Enables What We Do?* Even more than other types of collaboration, data sharing is bound by parameters — including privacy protection, funding streams and related reporting, data system functionality, and staff capacity — that must be understood from the beginning. It's critical that these parameters do not become an excuse for inaction; instead, identifying hard and soft boundaries throughout a project will help stakeholders clearly outline short- and long-term goals, which may include shifting the parameters themselves.

## Shared Power



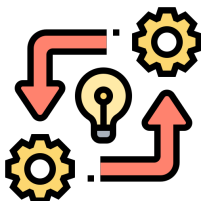
*How Are We Going to Do It — and With Whom?* All effective data collaboration requires sharing decision-making power across organizations and stakeholders; equitable data collaboration requires ongoing power sharing with impacted communities, whose data is often the center of these efforts. Doing so is difficult but essential — and requires a clear and intentional process of decision making, communication (and translation), and formal / informal structures that guide and keep diverse stakeholders working toward common goals.

## Shared Data



*How Will We Know We Are Doing It?* With goals identified, parameters named, and a decision-making table set, data sharing can finally commence! Such efforts typically fall into two buckets: shared measurement (see [Collective Impact](#)) to understand collective progress and challenges, and shared infrastructure — the systems that enable effective data sharing to take place (particularly in operations-focused efforts). Measurement efforts should strive to be generative — uncovering new insights and bringing more people to the work — rather than produce oversimplified metrics that can't encompass complex systems. Infrastructure includes data and technology platforms as well as shared policies and practices (see [RDA white paper](#)).

## Shared Action



*Actually Doing It!* The best learning and trust-building in data collaboration happens by actually sharing data — even if an effort starts small given existing parameters and alongside a slower-moving governance process. It is also worth noting that most collaborative efforts do not start or stop with data but are embedded in larger systems and policy-change initiatives that drive a (data supported) action agenda. Regardless of the form, data should seek to be an enabler of coordination and connectivity, not a barrier.