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Collaboration Overview

Navigate (formerly Linking Learning to Life, Inc.) is non-profit organization that acts as both a direct service program operator and an intermediary that supports a collaboration of schools, businesses, colleges, and other organizations to foster opportunities for community service, leadership development, career and college exploration, internships, and employment for youth in Vermont as they transition from school to careers and postsecondary education. Navigate started as a local collaboration and it is now supporting programs and partnerships across Vermont.

Navigate's collaboration structure includes

- dedicated staff and a board of directors with representation from business, education, state agencies, and other nonprofits;
- expanding partnerships with school districts, businesses, colleges, community organizations, and legislators; and
- a strategic plan and an annual report that are developed and approved every year.

Best practices include the following

- sustaining strong, consistent leadership and a focus on interpersonal relationships;
- clearly defining roles, expectations, and timelines;
- focusing on using data to analyze gaps and develop future plans; and
- thinking creatively when expanding the scope of services.

Throughout its tenure, Navigate has learned the following lessons

- determining creative ways to fund the collaboration is essential building connections with local partners helps address unique local challenges.

Collaboration Purpose

Navicate's mission is to improve the educational success and career prospects for youth through school, business, and community partnerships. Navicate leads the way in Vermont with providing young people with hands-on, real-life experiences to help them succeed in careers, in post-secondary education, and within their communities.

About the Collaboration

Navicate (formerly Linking Learning to Life) is a comprehensive youth serving organization that was founded in 1997 as a partnership between the Burlington (VT) School District, the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Vermont. These entities were brought together by their shared mission to help all Burlington students successfully prepare for the future.

Original funding for the collaboration came through a federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act grant. The grant provided five years of seed funding to establish a collaboration and implement programs to support youth. When this funding ended, Linking Learning to Life (LLL) merged with a regional school-to-work collaborative and expanded its services to begin serving all of the school districts in Chittenden County, Vermont. At that time, LLL became an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. In 2013, LLL rebranded into Navicate, which stands for helping young people navigate next steps and helping to transform education in Vermont. Since its inception, Navicate has continued to grow and form new partnerships with regional entities around Vermont in an effort to replicate some of its programs statewide.

Navicate creates and manages a variety of programs that collectively work to accomplish its mission "to improve the educational success and career prospects for youth through school, business, and community partnerships." Navicate leads the way in Vermont with providing young people with hands-on, real-life experiences to help them succeed in careers, in post-secondary education, and within their communities.

Click [here](#) for Career and Post-Secondary Readiness Programs.

The organization now engages and prepares more than 5,000 middle and high students from seven parts of the state through career events and workshops, internships, work readiness classes, supported dual-enrollment, and youth leadership development. Navicate also offers trainings for educators and employers engaged in work-based learning and is a leader in resource development to support this work in Vermont.

Collaboration Structure

Key aspects of the Navicate structure include the following elements:

Dedicated staff directly support student success as well as create organizational connections

As the collaboration has grown, the original partnership among the Burlington (VT) School District, the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Vermont

established Navicate (then still called LLL) as an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that acts as an intermediary organization. As an intermediary, Navicate is able to help connect students and schools to employers, colleges, and other resources. Staff are able to support a wide variety of students' needs and interests by linking them with partner organizations within the collaboration. Navicate's capacity as a connecting entity led it to be one of the founding members of the [Intermediary Network](#), which helps local and national intermediary organizations share effective strategies with one another.

Dedicated staff that support the work of Navicate and its partners have helped facilitate the success and expansion of Navicate programs throughout Vermont. Navicate is led by an executive director who has participated in the collaboration since its inception in 1997. In addition, Navicate has six other staff members and one or two [AmeriCorps VISTA](#) members who support the work of the collaboration on an ongoing basis. Navicate also continues to engage past staff members in an adjunct capacity.

A board of directors representing a broad spectrum of the community

Navicate's board of directors currently has 17 members, representing a broad range of leaders in the business and education fields, state agencies, and other nonprofits. The board of directors meets quarterly and also holds an annual meeting every fall to approve a new budget and develop a strategic plan.

The board of directors has three committees that meet between full board meetings. The committees are dedicated to carrying out certain aspects of the work.

- The Executive Committee has decision-making authority, conducts budget reviews, oversees staff compensation, conducts the executive director's annual review, and provides on-going organizational guidance.
- The Marketing and Development Committee focuses on increasing community engagement, publicizing Navicate's efforts, and generating new resources.
- The External Relations Committee helps identify and build strategic relationships with other non-profits, state agencies, and legislators.

Partnerships with local schools, businesses, and organizations

The collaboration includes partnerships with multiple local schools, colleges, businesses, and community organizations to help provide Vermont students with services and programs that help them succeed beyond high school. As the collaboration has spread across the region and state, additional partners have been established to support the work. Partners are asked to sign memorandums of understanding in order to ensure sustained commitment.

Every spring, Navicate holds a Community Partner Recognition Event to highlight the accomplishments of its partners and give out awards for those that have shown an outstanding dedication to creating opportunities for youth.

A strategic plan and an annual report that are developed and approved annually

The staff and board of directors of Navicate meet annually to discuss and approve a new strategic plan. Each year the strategic plan lays out a framework and specific action steps for carrying out the organization's mission. The strategic plan contains concrete, measurable goals; the activities that will lead to the fulfillment of those goals; the individual(s) leading the activities; and the deadlines for tasks to be completed. Having a plan and action steps clearly defined allows Navicate to accurately measure the progress of its collaborative efforts against its goals. Including a deadline with an actual date attached allows staff to plan ahead and fully accomplish tasks on time.

The staff and board also collaborate on the development of an annual report each year. While the strategic plan is a place to put forth goals, the annual report is an opportunity to reflect on how goals were met and how effective the collaboration was at serving students throughout the year. The annual report contains data on the services and programs utilized, financial information for the organization, and profiles of actual students served by LLL and its partners.

In 2012, Navicate was chosen as one of seventeen nonprofits to participate in a statewide Performance Institute to study and use Results-Based Accountability (RBA) in its data collection and reporting processes. This 18-month Institute has enabled Navicate to reflect on its organizational performance measures by looking at the three essential questions of RBA: How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?

Promising Practices

The following practices have helped Navicate to be successful in working collaboratively and achieving results.

Sustaining strong, consistent leadership and a focus on interpersonal relationships

Since its inception in 1997, Navicate has been led by the same executive director, Rich Tulikangas. Sustained leadership has facilitated a strong perpetuation of the organization's mission and allowed LLL to build trusting, lasting relationships with partners.

The Navicate board of directors is comprised of individuals who strongly support the organization's mission and vision. Board members serve two-year terms, and while some have not renewed their posts at the end of a term, many have. This board is actively involved in the work and remains constantly in touch with the target population, the challenges of the work, and the collaborative successes of the organization.

Having longstanding personal relationships with partners is important, especially in a state like Vermont that has relatively small, tight-knit communities. In its role as an intermediary, having positive relationships with other partner organizations plays a big role in keeping Navicate's collaborative efforts mutually beneficial and meaningful for the students participating.

Consistent leadership and dedicated staff also have helped foster relationships. Partners and community members have grown to trust Navicate and the quality of its collaborative work, which has built good will and solidified relationships.

Developing a clear understanding with partners about the roles, responsibilities, and timelines for collaboration

The success of Navicate's programs deeply depends on the cooperation and dedication of partner organizations in the collaboration. Therefore, Navicate develops memorandums of understanding with all of its partners that lay out exactly what is to be accomplished by the collaboration and what specific roles and responsibilities each partner agrees to. Consistently adhering to these agreements creates an environment of mutual understanding and reliance.

Yearly strategic plans also lay out the goals and objectives that the collaboration hopes to achieve on a yearly basis. Navicate's strategic plan not only establishes goals, but also maps these goals to specific activities and deadlines. Establishing this framework allows all staff and partners to be on the same page about the goals for the year and the steps that need to be taken to achieve these goals in order to further the organization's mission.

A focus on using data to analyze gaps and develop future plans

Navicate collects data for all of its programs to illustrate the impact the organization is having on Vermont students. Navicate collects a range of types of data including program outcome data and survey responses from program participants. This data is shared both with Navicate staff and with all partner organizations.

On a quarterly basis, Navicate staff meet for Action Research Days. These days provide time for staff to analyze the outcome data for the programs that Navicate and its partners support. Navicate staff use the data collected to reflect on how they are doing compared to the goals outlined in the strategic plan and to inform their plans for the future.

Navicate also shares this data with program partners and funders. For example, Navicate publishes an [annual report](#) each year that highlights outcomes data and success stories. Navicate and partners in the collaboration can use this information to try to garner additional funding from various sources. LLL recently created a summary of results brochure that provides a snapshot of the impact of its work over the past five years. Its focus on data and ability to show its success have been helpful as it applies for grants and funding.

Thinking creatively when expanding its scope of services

Navicate has faced significant growth since its inception in 1997. Starting as a district-level initiative it has grown to a regional initiative and now to one implementing programs across the state of Vermont. As it expanded, Navicate has had to determine how to most effectively scale up its programs and work without contradicting its mission or compromising the effectiveness of its programs. Embracing creative solutions and being flexible have helped as Navicate faces these challenges.

For example, Navicate was approached by multiple organizations that wanted to participate in its Training Interns and Partnering for Success (TIPS) internship program. This program began as a partnership between Navicate, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, and Burlington High School, in which six at-risk students interned at one of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream shops. This program was shown to be very successful and within the course of a year, there were four high schools

participating with about 25 different employers in the region. Schools and businesses in other counties throughout Vermont contacted Navicate to see how they could get involved.

Navicate staff and leadership struggled with how to help organizations across the state implement TIPS and what role Navicate should play. After debating multiple possibilities, Navicate decided to provide organizations with program materials and training and ongoing technical assistance around implementation, best practices, tools, and evaluation. As it has expanded statewide, the program has continued to be very successful and continues to be funded annually by the Vermont Department of Labor as the only secondary internship program out of the three programs it supports.

Lessons Learned

Navicate has learned the following lessons while working collaboratively.

Determining creative ways to fund the collaboration is essential

Navicate began through a federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act grant and has since continued to be largely funded by grants. It has been a constant struggle for the organization to continually seek out and secure funds. As the economy worsened in recent years, this struggle became even more acute, as multiple organizations across the state and country competed for fewer and fewer funds. Fostering committed, long-lasting relationships with partners has led to success in obtaining funding for programs. The close relationship between Navicate and partners has allowed both to seek funding to support the work of the collaboration. Navicate has benefited from creating multiple streams of funding. To date it has accessed funding from more than 70 different public and private sources.

Through these challenges, Navicate has learned that flexibility and creativity are essential to generating new and different funding sources. One of the ways it has tried to obtain funding creatively is through events. Its annual [Giant Pumpkin Regatta & Festival](#) is one of its the most lucrative events, generating about \$30,000 in total annual revenue. In the past, Navicate partnered with the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Vermont Giant Pumpkin Growers Association on the event, which specifically helps to sustain PILOT (Program to Inspire Leadership, Opportunity, and Thought), its youth leadership and career exploration program. Navicate plans to explore further creative avenues in the future to address its funding challenges.

In an effort to explore additional ways to procure funding, Navicate has also instituted a fee-for-service model for some of its programs. The largest current source of fee-for-service funding for Navicate is the High School Completion Program run by Vermont Adult Learning. This program, funded by the Vermont Department of Education, enables students who have dropped out of high school to work towards earning a diploma. Navicate provides these students with the opportunity to take college courses, and then charges Vermont Adult Learning for this service. Navicate is currently investigating additional ways to effectively incorporate a fee-for-service model into its programs. It is currently developing a plan to begin billing school districts in Chittenden County for a portion of the costs of the programs they use, whereas in the past these programs have been free. This new payment model would begin with the 2012–2013 school year and would be dependent on the individual district's needs.

Building connections with local partners helps address unique local challenges

Vermont has many rural areas and few communities with over 10,000 residents. The remoteness of many communities can pose a challenge for those designing programs and engaging students.

Recognizing this challenge, Navicate has come to rely heavily on its regional partners to effectively administer programs. The relationships these partners have built with rural schools and small rural employers allow programs to offer meaningful opportunities to students, even those who live in remote areas. Regional partners also have valuable insight into how to address transportation problems that could potentially inhibit participation. Fostering valuable partnerships with regional partners has allowed Navicate to establish its programs in multiple areas of the state without losing effectiveness.

Accomplishments

Navicate has been able to

- Engage more than 5,000 Vermont youth annually through the organization's programs and services.
- Expand Navicate's mission and scope of work from one school district to serving children and youth regionally and across Vermont,
- Transition from an informal collaboration to an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.
- Create a sustainable infrastructure for helping young people prepare for life beyond high school.

Resources

Learn more about Navicate

- Visit the Navicate website: <http://navicate.org/>
- View Navicate's 2012 Annual Report: http://issuu.com/navicate/docs/annual_report_2012
- Follow Linking Learning to Life on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Navicate>
- View videos on the Linking Learning to Life Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/LLLvt>

View additional information about [Youth Employment](#), [Positive Youth Development](#), and [Transition Age Youth](#) by visiting the Youth Topics on FindYouthInfo.gov.

