Instructions:

- Read case study prompt. (5-7 minutes)
- Groups discuss the following questions (35 minutes):
  - What is the problem the community needs to address? How might different stakeholders view that problem similarly or differently?
  - Is a collective impact approach appropriate? Why or why not?
  - What specific steps can be taken (using the collective impact approach or otherwise) to address the problem at hand, and create “win-win” situations?
  - What role(s) should the community college president and her institution play?
  - What data will be critical to helping the group move forward? How could they obtain the data?
  - Who is missing from the conversation?
- Debrief (10 minutes)
  - By considering different perspectives, did you identify any blind spots that you might have?
  - What lessons from this exercise can you apply to your institution’s situation?
Case Study: Normalsville, Ohio

The (fictional) region of Normalsville, Ohio and surrounding cities is not unlike other places in America: the manufacturing sector drove the economy for decades, but the 1990s began a transition to a service-based economy. While manufacturing remains an important part of the regional economy, the healthcare and – to a lesser degree – IT sectors have also grown to be major employers. Traditionally, the region’s four community colleges were respected for developing qualified candidates for open positions. However, in the past 15-20 years, employers have had to look outside the region to attract qualified talent, and some employers are even discussing moving their headquarters to cities with stronger talent pipelines. A recent employer survey noted that in 2016 there were 600 machinist job openings, but only 100 qualified candidates. Meanwhile, there were many more qualified candidates for Allied Health professions than there were openings.

K-12 education has its own challenges as well. Over the past 10 years, the Normalsville Independent School District (NISD) has had five superintendents, and while the high school graduation rate is relatively high, NISD’s post-secondary enrollment rate is in the bottom 10th percentile in the state. When NISD graduates do enter post-secondary institutions, they are frequently placed into remedial education.

Lastly, economic mobility and equity gaps are increasingly problematic. A recent national report, which has received a lot of local media attention, cited the Normalsville region as having the 10th worst economic mobility in the country. At all levels of education and employment, equity gaps by race, socioeconomic status, gender, and country of origin are significant.

Here are a few available statistics that describe the region in 2016:

- Approximately 1 million residents in the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)
- Poverty rate: 24% (13.5% national average in 2016)
- Overall percentage with Bachelor’s degree or higher: 26% (33% national average in 2015), % of Bachelor’s degree or higher, by race:
  - Non-Hispanic white: 36%
  - Black: 25%
  - Asian: 47%
  - Hispanic (of any race): 18%
- Associate’s degree or higher: 33% (42% national average in 2015)
- Percent of workforce 45 or older: 49% (43% state average in 2013)
- Unemployment rate: 6.5% (5.2% state average in 2016)

With this background, a community college president has convened a group to discuss what can be done to improve the region’s workforce problem. After years of mistrust and false starts, will this finally be a turning point for the region? The president has invited the following individuals:

Francine: President, Community College A (the group’s convener)

Francine has managed one of the largest community colleges in the state for the last decade, nearly doubling the number of the institution’s students that go to four-year higher-education institutions. While her institution is well-respected by the university system, it has been criticized by the media and employers in recent years for shifting away from the institution’s historical strength in producing graduates with market-ready technical and vocational skills – its workforce placement rate has fallen by 10% in the past 5 years.

Francine is greatly interested in a regional labor market-focused initiative, having seen successful initiatives elsewhere. Specifically, she wants to align her college with high-demand occupations. However, she is worried about the lack of workforce data, and that her institution may become too focused on short-term (and
sometimes fickle) workforce needs. She is also concerned about collaborating with other community colleges in the region, with whom she competes for students.

**Patricia: Executive Director, Workforce Investment Board (WIB)**

The WIB plays its traditional role of directing federal, state, and local funding to workforce development programs, and occasionally supervises the publication of reports on the regional economy. In recent years, the WIB has not successfully engaged with a broad swath of actors—a blind spot for WIB.

Patricia wants to better deploy public funding to workforce development programs; this initiative could lead to a gap analysis of skills, which would improve the WIB’s offering. A few years ago, WIB tried to reach out to community colleges in the region but received a cold shoulder. It has also asked community colleges for data on their graduates, but institutions have been reluctant to regularly share data, particularly at the student level. She is also worried that employers do not have a coherent vision about the long-term workforce needs that they need to be successful in the region. Finally, the WIB is understaffed.

**Aaron: Chief human resources officer, multinational company**

Aaron is in charge of recruiting, retaining, and retraining employees for his company’s four factories in the region. In recent years, the company’s growth and profits have suffered as a result of severe labor shortages for critical occupations at the four factories he manages.

Aaron is interested to work with the education system and other actors to co-create solutions that work not only for the area’s overall workforce needs but also for his company. He is hopeful that if he convinces community colleges and others that his company will hire graduates with specific skills and experiences, they will adjust their curricula and overall pipeline strategies. However, Aaron is skeptical that community colleges will adapt to his needs without broader community support—support that Aaron is not sure exists. Aaron feels that in the past he hasn’t been “heard” when he’s raised workforce concerns to community colleges—the colleges seem to believe that their current programs meet most of his needs, and that’s good enough. He is also worried that community colleges will not be able to shoulder the costs of shifting their programs, and doesn’t believe that his company will invest the time in the initiative.

**Miguel: Superintendent, NISD**

Miguel is in charge of NISD’s turnaround—the fifth person in the last decade to be tasked with that job. The district has seen a decline in academic performance—particularly at the secondary level with high school graduation, college enrollment, and college readiness all dropping—and he is hoping to participate in or launch new initiatives, programs, and interventions to help move the needle.

Miguel is interested to work with the post-secondary system (he has not previously partnered with them) and other actors, particularly companies, to co-create solutions. However, he is worried that community colleges will point the finger at him, his schools, and his teachers when it comes to issues like readiness, not realizing that NISD faces a challenging set of factors. In recent years, NISD has been blamed by community members for many of Normalsville’s problems—from its growing poverty rate to its workforce shortages.

**Jeff: Executive director, community-based organization**

Jeff is in charge of the largest workforce engagement and retraining community-based organization (CBO) in the region. In recent years, the organization has struggled to not only retrain workers but also understand what skills and occupations the workforce needs.

Jeff is interested to learn about the latest workforce needs of employers and what community colleges and others are doing to meet those needs. This will help his CBO better allocate its resources and steer would-be workers to the right training programs and employers. He also sees an opportunity to directly support activities like retraining and curriculum development. However, Jeff’s CBO has traditionally not collaborated
with education institutions. He has reservations about how much credit his CBO can get for this initiative, which may affect future fundraising efforts. He is also worried that his programs are not as well respected as the training provided at community colleges.

**Lakshmi, Community College A second year student**

Lakshmi is a first-generation college goer. After graduating high school and working a few odd jobs, she enrolled in community college with hopes of landing a high-quality, high-paying job; community college A’s admission officers and brochures said these jobs were possible to land. However, in her first year, she is worried that she wasn’t picking up the skills or experience to get a high-demand job after graduation.

Lakshmi wants the college to invest resources to help students like her pick the courses and career tracks that best align with her career goals, and she’d like for the community college to have more programs that are about employment. But, she’s worried that the college won’t take her needs seriously, and further, that it’s too late for her to get the support she needs.