Goal and Action Alignment Mapping How-To Guide

What is it?

- A mapping tool that allows people to see how they are embedded within a larger system that includes shared goals, illuminates win-wins between themselves and partners, and can help motivate action and change.
- A tool to help make explicit how different stakeholders individually connect to some common goals (i.e., how the goals of the initiative specifically link to the goals of their organization), what unique assets stakeholders can each contribute to the initiative, and what win-wins between stakeholders exist.

Why do we use it?

- To help align stakeholders (e.g., agencies, community groups, nonprofit partners, etc.) around some common agreed upon goals.
- To help organizers learn how to better approach different types of stakeholders when planning for and implementing a program or initiative.

How to create a Goal and Action Alignment Map

1. Define the initiative or program you want to focus the alignment work around (e.g., could be a new initiative or an initiative that needs reinvigorating).
2. Select which approximately 3 results/ outcomes are most important for the initiative or program, and place these 3 results/outcomes on teal stickies (e.g., to reduce injury and death, to increase the physical health of the community).
3. Lay out about 3 yellow stickies under the teal sticky notes, and under those, 3 orange stickies. Duplicate this grid of 3 x 3 stickies several times. Such that each person has the

same 3 results/outcomes on teal stickies but blank yellow and orange stickies to individually fill in.

4. Identify potential partners that are/could be engaged in the initiative and ask each partner to complete a 3x3 map/grid of stickies.
5. On the yellow stickies, ask each partner to write about 3 mission critical objectives that their organization is working toward (i.e., what the partner is trying to achieve within their organization each day). Write one idea per sticky note.
6. On the orange stickies, ask each partner to write about 3 pain points or challenges that their organization is facing. Write one idea per sticky note.
7. Next, ask the partner to draw connections/arrows from the teal sticky notes to the yellow and orange sticky notes to illustrate how achieving the 3 goals that the larger

initiative is working on could help them achieve their mission critical objectives or pain points. Annotate each connection.

8. Finally, ask the partner to draw connections/arrows from the orange and/or yellow sticky notes into the teal sticky notes to illustrate any work they are already doing within their organization (to address challenges or achieve their mission critical objectives) that could also help support the goals of the larger initiative. Annotate each connection.
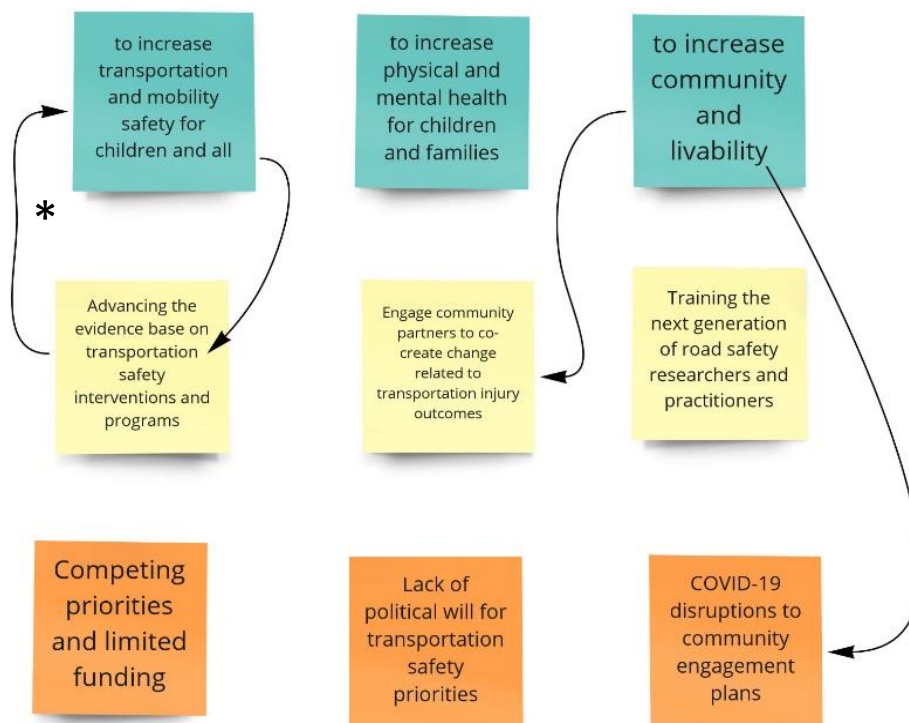
These maps can inspire discussion around:

- Are there any core results that we haven't yet identified stakeholders around (i.e., that "touch" the outcomes/results we care about)? Are there additional partners we should be reaching out to?
- How did different partners connect to these outcomes (i.e., through a connection from the teal outcomes to the yellow objectives or orange pain points)– any surprises or considerations for how similar partners in your community might connect to these outcomes?
- What sorts of actions/resources are different partners thinking they could provide to help achieve the target outcomes (i.e., arrows into teal sticky notes)– any surprises or takeaways for how other partners in your community/network might help?
- Within the potential actions suggested, can we identify any partnership synergies—where one partner might be able to support or augment another partner's potential actions? (This could involve supporting programming, data collection, partnership development, etc.—any pairings that could help individual organizations' work but also move forward the larger initiative?)

Example Goal and Action Alignment Map

to increase transportation and mobility safety for children and all

to increase physical and mental health for children and families

to increase community and livability

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Advancing the evidence base on transportation safety interventions and programs

Engage community partners to co-create change related to transportation injury outcomes

Training the next generation of road safety researchers and practitioners

Competing priorities and limited funding

Lack of political will for transportation safety priorities

COVID-19 disruptions to community engagement plans

* Annotation for connection: "Could use a curriculum our organization has developed related to transportation safety as a starting point for tailoring to school officials."

Goal and Action Alignment Mapping Case Study:
Applying a Systems Thinking Tool to Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Advance Transportation Safety

Cross-sector collaboration (involving government agencies, community organizers, lawmakers, and research institutions) is necessary to address complex problems like transportation injuries and deaths. Yet, collaboration is often hard. Each individual and organization has its own priorities and needs and faces unique challenges and resource constraints. They might also have pre-existing relationships with each other or with unrelated entities that can help or hinder work. For these reasons, to create successful partnerships, potential partners need to understand the larger system they are embedded within. Systems thinking tools, like Goal and Action Alignment (GAA) Mapping, offer a simple but structured way to facilitate this.

What are Goal and Action Alignment Maps?

They are a systems thinking tool to help us understand what motivates (potential) partners to work together, and what they already do/might do to help advance an initiative. By doing so, they help stakeholders better connect with one another in potentially new and powerful ways.

GAA Maps are usually drawn as part of a group activity in which a coalition of partners working on a common initiative explore how the individual work of partners (or potential new partners) relates to the common goals of the coalition.

As a first step, the coalition members identify the **three most important goals of the coalition**. After that, each coalition partner (or potential partner) completes their own map, identifying **three core objectives of the individual work of their organization** as well as the **three main challenges that their organization faces** when trying to

achieve those core objectives. Then, each partner (or potential partner) draws arrows that document:

- how the coalition goals affect the objectives and challenges of their individual organization (arrows from the teal boxes to yellow or orange boxes) and
- how their work on the objectives and challenges of their individual organization impacts coalition goals (arrows from yellow or orange boxes to teal boxes).

These arrows should be annotated to provide additional details about the nature of the relationship.

The diagram below shows the basic structure of a GAA Map. The three most important goals of the coalition are listed at the top (in teal). Below them, individuals or organizations write down their specific core objectives and challenges (in yellow and orange, respectively). After that, they draw arrows that represent the connections between goals and objectives/challenges and annotate them.

Basic Structure of a Goal and Action Alignment Map
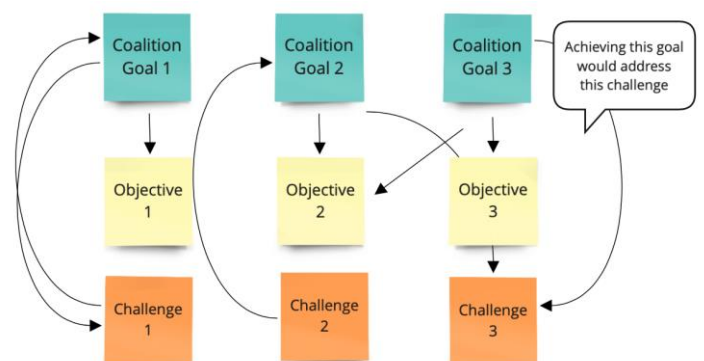
By comparing GAA Maps across individuals and organizations that are part of a coalition (or considering joining it), we can shed light on win-wins between individual partners and the broader coalition, motivating action and change. Furthermore, by identifying areas of potential friction (e.g., coalition goals exacerbating organization-specific challenges), this exercise can help organizers learn how to introduce changes in the coalition to better accommodate existing and potential partners.

Why is this helpful?

GAA Maps are a structured and systematic guide to help us understand what motivates partners to work with us, and what they already do/ might do to help a group's efforts.

Importantly, this approach does not require everyone to care about the same things. All partners can collaborate (and contribute to different coalition goals) as long as being part of the coalition does not interfere with their objectives or exacerbate their challenges.

Furthermore, because GAA maps are usually drawn as part of a group activity, they can contribute to creating a more honest and transparent coalition or group. Through discussion, participants can overcome assumptions about the objectives and challenges of their (potential) partners.

Real World Example

We used GAA Mapping during a virtual workshop aiming to understand how a diverse group of stakeholders (including government agencies, public health experts, researchers, and community organizations) could work to reduce traffic-related injuries and deaths in a large metropolitan county. Some of these stakeholders had been collaborating for some time but wanted to reassess the state of their partnership and understand how they could start collaborating with additional partners to expand the coalition.

With this in mind, they set aside time for a larger discussion among current and potential new partners to: 1) illuminate the network of partners that could help support comprehensive work to reduce traffic-related injuries and deaths, 2) uncover motivations on why or how diverse partners might want to get involved, and 3) identify future areas for partnership and program work. In the following sections, we describe how the GAA Mapping process contributed to achieving these objectives.

GAA Mapping in Action

To set the stage for this work, we first provided participants with a brief introduction to systems thinking. We explained how systems thinking can help us move away from a traditional road safety approach centered around modifying behavior at the individual level to a systems approach that focuses on structural factors that affect injury and death risks. We also emphasized the importance of considering the wider system in which collaborations are embedded and how system thinking tools can help us understand partnership networks as a "whole."

We then introduced GAA Maps as a tool that allows us to explore how to make collaborations more successful by uncovering areas of alignment and potential friction between the goals of the coalition and the work of individual partners.

First, we asked participants to agree on the 3 main goals of the coalition. Second, we asked participants to draw their GAA individually. As we were working online, we sent participants a link to Miro, a free online platform that allows users to work collaboratively on a virtual whiteboard. (Several other tools, including Google's Jamboard, Mural, and Zoom's whiteboard have similar functionalities.) The whiteboard on Miro was prepopulated with a GAA Map outline for each participant (similar to the diagram shown above). This outline included "virtual" sticky notes on which participants could write down their organization-specific objectives (yellow stickies) and challenges (orange stickies), below the agreed upon coalition goals (teal stickies).

We gave participants some individual time to work on their own GAA Map. Once they were done, we asked them to share their maps with the wider group and to review others' maps. While listening and reviewing, participants were encouraged to reflect on what their organization could do differently to support the shared goals of the coalition or how the wider coalition or specific partners could support their own objectives or help them with their own challenges.

What did this exercise reveal?

Initial group discussions among current (and potential) partners allowed us to identify three key goals for the coalition. These included **eliminating traffic-related serious injuries and fatalities**, **increasing healthy and equitable mobility** for all, and ensuring that **Safe System principles are built into transportation planning efforts**.

Individual GAA Maps provided rich information about the synergies and potential areas of friction between these coalition goals and the work of individual organizations. The diagram shown below, drawn by a participant working at the County Road Services Division, provides a good example. Two of the Division's objectives are keeping up

to date with the latest evidence on road safety and tracking and monitoring collisions. These objectives are directly related to the coalition's goal of eliminating traffic injuries and death. The Division could gain access to new knowledge and/or collision tracking evaluation expertise through the coalition. In addition, the Division could support other partners working towards this goal (e.g., by sharing evidence or best practices with other partners). The diagram also revealed potential synergies between the Division's justice and community engagement objectives and the coalition's equity goals.
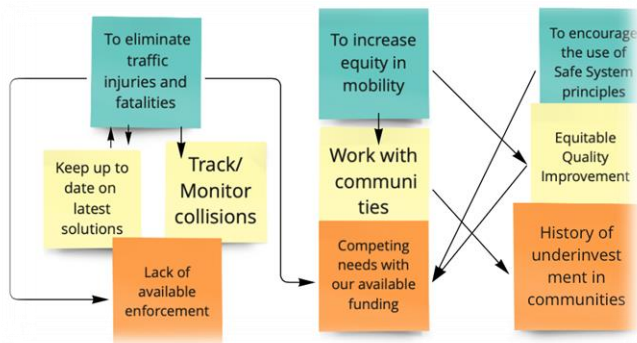
In this case, a history of underinvestment in vulnerable communities (and potentially related mistrust) represented a shared challenge for both the Division and the coalition and working on increasing county equity and mobility around transportation safety through the coalition would also help advance the Division's work in this space.

Synthesizing data across individual GAA Maps also provided rich insights. Individual organizations could offer a great deal of support to help the coalition meets its goals. This included access to up-to-date evidence on road safety interventions, technical expertise on data analytics,

planning guidance, and experience with effective community engagement and centering equity in evaluation and implementation work. In turn, the coalition's ambitions could help individual partners meet some of their objectives. The coalition could facilitate dissemination of (new) evidence and best practices across partners and provide access to expertise in data generation and evaluation. Moreover, forming part of the wider coalition made it possible for some organizations to achieve their objectives to collaborate across sectors, to amplify the impact of their work and messaging, and to provide a platform for more effective community engagement, advocacy, and legislative efforts.

Conclusion and Next steps

GAA Mapping is a systems thinking tool that offers a structured and systematic way to better understand how work by individual partners could contribute to the achievement of larger group or coalition's goals and how the group or coalition could help support individual partners' objectives (or address their challenges).

The initial insights from the GAA can enable participants to start developing more concrete action plans to collaboratively achieve coalition goals while supporting individual partners. At the same time, it can help individual organizations gain a better understanding of their role in the system and make it easier for potential new partners to decide whether to join the coalition by articulating what they can offer and what benefits they might receive.