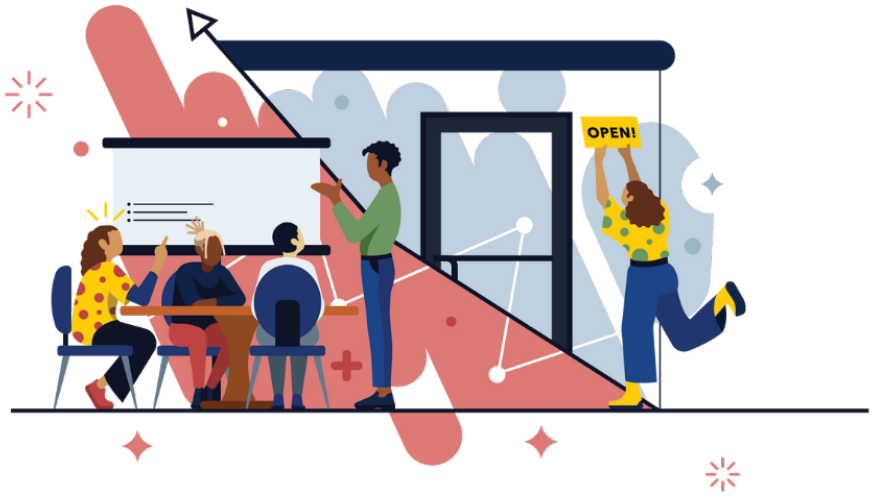
What Does it Mean to be a CoLab Nonprofit Partner?



What is CoLab?

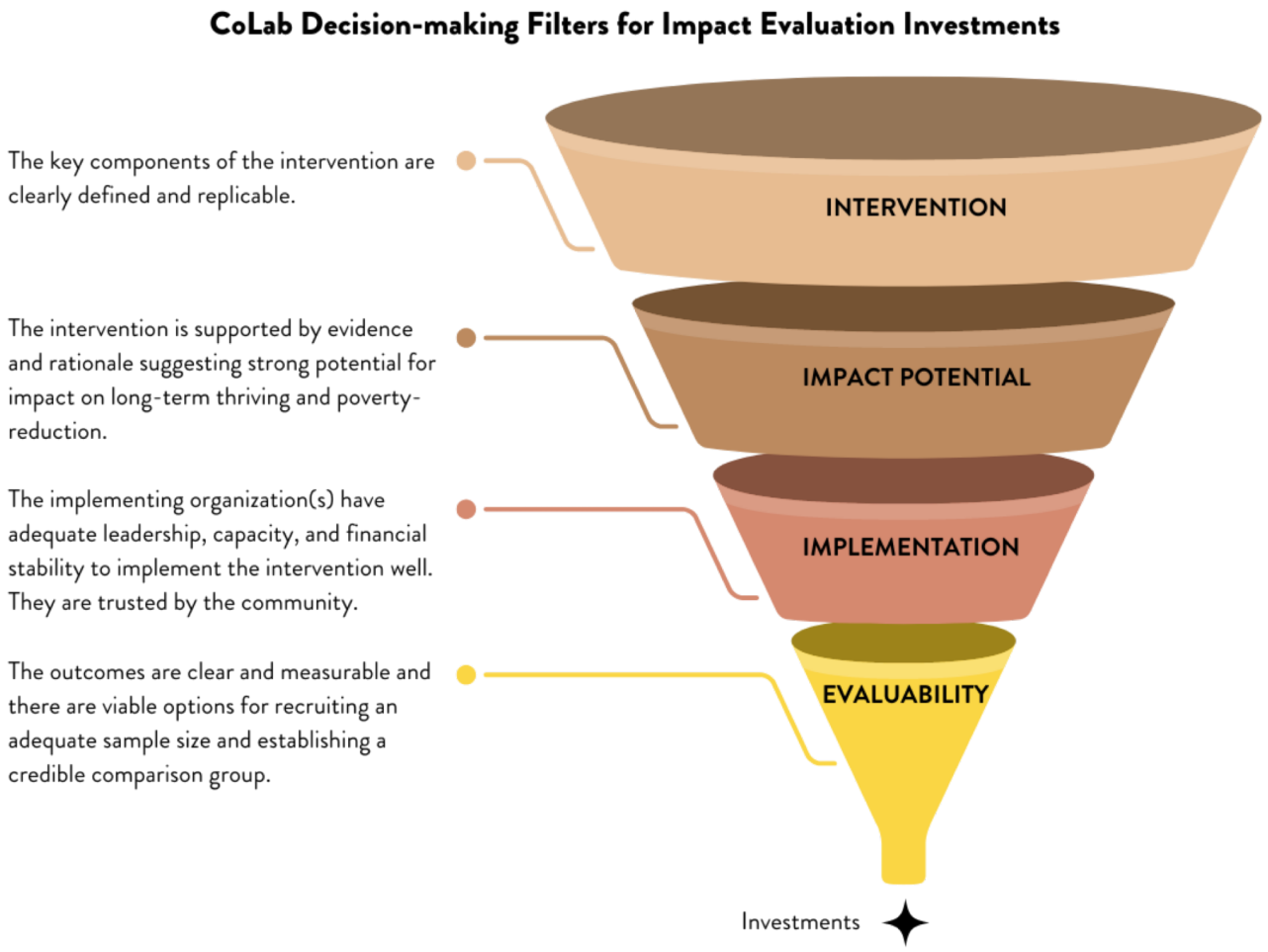
The Constellation Lab ("CoLab") funds and supports actionable research on poverty-fighting solutions. CoLab represents a new partnership of the Constellation Fund and the Foundation for Educational Research and Development (FERD) to invest in evidence to inform funding and community efforts to strengthen and scale effective solutions in Minnesota and beyond.

CoLab funds longitudinal impact evaluations of programs to reduce intergenerational poverty and support thriving people, families, and communities. An impact evaluation assesses changes in outcomes, such as income, health, or well-being, attributed to a specific program. This involves creating a credible comparison group from a bigger group of eligible people through a random lottery or other matching approach so that the evaluator can estimate the true program effects compared to the status quo without the program. Unlike most evaluations that only follow outcomes for a year or two, CoLab-funded evaluations will assess outcomes over many years.

CoLab also funds complementary types of actionable research, such as mixed-methods process evaluations, qualitative studies, community needs assessments, and research to inform the development or improvement of interventions before they undergo impact evaluation. CoLab will support partnerships to translate evidence to action through policy, philanthropy, and practice.

How Does CoLab Select Projects for Research Investment?

CoLab aims to strengthen the evidence base on different approaches to poverty reduction and supporting people's long-term thriving. Poverty has multiple causes, so there can be multiple solutions. We collaborate with a range of stakeholders to identify programs and practices that are good candidates for longitudinal evaluation and that could have population-level impact on poverty if scaled through public policy or philanthropic support. The figure outlines the four "filters" CoLab uses to help determine which programs are good candidates for evaluation.



What Does it Mean to be a CoLab Nonprofit Partner?

When CoLab selects a nonprofit organization as an impact evaluation partner, CoLab expresses an intention to make a very substantive and potentially long-term investment in the learning, influence, and scale-up of that organization's approach to affecting change. Very few programs undergo the kind of long-term, high-quality evaluation that CoLab funds and supports. Those that do often become national models and sources of learning and, if effective, can become eligible for new streams of funding as they reach evidence-based practice criteria. Examples of such programs can be found on Blueprints for Health Youth Development, the What Works Clearinghouse, and the Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse, among others.

The nonprofit partner is *not* responsible for conducting the evaluation. Rather, CoLab matches a qualified and value-aligned research team that works in collaboration with the nonprofit partner to lead the evaluation while the nonprofit leads the program implementation. CoLab will fund the full costs of the research. Typically, the program is funded through pre-existing revenue streams and/or with co-investment from other funders.

Research transparency is a key element of rigorous evaluation. While the program-related intellectual property remains under the control of the organization that creates the program, the research findings and materials are for the purpose of improving the evidence base and do not belong to the nonprofit

partner. As a professional norm, researchers conducting impact evaluations are now broadly expected in fields ranging from economics, to social work, to public health to publicly register an impact evaluation and its intended outcomes before the study begins and to report all findings. This increases public trust in research given a history of selective and biased reporting. Nonprofit partners will play key roles, however, in collaborating with research teams to help interpret the meaning of results.

What Does CoLab Expect of a Nonprofit Partner?

The nonprofit partner plays several critical roles in a CoLab-funded evaluation including:

- Full commitment from the organization's staff and governing leadership to ensuring reliable, quality implementation of the program with fidelity to its intended model.
- Importantly, while the nonprofit partner will not have to fund the study of its program, key members of its staff will need to commit time and capacity to support the research team and the success of CoLab's investment.
- Collaboration with the research team as it leads the development and implementation of evaluation plans. For example, the study recruitment process might adapt and build on existing program recruitment practices, and the research and program teams might work together to maintain contact with evaluation participants.
- Collecting and managing key information on the program participants and implementation that the research team can use as part of the evaluation.
- Committing to a culture of learning and transparency. Sometimes evaluation findings are not what we expect, but the lessons can still help organizations strengthen their effectiveness and the field work toward the best results possible. We seek nonprofit partners committed to acting with humility and reflection as knowledge leaders.
- Actively engaging in the processes of reviewing evaluation findings, co-interpreting their implications, and disseminating lessons.

Information: https://constellationfund.org/colab/. Contact: info@constellationlab.org.