

THE LAUNCH SEQUENCE

OVERVIEW

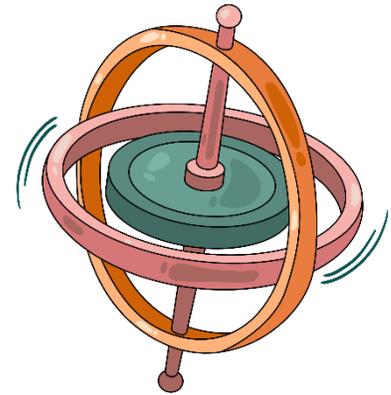
What Is a Launch Sequence?

When people talk about “launching” a collaborative effort, they often imagine a rocket: dramatic ignition, rapid ascent, visible progress.

But community change rarely works that way.

More often, collaboratives stall not from lack of passion, but from a mismatch between expectation and design. Energy spikes, then dissipates before anything really leaves the ground.

A Civic Canopy Launch Sequence switches the metaphor from rocket to gyroscope. A gyroscope takes intentional force to set in motion—the initial pull of a string. But once it is spinning, it generates the dynamic balance required to navigate complexity over time.



A Four Meeting Process

The purpose of a Launch Sequence is simple: To create the minimum viable set of conditions necessary for effective, sustained collaboration.

A Launch Sequence brings the [Community Learning Model](#) to life in a structured, four-meeting process designed to:

- Bring those affected by an issue to the same table to address it (Include)
- Build shared understanding of the community’s desired future (Results)
- Understand the root causes holding a problem in place and possible solutions for addressing it (Learn and Act)
- Establish governance and accountability (Culture of Collaboration)
- Create a cycle of learning (Learn)



The Launch Sequence also builds on the [Results-Based Accountability](#) approach developed by Mark Friedman that helps clarify ends before means, and Systems Thinking frameworks like the [4 Quadrant Model](#), which remind us that sustainable change requires shifts in mindsets, behaviors, culture, and structure.

The Launch Sequence emerged from the Canopy's research and field experience across dozens of community collaboratives. Trying to maximize depth of engagement while minimizing "collaboration fatigue," the Launch Sequence reduces the number of meetings often required to "get something going" to the fewest necessary to create momentum that sustains itself.

HOW TO USE

The Four-Meeting Launch Sequence: High-Level Overview

The Launch Sequence typically unfolds over four meetings within a 4-6 month window, but can be adapted to meet the needs of a given context. The sequence is purposeful, however, with each step contributing to the necessary conditions and building on the previous step.

Step 1: Building a Shared Future

The first step in the sequence helps set the tone and expectations for the journey together, and gives participants to dream about the future they want for the community. This builds a sense of common ground, and builds trust among participants. This step helps meet the following objectives:

- Establish trust and norms
- Develop shared language
- Build a common vision for our community's future
- Surface diverse perspectives

Step 2: Creating Measures of Progress

The second step circles back to the first to bring back the draft vision statement for full agreement, and asks the question, "How would we measure our progress toward the vision we just affirmed together?" This builds in a sense of accountability and realism, tethering a lofty vision to practical steps and measures. This step helps meet the following objectives:

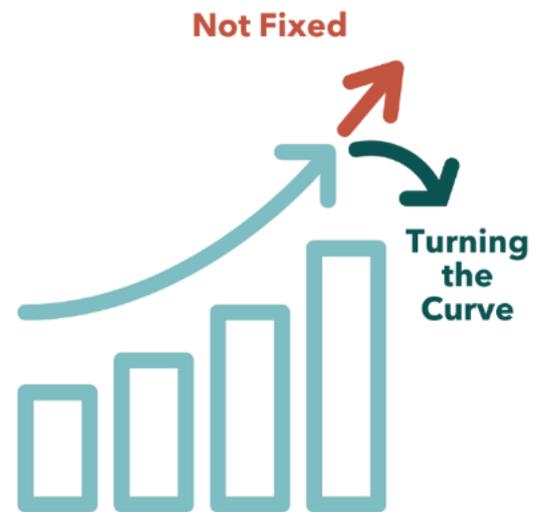
- Clarify the community vision
- Define measures of success
- Identify population-level vs. program-level outcomes



Step 3: Turning the Curve

With a clear vision and ideas for measuring progress, the group can now assess how it is doing based on those measures—establishing a shared baseline—and explore what is driving the trends it sees. And even more importantly, how to change those trends and “turn the curve” in the right direction through specific actions. This step helps meet the following objectives:

- Understand the root causes behind the patterns we see
- Develop possible solutions to address the root causes
- Launch action teams to refine solutions



Step 4: Organizing for Action

The final step in the Launch Sequence is to bring the different plans developed by Action Teams back together into one shared Action Map, and to enlist the broader community in taking sustained action on those strategies. Use the Action Map template to capture the result you defined in Step 1 and the indicators you selected in Step 2. Then align a set of strategies with actionable tactics the group can take that will help you turn the curve. This is both a celebration of work to date and the beginning of a continuous cycle of action and learning going forward. This step helps meet the following objectives:

- Finalize the Action Map
- Establish immediate action steps
- Define accountability
- Mark momentum and reinforce commitment to the vision



ACTION MAP TEMPLATE

Action Team Name

Our Result: A statement that describes a future condition for a group of people that you want to achieve. Example: "All _____ (population) in _____ (geographic area) are _____ (statement of well-being)"

Indicators: 3-5 measures that help quantify whether you've reached the result you're seeking.

Strategies: General approach to reaching our result by addressing root causes. Identify 3-5 core strategies you'll use to reach your result.

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Tactics: Specific action items to be taken by individuals, organizations, or the collaborative group. Align each tactic with the larger strategy it falls within.



WHEN TO USE

The Launch Sequence fits best when a critical mass of people in a community has determined that the time is right for bringing others together to address a pressing issue, and they want to ensure that they have the right people at the table to address it effectively.

A Launch Readiness Checklist: Preparing to Spin the Gyroscope

Before convening Meeting 1, several critical conditions should be in place.

This is where discipline matters most.

A. Establish a Small Planning Team (3-5 People)

- Committed leaders representing key sectors
- Willing to invest time and political capital
- Clear understanding of why collaboration is necessary
- Shared belief that no single entity can solve the issue alone

The Planning Team shapes invitations, framing, and tone.

B. Conduct 1-1 Conversations Before Launch

Conduct intentional one-on-one conversations with members of the broader community to:

- Test appetite for collaboration
- Surface concerns
- Clarify expectations
- Assess political landscape
- Build relational trust
- Identify potential Core Team members

Ask:

- What would make this worth your time?
- What concerns would you have?
- What must be true for this to succeed?

If resistance is high, pause to listen, expand the circle, and determine what it would take to mobilize for action. Take a moment to complete the [Recruitment Reflection](#) to identify any



potential barriers to participation or ways to incentivize participation. Remember: behind every criticism is a commitment to something. Try to build on that commitment to build a bigger “we.”

C. Identify the Core Team (12-18 Participants)

From those initial conversations, and based on other [community engagement strategies](#), convene a Core Team to help oversee the design and execution of the Launch Sequence. Select participants who:

- Represent diverse perspectives and lived experiences
- Hold influence within their networks
- Are directly affected by the issue
- Are capable of decision-making authority
- Are willing to engage in disciplined collaboration

Avoid:

- Creating too big of a group that is unwieldy to convene
- Exclusively institutional voices
- Over-representing similar interests and excluding diverse perspectives

D. Clarify Convening Authority

Inviting community members into a Launch Sequence is no small commitment—for you or for them. It helps to be clear on the “who” and the “why” behind this process to make sure you have the “credibility to convene.” This includes a legitimate stake in the issues, and trust from community members that something important could come from this process if successful. Be sure to clarify:

- Who is convening?
- Why are they credible?
- Why now?
- What authority does this group have?

The Launch Sequence does not rely on positional authority or market incentives to drive change. It generates what we call communicative power – the alignment of diverse actors around shared purpose through disciplined dialogue, deliberation, and shared learning. This form of power is slower to build, but more durable once established.



E. Design for Momentum, Not Perfection

- Schedule all four meetings in advance
- Select accessible venues that can accommodate the size of group you hope to attract and allow them to interact effectively
- Set clear expectations and goals for attendance
- Establish communication norms and routines
- Provide materials ahead of time in the languages your community speaks
- Build in time after each meeting to provide summaries back to the community so those who can't attend can still be engaged

COMMUNITY LEARNING MODEL

Culture of Collaboration

Strengthen the capacities that support collaborative work such as facilitative leadership, communication, information sharing and shared accountability. These elements strengthen the ability to move through the stages of the Community Learning Model.

The Launch Sequence is a tool that brings to life all phases of the Community Learning Model, and helps establish a true Culture of Collaboration. To learn more about tools for in each area of the Community Learning Model, visit civiccanopy.org/clm.

