



Building Community Crisis Coalitions

A Practical Guide to Trust, Partnerships, and
Data-Driven Collaboration

June 2026



About The Guide

Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help crisis response system agencies and service providers build, strengthen, and sustain regional crisis coalitions. Strong community partnerships support a coordinated response to behavioral health crises and help communities better understand and address the needs of individuals in crisis. This guide provides practical strategies and implementation guidance to support coalition development, engagement, and sustainability.

Guide Development

The Louisiana Center for Evidence to Practice, in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Health – Office of Behavioral Health, supports the development and training of Louisiana's behavioral health crisis response workforce. Together, CEP and LDH help strengthen the Louisiana Crisis Response System (LA-CRS) and support coordinated, effective crisis care across the state.

To support this work, this guide was developed by TBD Solutions Inc., a consulting firm dedicated to strengthening behavioral health and healthcare systems through effective partnerships and person-centered solutions.

What's in This Guide



Section 1: Why Community Crisis Coalitions Matter

Why collaboration improves crisis response.



Section 2: How Community Crisis Coalitions Are Built

Strategies for building trust, partnerships, and shared understanding.



Section 3: The Impact of Strong Community Crisis Coalitions

How coalitions improve outcomes.

SECTION 1

Why Community Crisis Coalitions Matter

Understanding why collaboration improves crisis response.



People in Crisis Enter Care Through Many Doors

Depending on the situation, people experiencing a behavioral health crisis may either seek help or be identified as needing support through a variety of community partners.



Law Enforcement



Emergency Departments



Schools



Outpatient Services



Crisis Services

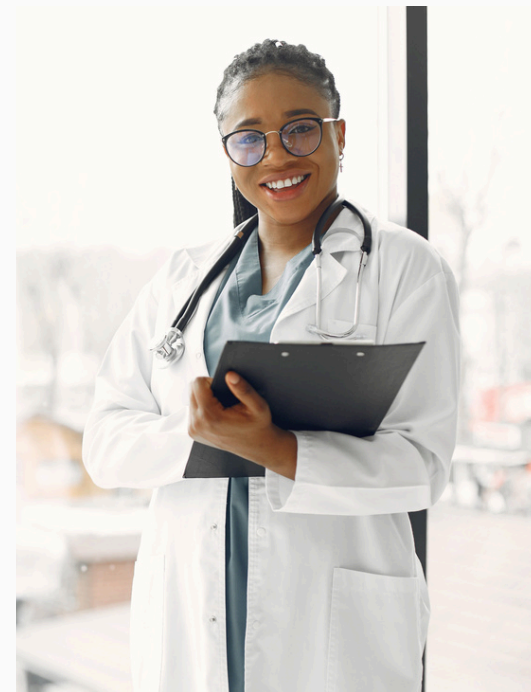
Each Community Partner Plays a Specialized Role

Community partners serve distinct roles in responding to behavioral health crises and often encounter individuals in crisis from different perspectives. Each partner has unique responsibilities and areas of expertise that shape the support they provide.



**Law
Enforcement**

Maintains
community safety



**Emergency
Departments**

Stabilize medical
emergencies



Schools

Support student
learning



**Outpatient
Services**

Provide ongoing
treatment



**Crisis
Services**

Assess, stabilize,
and treat crises

Community Crisis Coalitions Improve Outcomes

Because individuals enter crisis care through many different doors, coordination between partners is essential. Community crisis coalitions create opportunities to build trust, strengthen communication, improve referral pathways, and support data sharing, resulting in three important outcomes:

1



Timely Access to Care

Individuals receive timely access to effective, community-based crisis care.

2



Confident Referrals

Community partners confidently connect people to the right resources and remain focused on their primary mission.

3



Effective Crisis Support

Crisis providers can more effectively assess, stabilize, and treat individuals experiencing behavioral health crises.

SECTION 2

How Community Crisis Coalitions Are Built

Building trust, partnerships, and shared understanding.



Community Crisis Coalitions Are Built Through Two Practices

Community crisis coalitions are built through intentional actions that strengthen relationships and create a shared understanding of community needs and system performance. Two foundational practices help build and sustain strong coalitions:



Disciplines of engagement

Intentional and sustained actions that help community partners build trust, strengthen relationships, and support collaboration over time.



Data-Driven Convenings

Coalition meetings that help community partners use data as a shared source of truth to guide collaboration and system improvement.



Disciplines of Engagement Build Trust and Collaboration

Disciplines of Engagement are intentional and sustained actions that help crisis providers build trust, strengthen relationships, and support collaboration with community partners over time. This work is carried out through two core actions: Go & Learn and Go & Share.



GO & LEARN

Engage community partners to understand their roles, priorities, and perspectives.



GO & SHARE

Bring insights and data back to coalition partners to strengthen collaboration and sustain engagement.

Identify Crisis Community Partners

Go & Learn by identifying the community partners that may encounter individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Understanding who interacts with people in crisis helps ensure the right partners are included in coalition efforts.

Common partners include law enforcement, emergency departments, schools, government agencies, social service organizations, and other community-based providers.

Getting Started

- Create a list of potential coalition partners.
- Identify a primary contact at each organization.
- Document each partner's role.



Meet Community Partners Where They Work

Go & Learn by meeting community partners in their own environment. Taking the initiative to visit partners where they work provides valuable insight into their role, responsibilities, and day-to-day operations.

Requesting on-site meetings at a time that works for the partner makes it easier to connect, build relationships, and better understand their priorities, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.



**BUILD
RELATIONSHIPS**



**UNDERSTAND
ROLES**



**STRENGTHEN
THE SYSTEM**



Build Relationships Before a Crisis Occurs

Go & Learn by engaging community partners before a crisis occurs. Building relationships during periods of stability allows organizations to connect without the urgency of a crisis and creates opportunities to bring the right people together, understand referral processes, gather important information, and develop communication and referral pathways before they are needed.

Discussion Starters for Partner Meetings

- What challenges do you encounter when supporting individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis?
- How do individuals currently move between your organization and crisis services?
- Where do communication or referral challenges occur most often?
- What opportunities do you see to strengthen collaboration?





Understand Partner Priorities and Needs

Go & Learn by understanding what is most important to community partners. Ask partners about their priorities and desired outcomes in crisis care, and identify ways to measure progress toward those outcomes.

Learning the terminology, processes, and organizational structure that shape a partner’s work helps build trust and demonstrate the value of collaboration.



Turning Priorities into Measures

Ask two questions:

- 1. What outcome is most important to your agency?
- 2. How would we know if we were making progress?

Examples:

Partner Priority	Example Measure
Reduce psychiatric patient boarding	Average psychiatric patient length of stay in the emergency department
Reduce responses to nonviolent behavioral health calls	Number of behavioral health calls diverted from law enforcement
Increase access to community-based crisis care	Number of individuals connected to crisis services



GO & SHARE

Use Data to Sustain Partnerships

Go & Share by regularly sharing data related to partner priorities and shared initiatives. Consistently sharing information provides a shared source of truth that helps partners understand progress, evaluate the impact of collaborative efforts, and maintain engagement over time.

Putting Data into Practice

- Review progress during coalition meetings.
- Discuss successes and challenges with partners.
- Use data to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Provide regular updates through email or reports.



As Coalitions Grow, Two Common Challenges Emerge

Through Disciplines of Engagement, crisis providers build relationships with community partners and sustain those partnerships through ongoing communication and data sharing. As these partnerships grow into a community crisis coalition, partners begin meeting together to discuss system needs and opportunities for improvement. Two common challenges often emerge that can limit progress and impact.

1

Reliance on Anecdotal Stories

Individual experiences may not reflect broader system needs.

2

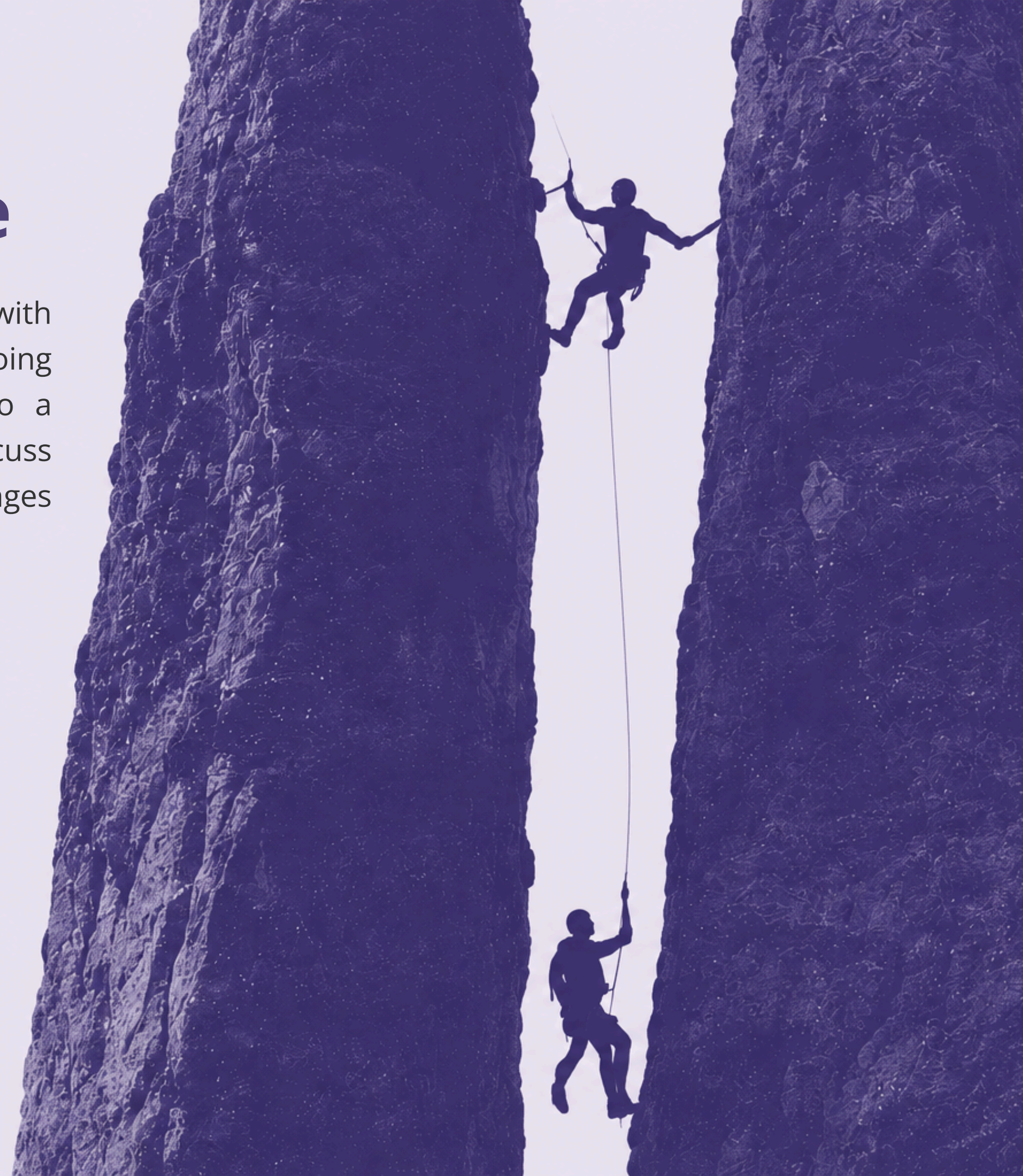
Solutions Without Clear Action Steps

Ideas are discussed without clear next steps or measurable outcomes.



The Goal

Create a shared understanding of system needs and identify measurable opportunities for improvement.



Data-Driven Convenings

Create Shared Understanding

Data-Driven Convenings are coalition meetings that use shared data to better understand system performance, identify priorities, and guide improvement efforts. By moving beyond anecdotal stories and individual experiences, community partners can create a shared understanding of system needs, prioritize improvements, and measure progress over time.



Create Shared Understanding

Develop a common view of how the crisis system is functioning.



Identify Needs

Use data to identify priorities and opportunities for improvement.



Measure Progress

Track outcomes and evaluate the impact of improvement efforts.

Three Measures Create a Big-Picture View of the Crisis System

To create a shared understanding of system performance, coalition partners can collect and review three key measures: Crisis Utilization, Crisis Resolution, and Timeliness. Together, these measures provide a big-picture view of how individuals move through the crisis system and highlight opportunities for improvement.

- 1 Crisis Utilization**
Measures where individuals experiencing a crisis are encountered across the community.
- 2 Crisis Resolution**
Measures where crises are successfully stabilized across the community.
- 3 Timeliness**
Measures how quickly individuals receive care and move through the crisis system.

Together, these measures answer three key questions:

- Where are crises occurring?
- Where are crises stabilizing?
- How quickly is care being provided?

Measure Crisis Utilization

Crisis utilization measures how many individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis are encountered by community partners. By tracking utilization across the crisis system, coalitions can better understand community needs, identify demand, and recognize patterns in where crises are occurring.



Questions to Consider

- How does your organization define a behavioral health crisis?
- What data sources could be used to track crisis encounters?
- What does utilization data reveal about community needs and service demand?



Measure Crisis Resolution

Crisis resolution measures how often individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis are successfully stabilized by the responding agency.

By tracking resolution across the crisis system, coalitions can better understand where stabilization is occurring and how individuals are being connected to ongoing support and services.



Questions to Consider

- How does your organization determine whether a crisis has been successfully stabilized?
- What outcomes could be used to measure successful stabilization?
- What does resolution data reveal about the effectiveness of current services and referral pathways?



Measure Timeliness

Timeliness measures how quickly individuals receive care and move through the crisis system. By tracking timeliness across the crisis system, coalitions can better understand where delays occur, identify bottlenecks, and improve access to care.



Questions to Consider

- Where do delays most commonly occur within the crisis system?
- What data sources could be used to measure response times or length of stay?
- What does timeliness data reveal about access to care and system efficiency?

Example Measures by Community Partner

The specific measures used by each organization will vary based on their role within the crisis system. The examples below illustrate how community partners can apply the concepts of utilization, resolution, and timeliness using data that may already be available within their organization.

Community Partner	Utilization	Resolution	Timeliness
Law Enforcement	Behavioral health-related calls for service	Calls resolved without hospital transport	Average response time
Emergency Department	Behavioral health-related ED visits	Discharged home without inpatient psychiatric admission	Average length of stay
Mobile Crisis	Mobile crisis responses	Crises resolved in the community	Average response time from dispatch to arrival
Crisis Unit	Admissions	Discharged without inpatient psychiatric admission	Average length of stay

SECTION 3

The Impact of Strong Community Crisis Coalitions

Creating meaningful outcomes through trust, partnerships, and shared understanding.



Strong Coalitions Create Meaningful Outcomes

Disciplines of Engagement and Data-Driven Convenings help community partners build trust, create a shared understanding of the crisis system, and align around shared priorities. Together, these practices create four important outcomes:



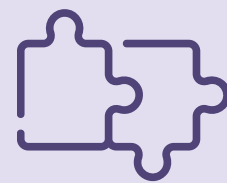
1



**Build System
Buy-In**

Shared priorities help partners align around system improvement.

2



**Support Tailored
System Design**

Local insights help communities design systems that fit their needs and resources.

3



**Improve Specialized
Client Care**

Effective referrals connect individuals to the providers best equipped to meet their needs.

4



**Increase System
Efficiency**

Strong coordination reduces duplication and improves system performance.



Strong Coalitions Build System Buy-In

Objective data and collaborative discussion create a shared understanding of system challenges and opportunities.

When partners understand the same challenges and opportunities, they are more likely to support and participate in improvement efforts. As a result, communities can move more effectively from discussion to action.



**Shared understanding
builds support for change.**

When partners see the same picture,
priorities align and momentum grows.

Strong Coalitions Support Tailored System Design

Every community has unique needs, resources, and challenges. Data-driven discussions help communities identify local priorities and design crisis systems that reflect the needs, strengths, and resources of their community. As a result, communities can develop solutions that are practical, sustainable, and responsive to local conditions.

Examples of Tailored Solutions

- Utilization data may reveal service gaps or unmet needs across the community.
- Resolution data may identify opportunities to strengthen referral pathways and alternatives to hospitalization.
- Timeliness data may highlight delays that lead communities to redesign processes or expand capacity.



Strong Coalitions Improve Specialized Client Care

Effective referral pathways help connect individuals to the professional or service best equipped to meet their needs. As a result, individuals are more likely to receive the right care, from the right provider, at the right time.

Matching Needs to Expertise

Safety concerns	→	Law enforcement
Medical stabilization	→	EMS or Emergency Department
Behavioral health crisis	→	Mobile Crisis Team
Ongoing treatment needs	→	Community-Based Providers



When individuals are connected to the right provider, outcomes improve and unnecessary system involvement is reduced.



Strong Coalitions Increase System Efficiency

Clear referral pathways help community partners focus on their primary roles and responsibilities. As a result, duplication is reduced, coordination improves, and the crisis system operates more efficiently.

Efficiency allows every partner to spend more time doing what they do best.

- Law enforcement focuses on public safety.
- Emergency departments focus on medical stabilization.
- Schools focus on supporting student learning.
- Crisis providers focus on behavioral health care.
- Individuals receive the right support at the right time



Taking the Next Helpful Step

Across the country, communities are strengthening their crisis systems through collaboration, data, and shared problem-solving. Whether your coalition is just getting started or continuing to grow, these practical approaches can help you take the next helpful step.

The goal is not to do everything at once. The goal is to take the next helpful step.

