

A photograph of three children and an adult male playing with wooden train tracks on a green play mat. The child in the foreground is a young girl with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a white shirt, focused on placing a yellow train car. Behind her is another girl with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a pink and white striped shirt, also looking at the tracks. To the right, an adult male with dark skin, wearing a grey hoodie and a tan baseball cap, is kneeling and assisting with the train set. In the background, another child in a red shirt is partially visible. The train set includes wooden tracks, a bridge, a tunnel, and various colorful train cars and accessories.

Trying together

Strategic Roadmap

2018-2022



Trying Together is at a pivotal moment in our 55 year history in the Pittsburgh region. What began as a community driven, all-volunteer effort has developed into a leading non-profit providing advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities for the needs and rights of young children, their families, and the adults who interact with them.

When we changed our name to Trying Together in 2018, the inspiration came from this Fred Rogers' quote:

“We need to remember that children are trying, too—trying to understand their feelings and their world, trying to please the people they love, trying to grow. When grownups and children are trying together, just about anything can be possible.”

By collaborating with early care and education professionals, families, and other individuals to advocate together, partner together, and learn together, we create a future in which caregivers feel valued; children have access to high-quality early learning environments; and families have the resources they need to support their children's early learning experiences.

As we look forward to the next five years (2018–2022), we are encouraged and driven to continue and expand the reach of our work to statewide and national audiences to meet these goals. We know this is no small task, and we do not claim to have all of the answers. But, we do believe by tackling together the challenges the early childhood field faces, we will get closer to a range of possible solutions.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues, because together, we can make this vision a reality.

Sincerely,



Cara Ciminillo

Trying Together, Executive Director



Background

Trying Together began in 1963 as the Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association (P.A.P.A.). In 1983, the organization officially affiliated with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and became the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC). As a volunteer driven, membership organization for professionals in the field of early childhood learning and development, PAEYC coordinated annual conferences, provided networking and leadership opportunities, and served as a local voice for the field.

Thanks to the generous support of the Pittsburgh philanthropic community in the early 2000s, PAEYC was able to move from a volunteer to staffed model allowing for deepened and expanded advocacy and professional service to the region which included neighborhood-based work with child care providers and families.

In late 2016, PAEYC and its sister 'AEYCs' throughout the state were presented with several options for continued engagement with NAEYC. A decision was made that PAEYC would house the Pittsburgh Chapter of PennAEYC and continue to lead regional advocacy efforts while PennAEYC would provide a daily presence in Harrisburg. Collectively,

this move strengthens the field's voice and enables greater coordination throughout the state.

Guided through a strategic planning process in 2017 by LaPiana Consulting, the Board of Directors and staff reflected on PAEYC's history and growth. We considered the initial problem we sought to solve, progress we had made, and what more needed to be done; refined our mission; and articulated a vision statement to serve as our "northstar". Finally, we identified four goals that would drive our work forward. In consideration of these factors, a decision was made to rebrand the organization. Utilizing Little Kelpie, a communication design studio, PAEYC worked with multiple stakeholders to identify a new name and logo.

Rebranded as Trying Together in early 2018, we have established a reputation for innovation, deep content knowledge, and the ability to collaborate with a variety of partners. Through our mission, we remain committed to making sure all children have high-quality early learning experiences. With a fresh vision, mission, logo, name, and five-year strategic plan, we will continue supporting the work of early childhood for years to come.





*“Our capacity to care
for someone else is rooted
in our self-worth.”*

Fred Rogers

Vision and Mission

Trying Together envisions a future in which all caregivers feel valued.



In pursuit of that vision, our mission is to support high-quality care and education for young children. We provide advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities for the needs and rights of children, their families, and the individuals who interact with them. We work regionally (in Southwestern Pennsylvania) and take our expertise and models to statewide and national audiences.

By 2022, Trying Together will be:

- A national leader offering its expertise in coordinating and connecting systems at the neighborhood, local, and regional levels to support early childhood development and early learning.
- The premier provider of in-person and online professional growth opportunities for home, center, and school-based professionals to ensure that every child has access to high-quality early childhood and early learning experiences.
- A 'go to source' for families to aid them in making well-informed decisions regarding their child's early experiences.
- An expert policy resource in western Pennsylvania and a leading advocate for high-quality early care and education in the state, mobilizing its network to take action on issues important to young children and their families.



Framing Questions

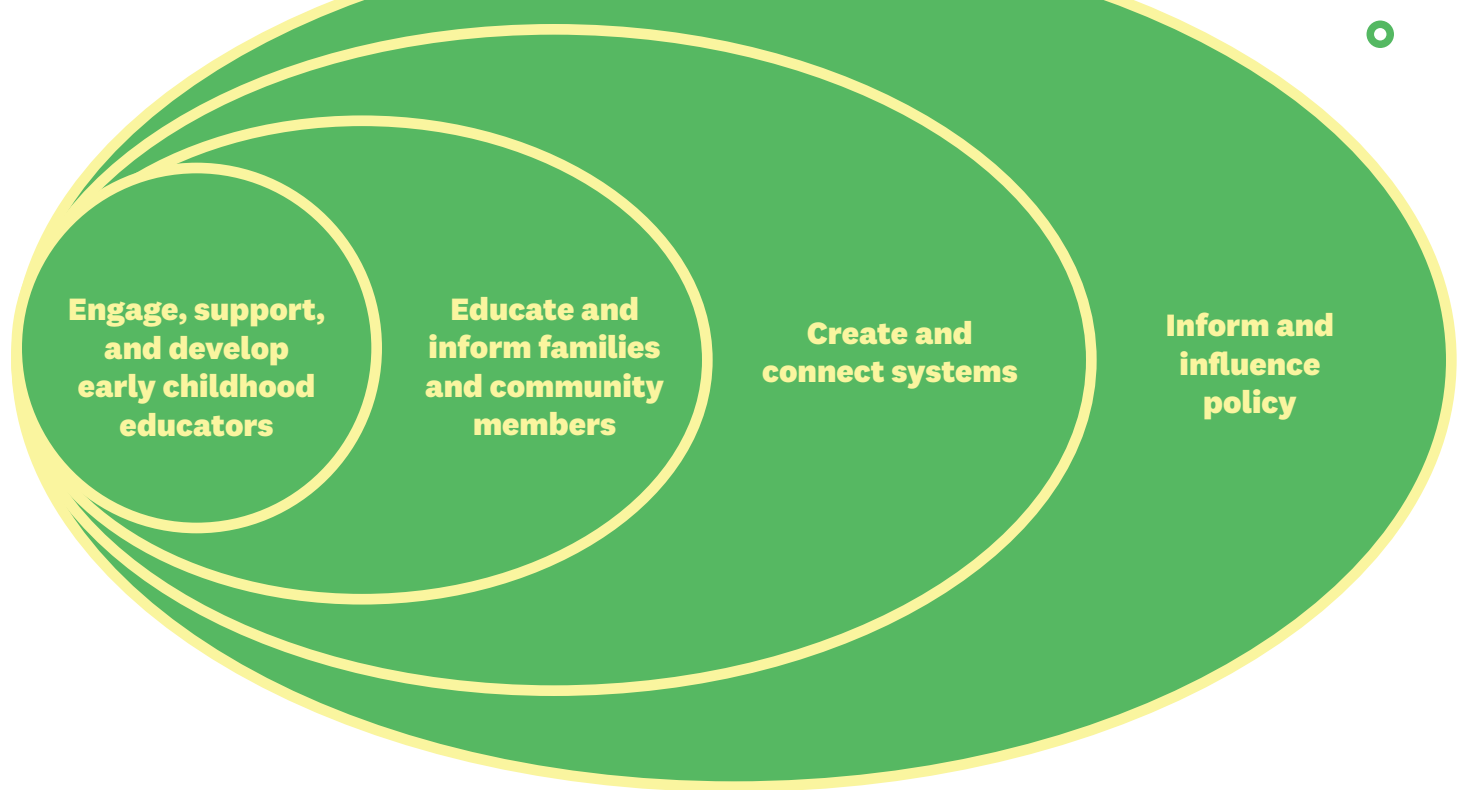
Achieving the goals outlined above required us to answer several big questions as we considered future strategies:

- What qualitative and quantitative impact are we seeking to ensure that caregivers feel valued?
- Are there service gaps within the system that need to be addressed in order to best meet the needs of our stakeholders (children, families, and early care and education professionals)?
- How do we decide among opportunities to develop and/or participate in new programs and community initiatives so we can optimize impact and best utilize and build our expertise?
- Are there opportunities to diversify and/or strengthen our revenue mix for greater sustainability?
- What strategic partners do we need or want to be effective in either deepening or extending our impact?
- Are we prepared to respond to policy changes?

Organizational & Programmatic Strategies

The answers to our framing questions are found in our organizational and programmatic strategies. Both allow us to set implementation goals, develop program and operational plans that support these strategies, and to make decisions that consistently move the organization forward. They also help us to decide our approach, and which programs and activities to offer in order to achieve specific outcomes related to our target audiences. (*LaPiana Consulting*)

Our organizational strategy is to catalyze and deliver a range of solutions to influence and improve early childhood care and education while our programmatic strategies (as outlined below) connect and build upon one another to achieve this strategy.



Engage, Support, and Develop Early Childhood Educators

Programs designed to support early childhood educators represent our most mature and longest standing area of work. We use a professional development logic model (see Appendix A) as a framework for understanding and achieving a positive impact on the early childhood educators these programs reach.

Our program offerings focus on early childhood educators working in home, center, and school-based settings delivered both in-person and online. As we look to the future, we will expand engagement with home visitors and school-based providers.

Professional Development

- Customized professional development offerings will be created for early education, out-of-school-time, and early elementary programs. Targeted to their goals, interests, and needs, we will work with various higher education partners to formalize arrangements for the provision of credit hours for these offerings. These hours could articulate into a professional certificate, credential, and/or degree in early childhood.

- Additional opportunities for professional development include coaching and mentoring services. Intended to promote and support awareness and strengthening of individuals' and programs' learning processes and professional practices, the mentoring model we created is relationship-based and customized to meet individual needs as well as enhance identified goals and interests.

Two innovations and philosophies which may also be expanded are: *Message from Me* and *Everyday Interactions Matter (EIM)*. Both of these connect us with a national—and potentially international—audience.

- *Message from Me* is a digital tool which enables young children to better communicate their daytime activities in early care and education settings with their families. Developed by the CREATE Lab at Carnegie Mellon University, Trying Together exclusively provides the professional development for this tool.
- *Everyday Interactions Matter (EIM)*, the early childhood arm of *Simple Interactions Matter (SIM)*, is a strengths-based approach to supporting child- and youth-serving professionals in learning and growing from their own practice. Focused on the everyday interactions between adults and children, EIM/SIM emphasizes “finding the deep and simple in quality early childhood education.” Trying Together will continue to incorporate the EIM philosophy into more of its development offerings and connect it to our work with families.





Educate and Inform Families and Community Members

A child's home is the first and most influential environment in their development. Recognizing this, we will collaborate with families in meaningful ways to support this critical learning period. By providing valuable information such as tips on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in the home, we can serve as a 'go-to' resource for families, aiding them in making decisions about their child's early learning experiences.

Interactions

- We will help to foster responsive and caring family-child interactions in our role as lead organization for the Homewood-Brushton Family Support Center through innovative programming and strategies.



Play






As a founding member of the Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative, we cultivate understanding about the importance of play in early learning and throughout life among families and community members.

- We will leverage the work of the Collaborative in Hazelwood (via the Play Trail). Over the next several years, we envision expanding the Collaborative's involvement to more neighborhoods and connecting Trying Together's family and fatherhood work more directly to the importance of play through messaging and model activities.

High-Quality Child Care

High-quality child care is essential to early childhood development. We will provide research and tools to families and community members that allow them to speak-up on behalf of themselves and young children.

- We will develop a tool/strategy informed by our experience in Homewood to support families in advocating for and affecting their child's early care and education experience.
- 
- 
- 

Create and Connect Systems

We utilize research and data to inform our decision-making, capturing learnings from our work in neighborhoods throughout the region. These findings are then shared on a local, regional, and national level to help create and connect systems. (Figure 1) Through this work, we support high-quality, early learning experiences in communities.

- We will work with our partners at the Department of Human Services and others to integrate and strengthen existing data systems. By integrating available child-, family-, and provider-level data, we will provide thoughtful analysis that better informs city and regional planning and decision-making, and allows us to monitor and evaluate our collective goals and outcomes.

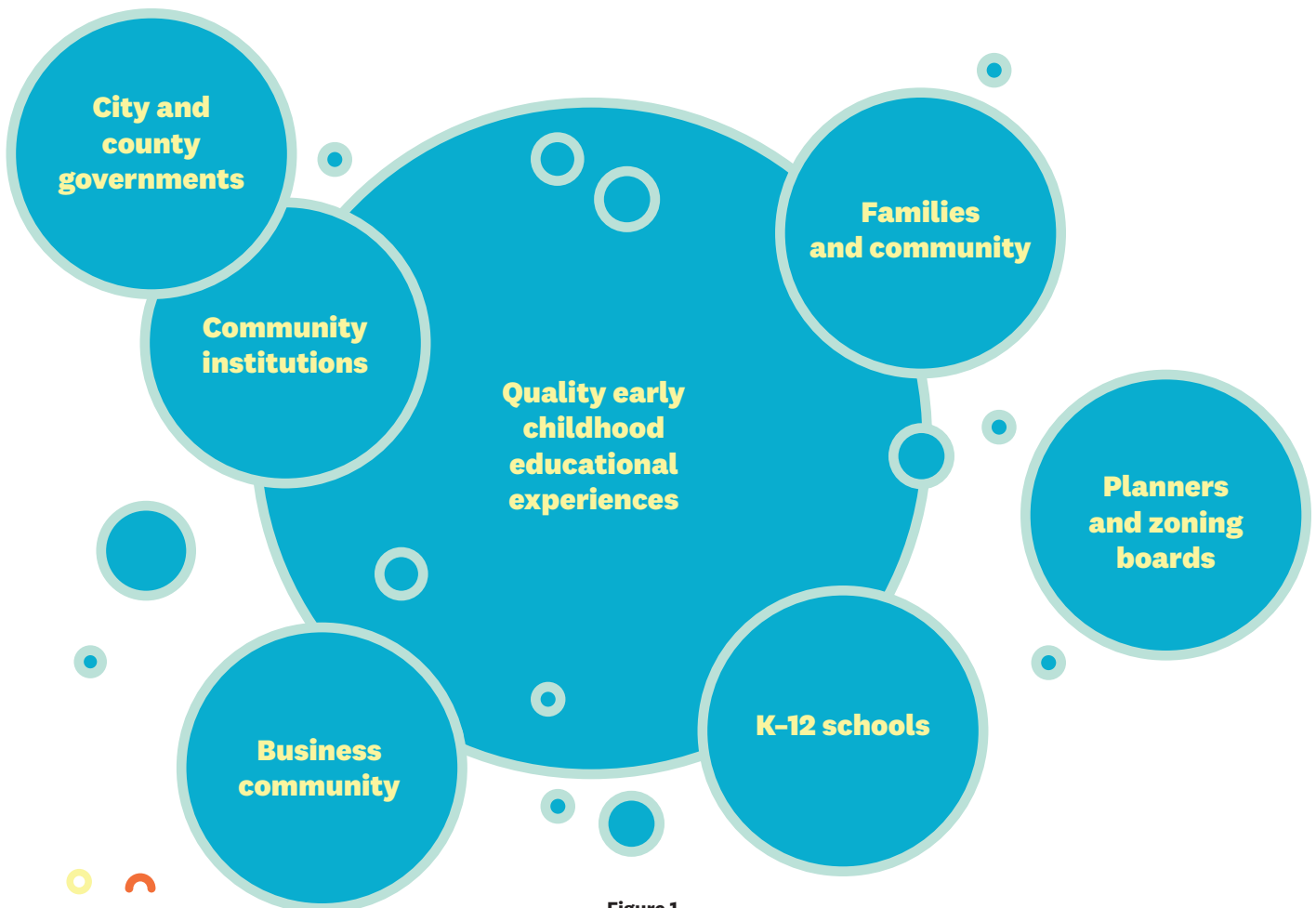


Figure 1



Inform and Influence Policy

We advocate with our partners to educate policymakers and to promote policies that benefit children, families, and early care and education professionals. With the development of a bi-annual Public Policy Agenda, we have established our position on doing what's best for children. Looking to the future, we will enhance relationships with providers and legislators, develop expert research, communications, and messaging, and explore opportunities to support other campaigns that also affect children and families.

Local



- We will cultivate grasstops and non-traditional supporters for early childhood by expanding outreach to commissioners in surrounding counties. By developing relationships with school board members, we will affect policies on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in school districts.

Statewide



- A founding partner of Early Learning PA (ELPA) and other statewide campaigns, we will continue to connect the provider community to policy-makers through our committee work in the areas of home visiting, child care, and preschool.

National

- Through our participation in action alerts and campaigns released by national groups, and through presentations at conferences, we will maintain advocacy at the national level by sharing our local expertise with policy and advocacy audiences across the United States.





Communications

Poised to execute the strategic plan, Trying Together requires a coordinated strategy to communicate our goals. Through clear, concise, and consistent communications, we will utilize the extendibility of our new name to segment messaging to our growing audiences. To reinforce the brand, we will focus on internal professional development in communications and public relations skills with the goal of making our messaging and work relatable to all audiences, including those who are not early care and education professionals.

- Develop and implement communications policies and procedures.
- Provide professional growth opportunities for staff to improve communications and public relations skills.
- Develop relationships with target audiences and conduct market research through focus-groups, and surveys to create clear, concise, and consistent messaging.
- Implement a paid advertising strategy.
- Pursue opportunities for cross-promotion with local and national partners.



Conclusion

This roadmap is a framework for engaging in an ever-changing world. As an innovator, we are often presented with opportunities to engage with new partners and in new programs. To ensure that we are in a position to make sound, strategic decisions regarding opportunities, as well as evaluating current work and challenges we may be faced with, a strategy screen was developed and is being used to guide our considerations. (See Appendix B)

Likewise, our detailed implementation plan, while not included in full, will be used as living document—one that is referenced, evaluated and revised as needed.

If you would like to partner together with us to support high-quality care and education for young children, please visit www.tryingtogether.org to learn more.

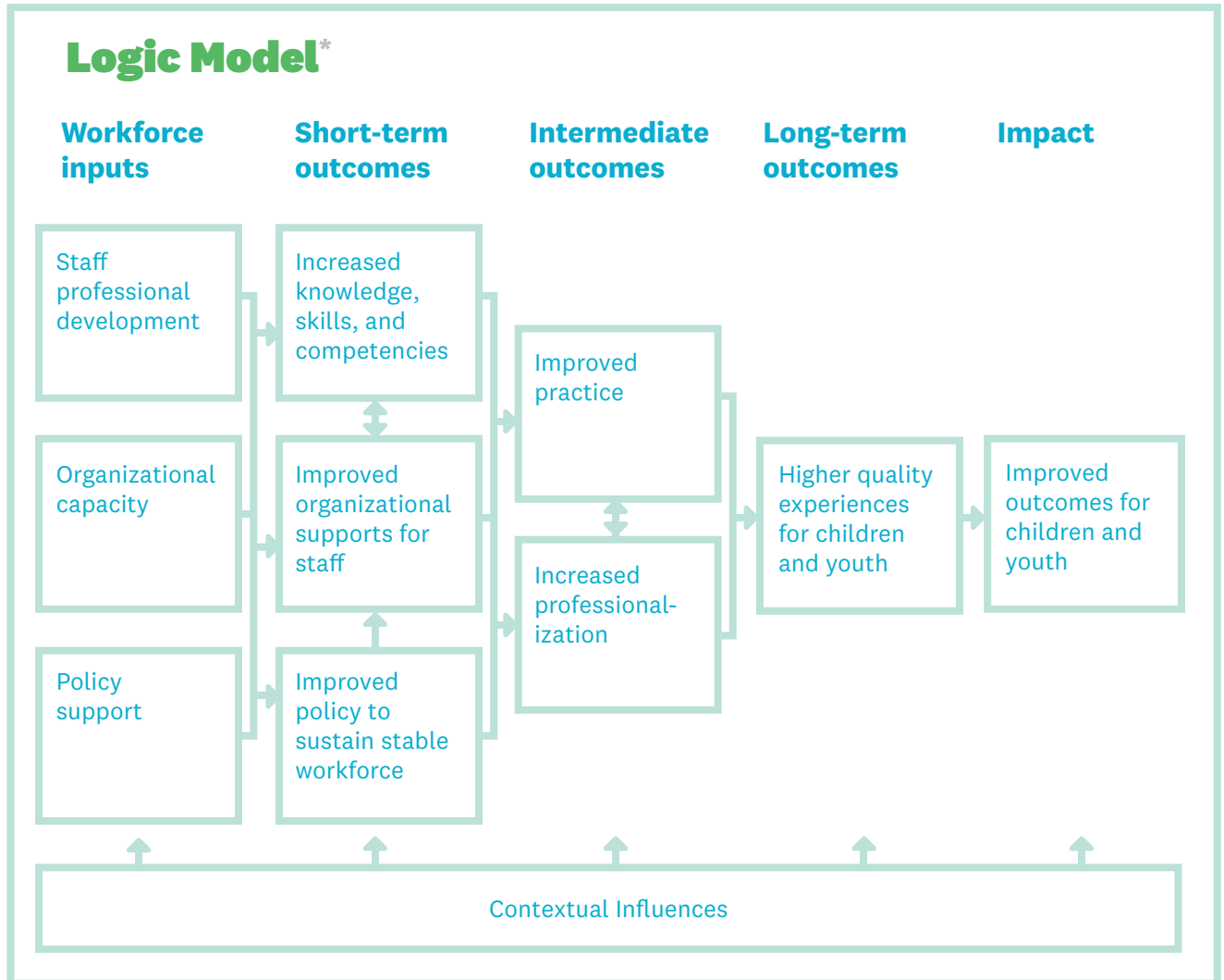
In Gratitude

Trying Together thanks LaPiana Consulting for their guidance and partnership in this process. Their patience and humor was much appreciated! We are also grateful to our Board of Directors, partners, and staff for their openness and trust in the process and their thoughtful deliberation which helped us to develop the roadmap. Finally, thank you to our funders without whom supporting the work of early childhood would not be possible; your unwavering support has been essential throughout this period of growth.



Appendix A

Logic Model*



*Harvard Family Research Project, (2005/06, Winter). The Evaluation Exchange: Professional Development, XI (4). Cambridge, MA: Author.

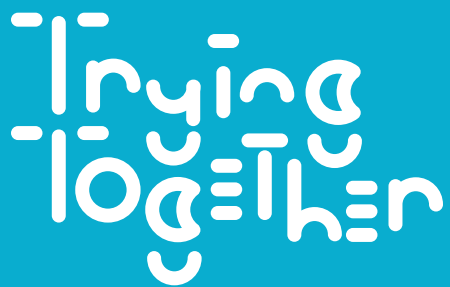
Appendix B



Strategy Screen

1. Does it help advance our mission? How?
2. Does it leverage or enhance our competitive advantages?
3. Is it scalable?
 - a. What would it take?
 - b. Does it lead to greater impact?
 - c. What is the line of service?
 - d. Who is the audience?
4. Is this the right thing for us to do? Can we do it better than someone else might? Should we partner with someone?
5. Do we have the resources to support the activity/strategy and remain stable and sustainable?
6. Is there enduring impact for our audience(s)—meaningful outcomes?
7. Do we have or can we acquire the necessary expertise?
8. Can we leverage into other areas—ex. valuable relationships?
9. Does it contribute to a comprehensive approach?
10. How does this impact our brand/reputation?
11. Is it consistent with our values and culture?





Trying Together

5604 Solway Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412.421.3889
tryingtogether.org