

THE MONROE COUNTY SYSTEMS INTEGRATION PROJECT

UNITED WAY OF GREATER ROCHESTER
A UNITED WAY INNOVATION CASE STUDY



Over the last two years, United Way of Greater Rochester in Rochester, New York, has emerged as a leader in establishing the [Monroe County Systems Integration Project \(SIP\)](#). SIP is a multi-sector project with over 350 participating stakeholders, working together to move individuals and families to the center of care. To do this, they aim to create connections between 300 health, education, and human service organizations by building relationships, workflows, and technology that links an individual's service experience across sectors. By coming together in this way, SIP will help improve the health and economic well-being of individuals and families in Monroe County, especially those who are vulnerable and/or impacted by poverty.

The core components of SIP, which will be implemented through 2024, include:

- ▶ Integrated service delivery that spans the health, human service, education, and public sectors
- ▶ A shared digital dashboard that offers providers a 360-degree view of more than 150,000 individuals
- ▶ A shared digital closed-loop referral system used by more than 300 providers
- ▶ A robust change management process inclusive of human-centered design, prototyping, multi-sector pilots, rapid cycle improvements, training, and technical support, adaptive leadership, and technology utilization
- ▶ A shared data hub and analytic engine that compiles new and existing data to both inform implementation and provide a means for measuring shared accountability for sector-specific outcomes, including evaluation of return on public and private investments

BACKGROUND

As major American cities across the U.S. cope with rising poverty rates, Rochester, New York is no different. In 2015, ACT Rochester and the Rochester Area Community Foundation released a [report](#) that showed that Rochester had one of the highest childhood poverty rates among like-sized cities, and one of the highest overall poverty rates in the country. The release of this report launched the Rochester/Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI), a collective impact effort housed at United Way of Greater Rochester, to explore approaches to addressing Rochester's poverty crisis.

Part of RMAPI's early work included Rochester's participation in the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge.¹ The IBM report

determined that poverty in Rochester was enabled by a broken system of service delivery plagued by:

- ▶ Misaligned services and programs
- ▶ Reactive, transactional service delivery with little focus on proactive and preventive actions
- ▶ Lack of person-centered service delivery and measurement systems
- ▶ An inconsistent approach to data

As a result of the IBM report, systems transformation became a key focus of RMAPI's work.

At the same time, Rochester's healthcare leadership and community-based organizations (CBOs) were having conversations about how to concurrently improve the quality and reduce the cost of healthcare for its lowest-income residents. In 2014, the state of New York received a 1115 waiver and grant from the federal Centers for Medicaid and Medicare (CMS). It reinvested \$8 billion of the \$17.1 billion in federal savings generated by the State's Medicaid reform efforts. Rochester received \$500 million to redesign the Medicaid delivery system.

Both RMAPI and the Medicaid redesign sought systems change that spanned multiple sectors, connecting with issues like housing, food security, transportation, and more. At one point in time, both initiatives had the same community leaders attending similar meetings to solve an identical set of problems for the same target population. It was clear that the community required one place where the two initiatives (and others) could work together to generate a core set of common solutions that would transform the way that services were being delivered.

The SIP effort was buoyed by the strong support of U.S. Congressman Joseph Morelle who recognized the significant inefficiencies created by overlapping work, and whose initial invitation and ongoing leadership ensured consistent participation of community leaders. Further, United Way of Greater Rochester offered neutral staffing, space, and eventually fiduciary oversight for SIP, which was essential as diverse sectors with competing interests worked to build trust and consensus. As Laura Gustin, SIP Project Director, notes, "United Way was an entity that didn't have an institutional stake in the outcome, except for ensuring the greater community good."

The work began with the creation of a vision statement, and evolved into the creation of stakeholder maps, a theory of change, and design goals. The group made a conscientious decision to delay conversations about operating structure, formal decision-making processes and fundraising until they were absolutely necessary. This allowed the group to dream together without governance and institutional politics

dominating or derailing the work.

By the summer of 2018, the Systems Integration Team (a diverse group of cross-sector leaders from 40 different partner organizations) determined that there was, in fact, an extensive body of work that should be designed and implemented, including the development of a single data ecosystem that facilitates data sharing across the health, human service, education, and public sectors. They also saw the community need for an integrated delivery model with common procedures for point-of-entry, intake, service pathways, navigation, referral management, and consumer-driven informed consent. This, in turn, led to the establishment of a formal decision-making structure, staffing, project work plan, and ultimately receipt of a \$15 million, 5-year investment from New York State.

Building consensus with 40+ partners posed many challenges. Each partner came to the SIP with their organization's priorities, sector-specific expertise, and preconceived notions of success. There was no established mental model of Systems Thinking. Organizations saw themselves as individually and uniquely positioned to both solve and own solutions, at the expense of institutions and sectors. The United Way team and project leadership consistently upheld the concepts of integration and the co-creation of public good, ensuring that partners were building a solution for the entire community, versus the economic interests of a single partner or sector.

"We're not just developing a community information exchange, we're not just connecting health and human services. This is as much about ending the cycle of poverty, as it is about creating value for healthcare systems, as it is about creating connections between the school district, the health system, and community-based providers."

-Laura Gustin

BUILDING THE SYSTEMS INTEGRATION PROJECT

The foundation of SIP is a series of eight interdependent strategies that were created via a consensus process with the Systems Integration Team, in consultation with seven work groups of subject matter experts. Each strategy highlights a core focus area of SIP:

- ▶ Community Engagement
- ▶ Communications
- ▶ Data Ecosystem
- ▶ Integrated Service Delivery
- ▶ Shared Language
- ▶ Impact and Evaluation
- ▶ Legal Framework
- ▶ Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

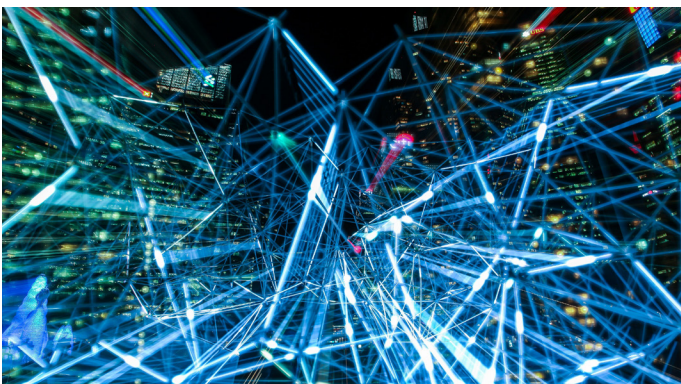
Execution of each strategy is managed through the project work plan using both Agile and traditional project management methodologies.

SIP is facilitated by 12 full time employees in the project office, housed at the United Way of Greater Rochester. Overall, the Project Office manages the project's risk, scope, schedule, budget, resources, and stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities of SIP Staff include:

- ▶ Facilitate SIP operations, including committees and work groups, partner engagement, and change management
- ▶ Foster trust, shared accountability and transparency across SIP operations
- ▶ Facilitate communication including the bi-directional flow of information between SIP and aligned initiatives.

1) Building Trust Among Partners

For the first year, the Systems Integration Team met for two hours every other week. The primary goal of these convenings was to develop consensus around a common vision of both the current and future state. Formal processes and facilitated group activities were often used to build both relationships and trust. As of today, participating politicians, executives, and CEOs have engaged in hundreds of hours of group work and collaborative decision-making, which has led to solid cross-sector relationships and a significant level of trust.



Exemplary practices that have been used by SIP to build trust and consensus include the use of an open *Request for Comment* procedure to review, amend, and approve SIP strategies. The team also uses a technique borrowed from Human-Centered Design to elicit “I Like/I Wish” feedback about project deliverables.

In a more robust example of how SIP engaged stakeholders to ensure buy-in to the design and implementation of the data ecosystem, SIP employed a methodical process that included business requirement interviews with over 100 partners, business requirement development by a multi-sector technology team and approval by the Systems Integration Team, the deployment of a procurement committee that included a cross-section of the Systems Integration Team where each sector had equal representation, and a six month public procurement process that concluded with vendor finalist presentations that were open to all members of the collaborative. Further, the data ecosystem build will begin with interactive user design sessions inclusive of community members and service providers who will co-create the system’s user interface and participate in user testing. At each step, SIP is intentional about engaging a diverse group of stakeholders, ensuring transparency, and consistently offering opportunities for cross-sector engagement and feedback loops. These are essential ingredients to building and maintaining trust among partners.



Photo by Systems Integration Project

2) Systems Mapping

Systems change is about addressing the root causes of social problems, which are often intractable and embedded in networks of cause and effect. To better understand the changes required to create real and lasting systemic change, the Systems Integration Team centered the project around systems thinking. Using systems mapping², a visual depiction of the components of the system, their interactions and relationships, the team created a theory of change. As a group, the partners determined the work that must be done to transform the system and to realize their shared vision.

One thing that separates SIP from past improvement

initiatives is the focus on integration of existing resources rather than building new siloes. SIP asked every provider at the table, “Who is doing this work already?” After they realized there were many existing data hubs among them already, the group of partners envisioned the SIP data ecosystem as an aggregator or a hub that could communicate with already-existing data hubs across sectors.



Photo by Goodwill of the Finger Lakes – 211/Lifeline

3) 211

The 211/Lifeline organization that serves Monroe County is operated by Goodwill of the Finger Lakes. 211/Lifeline covers the counties of Monroe, Livingston, Ontario, Wayne, Seneca, and Cayuga. The SIP project office has worked closely with the 211 team to enhance 211’s referral system by creating a closed-loop thus making 211 a strong front door for clients who need help connecting to vital services in the community. 211 is well aware that New York state might witness a large shrinkage of its nonprofit sector given the New York state budget cuts. 211 has been working with partners to help them keep their information up to date to maximize utility for people in crisis who could benefit from services.

The SIP team also wants to help raise awareness that 211 can provide high-level navigation assistance for referrals. By leveraging SIP’s work on shared language and defined service pathways for critical social determinants of health domains, 211’s online resource function can act as an informal navigator for people in need who want to learn more about the available resources that are most relevant to them.



Example: Eviction Prevention and How 211 Works as a “Front Door”

In times of crisis how do people access the care they need? Are they retraumatized every time they have to tell their story to a new person? How do we make “the system” feel more human-centered? The COVID-19 pandemic increased demand for services throughout the Rochester, New York, community, just like throughout the country. The Systems Integration Project saw this as a call to work beyond silos and institutions to better serve those in need.

Imagine a person receives notice that they must either pay the rent or move out. They know they need rental assistance but without a clear and unified system to request help, it could be overwhelming.

Until recently, the process of applying for emergency rent assistance was cumbersome and not at all person-centered. The SIP team launched the Eviction Prevention Pilot Initiative (EPPI) in 2020 and is currently partnering with local government and community organizations on EPPI 2.0. This program has created an intake workflow for eviction prevention with 211 as its main point-of-entry. As part of their pre-screening process, 211 asks the caller some basic questions to help them understand what services they may be eligible for. Using a government automation platform called SimpliGov, the data collected at 211 will automatically move the person’s information to a participating community-based organization (CBO) so they don’t have to tell their whole story again to a staff member at the CBO.

Once the community member arrives at the CBO, a staff member will walk them through the digital universal application already started with the 211 operator. This allows the CBO staff member to help their client apply for multiple services. For example, there are about seven pots of dollars in the region to help prevent evictions and the universal application allows the client to apply for all of them at the same time, including but not limited to, public assistance through the Department of Social Services (DSS).

In the past, applicants were told by organizations that they had to first apply with DSS by filling out a 25-page application form called the 2921 or NYS Application for Certain Benefits. Once denied for services by DSS, the applicant could take the denial notice to one or many local human service organizations and complete each organization’s specific application process for emergency rent assistance. This was a very confusing process. Each CBO independently managed their

eligibility and documentation requirements according to the expectations of their funders, leaving individuals to navigate a sea of varied requirements and decision-making processes. This is not a person-centered process.

In the new workflow, the CBO staff member attaches the documentation that the client has brought to the appointment to the application. The staff member can close the case by providing a check to the client’s landlord. If the client is eligible for DSS services, CBO staff can transfer all that information to DSS for follow up. The process is reduced from 8-10 hours to less than 30 minutes. The person-centered application process is transformative in that it removes the guesswork and variability of what is required to get help and improves accessibility to other resources such as legal counsel, financial counseling, basic needs, etc., while the primary need of rent assistance is addressed.

Besides 211, there are other front doors participating in EPPI 2.0. This includes an organization dedicated as a resource for landlords as well as an organization working specifically with victims of domestic violence. Additionally, the SIP team coordinates an onsite presence at the Monroe County Hall of Justice COVID-19 court. After a client leaves their court hearing, they can sit down with a EPPI volunteer and begin the process. The volunteer would collect the client’s information and refer them to a CBO or another partner that will continue the process in a personalized way.

Additionally, the SIP team has piloted expanded “front door” services with local neighborhood centers, businesses, and churches to connect people with EPPI. This is being done to extend the reach of the program into neighborhoods and the spaces where people feel comfortable reaching out. SIP offered incentives, training, and system access to 20 neighborhood front doors to both build capacity with the organizations and increase the number of people who could benefit from the services.

NOTE: In summer 2020, SIP leaders identified a few standard procedures that created obstacles to success. United Way of Greater Rochester and a few other partners found that there were some policies that were not actually “on the books” but were preventing people from getting services. For example, the previously mentioned process that a person had to first apply and be denied by DHS was carefully reviewed and determined not to be a regulatory or funder requirement. Finding out that the requirement was simply an “urban legend” lifted a barrier and allowed individuals to skip the time consuming and traumatic experience of going to the DSS office.

4) Design Management Institute

To innovate so that the system is more accessible, SIP has partnered with consultants at the Design Management Institute (DMI). DMI is a global (non-profit) organization that connects, promotes, and elevates the role of Design, Design Management, and Design Innovation in business, culture, and society. Together DMI and the SIP are spreading the human-centered design (HCD) methods and mindsets to increase the number of trained HCD practitioners in Monroe County. The idea behind this is that with more individuals in the community trained to approach problems and opportunities with an eye toward clearly defining what is desirable (to users), feasible, and sustainable, then some of the past practices of creating siloed programs without talking to impacted individuals can be reimaged with new tools and ways of thinking.

In addition to increased awareness and practice of human centered design, DMI and SIP are also collaborating on defining the user journey through the newly integrated system - including the terms and language used to describe the journey. A key part of change management will be to ensure that the language that SIP uses to describe its product is accessible to the providers and individuals it is intended to serve.

5) Systems Integration Model Toolkit

When working across sectors, SIP leadership clearly recognized the importance of leveraging tools that allow participants to view themselves as part of something bigger. They created a theory of change and determined the work they had to do. They determined which outcomes they wanted to prioritize and showed how those inputs connected across sectors.

The SIP partners realized that design thinking, also called human-centered design, is one of the formal tools for creating systems change. The tool kit helped providers truly change what they are going to do, rather than putting together status quo solutions. Modular design works to integrate systems in a simple and manageable way; for example, United Way used lessons learned from an early food pilot to inform the eviction prevention pilot and will continue to iterate and improve for future pilots.

From November 2019 through February 2020, twenty-nine multi-disciplinary teams learned and then used human-centered design to develop, test, and iterate prototypes of new service delivery workflows. The proposed solutions spanned across the education, health care, and human services sectors, and showcase ways to work across and within each sector more collaboratively to drive better results for individuals and families. Each teams' goal was to address challenges identified within the Greater Rochester, New

York, community, and design solutions that are desirable, viable, and feasible.

Each prototyping team was required to have two community members participating. SIP did more than just train providers; it also trained community members in human-centered design to create a full learning and capacity-building experience.



Photo by Foodlink

6) Community Voice

From the beginning, all the partners realized that a redesign could not be successful without engaging with members of the Rochester community with lived experience. It was the community saying that the system was not working for them that inspired the initiative in the first place. Before the community voice was fully integrated into SIP, however, the SIP partners spent a lot of time in conference rooms building relationships among themselves before moving forward. Eventually, after they spent time planning and trust building, it became clear that SIP needed to engage community members' voices in each aspect of the process.

Today, SIP has an active community advisory group called the Community Voice Network (CVN) that acts as the intersection between the much broader community and the project. The CVN advises on where and when SIP should engage community members. Currently the group is working on naming the data ecosystem's front door. The group is known for hosting community events for Rochester residents such as the socially-distanced outdoor event held last Summer to connect individuals to free Covid-19 testing, rent assistance, public assistance, primary care and health insurance, and more.

From the beginning, SIP has looked for ways to infuse community voice into the solutions it creates. In early 2020, while finalizing the shared language definitions the SIP engaged CBOs of all sizes to survey people asking, "Where are you at right now, and what language would you use to

describe that?" The responses to this survey were coupled with results from another survey conducted in mid-2020 by RMAPI and together informed the levels or states of well-being that SIP is using to describe how a person is doing within a given domain such as housing, transportation, safety, etc. The states of well-being are described as: "Not Okay", "Okay", "Good", "Fine", "Future Fine" and have replaced previously used descriptors ranging from "Crisis" to "Thriving." Finally, SIP created an equity review board to be part of the work. The board is a group of 12 experts in diversity, equity, and inclusion. The board implemented a process for reviewing each aspect of the work with an equity lens to make sure that the project holds itself accountable to building equity in the solutions being implemented. Even more, SIP is creating a public dashboard, so they can be held publicly accountable to achieving the project's stated goals and benefits.

SIP is well on its way toward achieving the goal of engaging 10,000 community members participating in the system redesign by the end of the project in March 2024.



Photo by ROC the Future

7) Sustainability

By fall 2020, SIP designed its measurement model so they could easily understand the impact of their work. The SIP team documents widely what they can accomplish in each pilot so they can analyze return on investment.

The team believes that SIP has the potential to transform how public dollars move in the community and be invested in places where they do not move today. The team is interested in master contracting, with an appreciation for data, workflows, and solutions that allow the community's need to inform what it does with public funds.

The project is funded through 2024 with a design that allows

their team space to be creative. SIP is putting in place a long-term governance model to transform what exists in the community, and is working to develop a measurement model that demonstrates the value of more local control of public spend.

The state of New York and private philanthropy trusted United Way of Greater Rochester's track record to invest in innovation, and to work together to meet the evolving needs and learnings of the project through regular check-ins, reporting and engagement. This has allowed the SIP to thrive under a more agile approach to its work.

ADVICE FOR OTHER UNITED WAYS

Develop trust with core organizations and influencers in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors.

- ▶ If United Way can get their buy-in, then they could be leaders in bringing others to the table. With those organizations, United Way promises them that because this is an initiative meant for community good, they will not get everything they want, but SIP gives them 60% of the wins. This is a process that is going to generate community good.

Center community voices.

- ▶ Every decision and every strategy were facilitated by SIP but was created by the community and by the CEOs that must implement it over time. In that way, it's hard for people to say, "I don't see myself in this," because they are truly their decisions.

Don't focus too much on the digital tool itself.

- ▶ Technology changes all the time. Don't make the program all about the tool; consider the "it" which is the improved service delivery that the IT is expected to enable -- and start with the trust and relationship building that win broad support and adoption of the changes later on.

LINKS

Monroe County Systems Integration Project
<https://www.uwrochester.org/Community-Impact-Fund/Strategic-Initiatives-and-Advocacy/SIP>

Benchmarking Rochester's Poverty
<https://www.racf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RACF-Poverty-Report-Update-2015.pdf>

¹ <http://endingpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/IBM-Smarter-Cities-Challenge-Report.pdf>

² A system map shows the components and boundary of a system and the components of the environment at a point in time. A system map is effectively a list of components.

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