THE COALITION IMPERATIVE

A GUIDEBOOK FOR HOW REGIONS CAN BUILD AND SUSTAIN COALITIONS TO GROW A GOOD-JOBS ECONOMY

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AMERICA ACHIEVES**

Brookings Metro

AMERICA ACHIEVES

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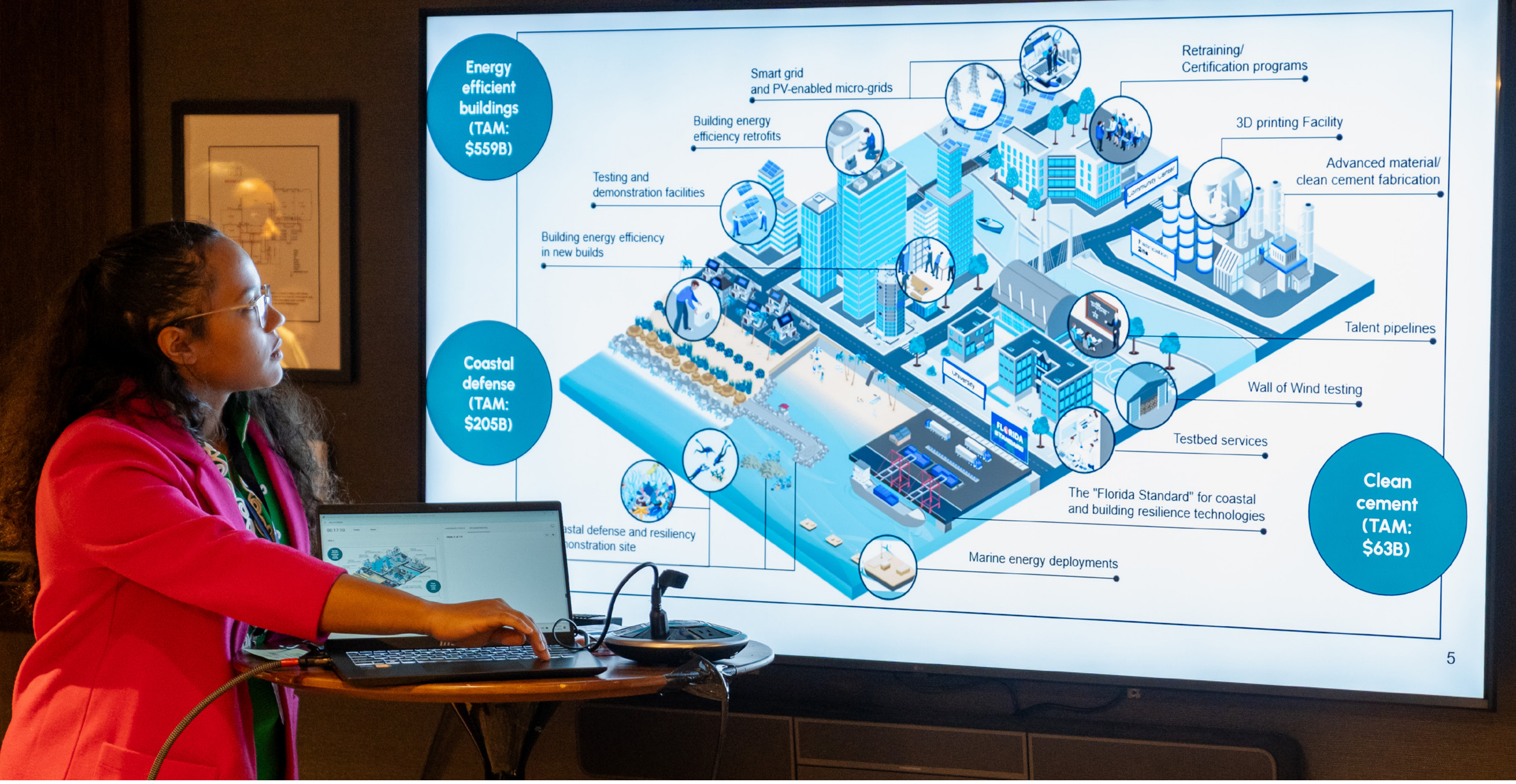
NOVEMBER 2025

ABOUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS

Brookings Metro's mission is to collaborate with local leaders to transform original insights into policy and practical solutions that scale nationally. In service of this mission, we produce trusted, actionable research, apply it through regional engagements and national networks, and connect with policymakers at all levels to drive impact at scale.

America Achieves is a national nonprofit organization working to help local communities and states ensure everyone has a clear path to a good job, no matter who they are, where they live, and whether or not they have a college degree. Our Good Jobs Economy initiative partners with states, regions, and local workforce and economic development intermediaries to design, fund, and implement the programs, strategies, and systems that create sustainable pathways to good jobs. As part of this Good Jobs Economy initiative, America Achieves is partnering with the National Governors Association to modernize state talent systems that support the workforce efforts of regional coalitions.



America Achieves' Good Jobs Economy Convening in December 2024 for the peer learning cohort. | Photo credit: America Achieves

Executive summary

Across the United States, regional leaders face a pressing mandate to grow good jobs and expand economic mobility for all residents. But no single organization has the knowledge, influence, and resources to deliver on this mandate alone. Cross-sector coalitions—public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic actors working together on a shared, transformative vision that integrates talent, innovation, and placemaking strategies—offer a compelling approach. Both theory and practice show that when managed well, cross-sector coalitions can help regions achieve greater strategic alignment, resource efficiency, and economic resilience. This evidence has led to a growing adoption of coalition-based strategies across the nation, partly enabled by recent federal policies that incentivized the formation of these place-based coalitions. But gaps remain: While local and regional leaders recognize the value of collaboration, the work of aligning priorities and initiatives across organizations with divergent incentives—all to deliver meaningful outcomes—is often messy and time-consuming.

The purpose of this report is to help leaders working in government, higher education, community organizations, philanthropy, and the private sector build and sustain effective cross-sector coalitions that grow good jobs and improve pathways to economic mobility.

The report draws on a nine-month collaboration between America Achieves, Brookings Metro, and 11 regional coalitions—incorporating interviews, site visits, and peer learning from practical discussions and exchanges. It distills lessons for regional practitioners, investors, and policymakers into five foundational building blocks of cross-sector coalitions (aimed primarily at local and regional leaders), as well as five implications for the future of place-based economic policy (aimed primarily at policymakers and investors).

FIVE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CROSS-SECTOR COALITIONS

To turn collaboration into outcomes, every cross-sector coalition needs a clear foundation. The five building blocks listed below define how coalitions move from vision to results.

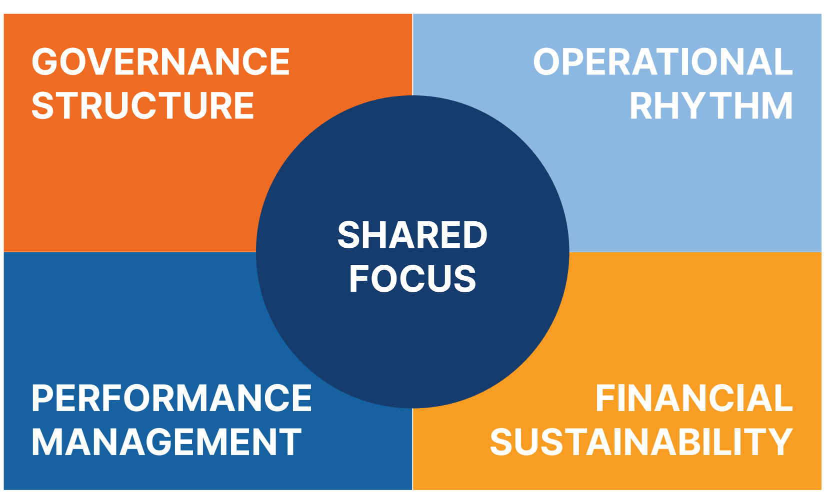
1. **Shared focus:** Clear, long-term North Star vision, goals, and outcomes defining the potential big win for the coalition's work, with intermediate priorities.
2. **Governance structure:** Established coalition leadership and membership structure with defined roles and responsibilities.
3. **Operational rhythm:** Processes for distributed decisionmaking, strategic implementation, and stakeholder engagement.
4. **Performance management:** Capacity to establish baseline data, then set appropriately actionable metrics and targets to track and communicate short-, medium-, and long-term progress, driving strategic and operational outcomes.
5. **Financial sustainability:** A financial model that blends and braids public, commercial, philanthropic, and other capital sources to sustain the strategy.

FIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF PLACE-BASED ECONOMIC POLICY

The experiences of regional coalitions suggest that government funding can play a uniquely critical role in driving outcomes at scale by:

1. **Incentivizing long-term strategic alignment**, including with priority industry sectors and high-level objectives for growing good jobs and economic mobility.
2. **Investing in strategic convening** to reduce barriers to cross-sector collaboration throughout strategic planning, project development, and execution.
3. **Funding data and accountability systems** to track regional progress toward stated goals and ensure outcomes-focused performance management.
4. **De-risking private investment** by funding critical pre-competitive shared assets (e.g., planning, public goods, coordination, etc.) that crowd in co-investment from other sectors.
5. **Conveying credibility to regional strategies** through competitive planning and grant award processes, thus validating a region's competitive advantages.

Five building blocks of governance for an effective regional coalition

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