



Strategic Plan Summary

2022-2025

OVERVIEW

Founded in March 2020 by Dr. Jason Purnell, the COVID-19 Regional Response Team (RRT) has spent the last two and one-half years working to develop a centralized system of response with the capacity to strengthen the resilience and recovery of the populations most affected by COVID-19. RRT staff, Collaborative Action Network (CAN) members and Steering Committee have engaged in new approaches to partnership that not only seek to mitigate the adverse impacts of COVID-19, but that also address the structural inequities generated by systemic racism. As work in response to the pandemic has moved from outbreak to containment and now to recovery, the RRT's leadership and membership have considered the initiative's long-term operations and foci.

The need for collaborative, effective and equitable crisis mitigation across the St. Louis region has not abated. More life-threatening crises are likely to arise in the near future and long-standing systems dysfunctions that endanger the lives of marginalized communities stubbornly persist. However, a clear plan of action for developing and maintaining the civic infrastructure required to rapidly mobilize and deploy around regional problems proved elusive.

To help close this gap, the RRT's Managing Director, Andrea Jackson-Jennings, commenced a strategic planning process from February through September of 2022 to create a shared vision of the initiative's future and a detailed blueprint for actualizing this vision. Consultants from Emerging Wisdom and its partner firm, Alchemic Works, analyzed the information obtained from RRT leadership, staff, 13 planning committee members, 22 planning sessions, 10 key informant interviews and a pre-planning electronic survey. Their findings have been synthesized into a full Strategic Plan. This Summary provides an overview of the Strategic Plan and its major recommendations.

RRT Mission

The St. Louis Regional Response Team (St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County, Madison County, and St. Clair County) improves the health and well-being of underserved communities by mobilizing the non-profit, philanthropic and public sectors to collaboratively address life threatening crises and systems' dysfunctions.

RRT Vision

The RRT envisions an STL region where:

- Collaborative, equitable, and effective responses to life threatening crises and racial disparities are standard practice
- New approaches to partnership transform organizational and systems behaviors in ways that remove race as a predictor of life outcomes
- A culture of accountability emerges within the non-profit, philanthropic and public sectors that centers community priorities and experiences in decision-making
- Marginalized communities, and the organizations that serve them, receive heightened levels of investment and support, eliminating the conditions of vulnerability that imperil their existence

RRT Guiding Principles

- We center racial equity and a commitment to anti-racism in all of our work
- We partner intentionally with impacted individuals and communities
- We orient toward urgency, solutions and coordinated regional action
- We adopt the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health Equity Principles](#)

RRT Core Functions

To generate the community impacts articulated in its vision and powered by its mission, the RRT performs five core functions (right). It executes these functions through an array of organizational activities in collaboration with social service providers, community stakeholders and institutional decision-makers. The RRT has no intention of replacing or confusing the region's existing emergency management infrastructure, nor will it compete for direct service dollars. The RRT will seek to strengthen and amplify existing community relationships and intermediaries however possible.

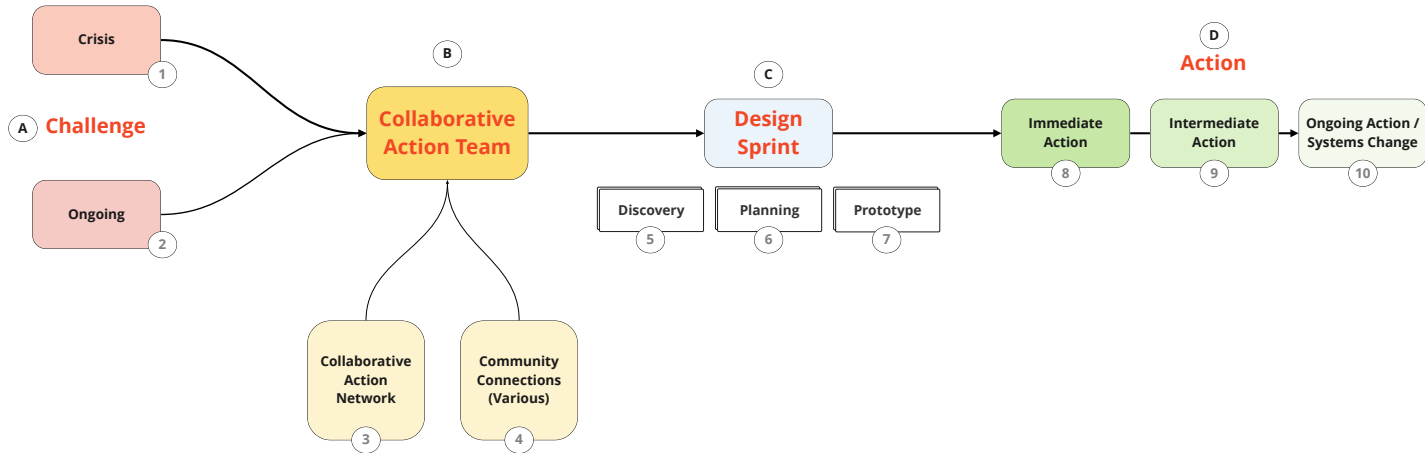


COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONING STRUCTURE

Historically, the RRT executed its core functions through issue-oriented community campaigns that addressed the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as engaged heavily in education and capacity-building efforts. Its presence helped to facilitate and accelerate collective problem-solving, shared decision-making, aligned action and resource mobilization and deployment. As public attention to the pandemic wanes and its public health effects become more contained, the question for regional leaders to consider is *how to preserve the RRT's core functions while widening its scope of focus beyond acute crisis response.*

Planning participants identified a critical gap between the need for deepened collaboration and the presence of a civic structure that could build relationships across sectors and geographies; advance shared analyses; connect siloed capacities and competencies; test and scale solutions in both real time and over time; and learn from its efforts to ensure continuous improvement. Closing this gap requires the development of such a structure – a Collaborative Solutioning Structure – that can execute this work with fidelity and flexibility. For planning participants, this is a natural extension of the RRT's work, providing an “issue agnostic” platform from which to spur continued regional transformation. The following page provides a visual and description of this new structure.

Collaborative Solutioning Structure



A The RRT's **Collaborative Action Team** structure will facilitate a real-time, partnership-oriented, and community-engaged approach to tackling important regional Challenges through an innovative **co-design and action process**.

The first step of the process is to **identify an important regional Challenge** that should be considered by the Regional Response Team and its partners. Challenges are recommended / approved by the RRT Steering Committee and fall into two buckets:

1 *Crisis:* These Challenges are sudden, acute, and require immediate planning and action by RRT partners (i.e. Covid-19, flooding, recession).

2 *Ongoing:* These Challenges require attention due to their significant impact on racial equity and community wellbeing in the region, though are not sparked by a specific Crisis

B Once a Challenge is identified and defined, a **Team is assembled with organizational and lived expertise** to co-design a meaningful short- and long-term response. This team should seek a balance of perspectives and expertise while still enabling facilitation and deliberation (likely no more than 20 people). To make sure a right-fit Team is quickly assembled, stakeholders should also be regularly convened and connected through:

3 *Collaborative Action Network (RRT):* The RRT's existing table is sustained for ongoing relationship-building and communication, with network mapping to understand organizational and personal roles and assets that can be leveraged toward a Challenge

4 *Community Connections (Various):* Building upon the strengths and relationships of existing networks like the Community Health Workers Coalition and Alive and Well Communities, the RRT also supports ongoing engagement with residents to better understand ground-level realities and represent lived experience as (compensated) participants in Design Sprints. CAN members can also help recruit community participants depending on the Challenge.

C Once a Challenge is defined and a Team assembled, **Design Sprints are held to better understand the issue, plan for action, and prototype change activities** (however possible). Sprints can be held condensed into a single day or spread across a number of weeks or sessions, either of which may be appropriate depending on the urgency and complexity of a Challenge. Dedicated facilitators and co-design experts will assist the process throughout. Design Sprints will move through the following stages:

5 *Discovery:* Building upon the initial Challenge definition, further aspects of the issue are explored — including an equity analysis, understanding of communities and people affected, root cause analysis, and other impactful policy/system forces

6 *Planning:* After an issue is fully explored, planning can take place for potential immediate, intermediate, and ongoing actions — including which organizations need to be involved, how much funding is needed, and how actions are prioritized based on feasibility and impact

7 *Prototype (Optional):* If possible and appropriate, a clearly defined Challenge can be tested and explored through a smaller, simplified prototype that quickly (and cheaply) tests proposed actions and gathers more information before they are expanded (ideally with an easily accessed budget of around \$10,000 and in-kind support by partner organizations)

D Design Sprints will produce a **clear plan for action that includes immediate and intermediate efforts, as well as ongoing policy and systems change**. Actions should be integrated into ongoing organizations and efforts whenever possible, though may sometimes require a new effort to be created — and may sometimes sunset if integrated into regional policies, systems, and structures. Actions will fall into the following buckets:

8 *Immediate:* Design Sprints will identify short-term actions that can be taken immediately to address the Challenge — ideally with easily accessible funding (up to \$50,000) that can be deployed by best-fit partners and community members

9 *Intermediate:* A number of intermediate actions should also be identified in a Design Sprint, as well as emerge from immediate action results and learning. Funding for these actions will likely require more traditional grant and funding mechanisms.

10 *Ongoing:* Every Challenge is impacted by — and can impact — ongoing policies, systems, and structures that must be addressed in pursuit of racial equity and community wellbeing. Ongoing actions should also focus on the infrastructure needed to connect and improve the region's capacity for continuous improvement and responsiveness.

Strategic Priorities

The RRT also engaged in an environmental scan and SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to identify its best strategic role in the landscape — inclusive of the new Collaborative Solutioning structure outlined above. Full SWOT details can be found in the full Strategic Plan. This analysis led to the identification of RRT Strategic Priorities, which are represented by the graphic below.

Deepened regional collaboration is centered because it is the purpose for which the RRT was created. The region's entrenched fragmentation, in virtually every aspect of public, private and civic life, was a critical driver of its inadequate COVID-19 response and the profound loss of life and diminished well-being that ensued. Efforts to bring about a more racially, socially and economically equitable recovery will require levels of regional cooperation that have, heretofore, only been sporadically achieved and seldom sustained. The RRT's intent, through this plan, is to strengthen the civic infrastructure needed to sustain heightened levels of collaboration and to obtain the resources (funding) and expertise (marketing, evaluation and policy advocacy) that will enable this infrastructure to generate community benefits for years to come. The full Strategic Plan (and supplementary Appendix) includes detailed goals, objectives, timeframes, accountable parties, and success factors as a starting point to develop each of these Strategic Priorities over the next three years.



Call to Action

Successfully executing this strategic plan will require a significant investment of human and financial resources by the RRT's staff, stakeholders and community partners. Over time, however, the returns on this investment will include the development of a civic infrastructure that helps prevent the St. Louis region from falling back into a pre-COVID status quo that is racially, socially and economically inequitable. This infrastructure, which crosses sectors and geographies, will support the region in evolving through its crises by resourcing new approaches to partnership that advance changes in values, relationships and structures. And these changes, when scaled and sustained, will help to ensure that more of the region's residents experience lasting improvements in their health and well-being so that fewer are bound by the conditions of vulnerability that imperiled previous generations.