



ASCEND TOGETHER: Plan Summary

A Shared Path to Thriving Children, Families and Neighborhoods in Hartford, CT

Five-Year Strategy & Implementation Plan (2026–2030) for Hartford’s Prenatal-to-Career System

Revised December 31, 2025

I. Shared Opportunity

Why Ascend, Why Now?

For decades, community-based organizations, resident advocates, neighborhood leaders, and local institutions in the north end of Hartford, CT, have worked relentlessly to improve the lives of children and families—often with limited resources but extraordinary commitment. In 2021, when Hartford was awarded a U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods grant, a new possibility emerged:

Instead of building new programs, build a stronger system. A system grounded in trust and coordinated support—woven across neighborhoods, schools, service providers, and public agencies. Hartford’s application earned the highest score in the nation and brought \$30M of federal investment and over \$36M in match commitments into North Hartford.

We are now entering a pivotal year—**2026 is the bridge** from a time-limited, neighborhood-focused investment to a sustainable and scalable citywide system capable of improving long-term outcomes for all Hartford children, youth, and families.

Momentum to Build On

After four years of coordinated effort through the **North Hartford Ascend** Promise Neighborhood initiative, we have seen what becomes possible when partners work in sync rather than in silos:

- Students are experiencing **greater engagement**, achievement, and pathways to meaningful and financially rewarding futures.
- Families are accessing more resources through clearer, more **coordinated navigation**.
- Schools, providers, and community organizations are **aligning goals**, plans, and data.
- Residents are participating more actively in **shaping the systems** that affect their lives, elevating priorities, and calling for increased transparency and accountability.
- Early signs of **population-level improvement**—across kindergarten readiness, attendance, postsecondary enrollment, and youth safety—are demonstrating that the foundation is working.

We now have the momentum and the assets—partnerships, resident participation, measurable progress, and data and relational infrastructure—needed to integrate and expand what works into a **lasting, citywide prenatal-to-career (P2C) system**.

“This is the first time in a long time when it feels like *all* of us are moving in the same direction—and that the community has a meaningful role in shaping the system.”

— Resident leader at the November 3, 2025 Ascend Sustainability Co-Creation Session

Authored Together; Implemented Together

Ascend Together is a shared strategy to move to a durable, scalable, and locally guided system. The plan summarized here reflects the combined expertise and collaboration of parents, youth, and families; community-based organizations and service providers; educators; City and State partners; philanthropic and financing leaders; subject matter experts; and peer communities from around the country, who participated in a months-long co-creation process.

Above all, people emphasized the importance of **continuing to build the system our children deserve**—and to institutionalize it citywide so that it lasts.

The Ascend Together plan (see full version [here](#)) that has emerged from this co-creation process is organized around **four strategic priorities**—each essential and reinforcing the others. The path ahead requires strengthening and elevating what already works while also developing new approaches to meet emerging priorities. The work is ambitious, but it is entirely achievable when shared across partners, institutions, and neighborhoods. Together, we will continue to strengthen the foundation for a thriving, connected P2C system—and a city rising as one.

“We’re going to ‘set the bar, meet the bar, exceed the bar, and raise the bar’ in everything we do. Working together, we are going to see Hartford rise!”

— Dr. Andraé Townsel, Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools, in *Superintendent Update*, December 12 2025

II. Shared Outcomes

Strategic Priority: Establish a clear, citywide set of prenatal-to-career (P2C) outcomes that align partners around a common direction, strengthen transparency and trust, guide continuous learning and improvement, and demonstrate the collective value of Hartford’s shared P2C system.

2026 Goals:

1. **Finalize, adopt, and operationalize a citywide P2C Outcomes Framework.** Co-develop final outcomes and indicators with key stakeholders; conduct broader public review; and secure formal adoption by Q3–Q4 2026—including integration of the framework into MOUs, partner agreements, and early planning/budget processes.
2. **Strengthen coordinated action and practice across partners to improve shared outcomes.** Expand rapid-cycle learning and practice-change structures and support partners in using shared data to target improvements in key outcomes, such as attendance, early childhood readiness, youth engagement, family stability, and safe/supportive environments.
3. **Make progress visible through transparent, locally focused reporting.** Develop and publish the first public-facing P2C Outcomes Dashboard; produce the inaugural annual *State of the P2C System* report; and expand community-guided communication and advocacy strategies to build trust, shared meaning, and accountability.
4. **Integrate ROI and value storytelling into planning and investment decisions.** Complete the ROI calculator and business case tools and train partners on embedding outcomes- and ROI-informed practices in fundraising, resource alignment, and public advocacy.

What this will look like at the end of 2026: Hartford enters 2027 with a unified, adopted outcomes framework; transparent, locally focused reporting; and a set of value proposition tools (ROI and business case) that strengthen credibility and investment readiness—alongside a clear short-term funding plan to maintain stability as federal funding sunsets.

“Families want to know what’s working, what’s not, and how we’re fixing it together.”
— Parent leader during Ascend sustainability interviews, October 2025

III. Shared Infrastructure

Strategic Priority: Build and sustain the relational, operational, data, and physical infrastructure that enables partners, residents, and institutions to work together seamlessly—creating the conditions for consistent, coordinated support for every child and family.

2026 Goals:

1. **Advance cross-partner infrastructure improvements across navigation, data, learning, community relationships, and coordinated operations.** Establish shared navigation standards; align school-community referral workflows; strengthen relational and community infrastructure; refine shared data systems; streamline data-sharing agreements; and launch systemwide feedback and learning processes.
2. **Assess and begin building community stewardship structures that strengthen system legitimacy and long-term sustainability.** Conduct a feasibility assessment of community stewardship models; co-design expanded roles for residents; and prepare for pilot testing of shared-stewardship/shared-benefit approaches beginning in 2027.
3. **Select and begin standing up a durable backbone structure/entity using a criteria-based, cross-stakeholder process.** Use the balanced scorecard framework to evaluate backbone options; engage residents and partners in the selection process; reach a shared decision by end of 2026; and outline early financing and staffing needs for backbone implementation in 2027.
4. **Lay the groundwork for responsible scaling of the P2C system across neighborhoods.** Finalize readiness criteria; document lessons and improvement opportunities; and develop a 2027–2030 scaling roadmap that ensures fidelity to shared outcomes, locally guided adaptation, and adequate staffing, governance, and data capacity.

What this will look like at the end of 2026: A long-term backbone entity is selected and cross-partner infrastructure is strengthened to make the P2C system feel more coherent to families—and prepared for responsible scaling beginning in 2027.

“What’s changing is that we actually know each other now. When people trust each other, everything else gets easier.”

— *Ascend Leadership Team member during sustainability plan interviews, September 2025*

IV. Shared Investment

Strategic Priority: Create a diversified, durable, and outcomes-aligned financing strategy that resources Hartford’s shared P2C infrastructure, supports locally co-developed innovation, and institutionalizes long-term investment across public, private, philanthropic, and community partners.

2026 Goals:

1. **Secure initial 2026–2029 bridge financing to maintain backbone functions and core shared infrastructure.** Complete a bridge-financing plan; cultivate philanthropic “anchor investors”; pursue early corporate and employer partnerships; and begin assembling a rolling multi-year fund to ensure continuity of navigation, data, coordination, and system-building capacity.
2. **Develop the foundation for a diversified long-term investment strategy (2030+).** Conduct comprehensive fiscal mapping across City, HPS, and State agencies; identify early opportunities for public-sector alignment; coordinate with statewide coalitions and align with legislative opportunities; and craft preliminary multi-year investment priorities and advocacy strategies.
3. **Complete ROI, business case, and value proposition tools needed to demonstrate system value and drive investment.** Finalize the ROI calculator and business case with Manatt Health; prepare partner-facing and public-facing materials; and begin using ROI insights to inform grant proposals and policy advocacy.
4. **Prepare Hartford for outcomes-based financing pilots.** Conduct a feasibility study for outcomes-based financing (e.g., shared savings, rate cards, pay-for-success); select 1-2 early pilot areas aligned with shared outcomes (e.g., attendance, early childhood transitions, youth reconnection); and design pilot structures for 2027 implementation.
5. **Develop a Technical Assistance & Learning Network strategy to generate earned revenue.** Assess market demand; design TA offerings (e.g., related to navigation systems, community hubs, outcomes frameworks, data-sharing, and practice-change models); and prepare the infrastructure needed to launch TA services in 2027.

What this will look like at the end of 2026: A clear financing runway through 2029; an expanding network of investors and partners; and new valuation and fiscal tools, fundraising and advocacy capacity that position Hartford to pursue long-term, diversified investment beginning in 2027.

“ROI isn’t just about dollars—it’s about showing the value of doing right by children and families.”

— *Outcomes-based financing expert during sustainability plan interviews, July 2025*

V. Shared Commitment

Strategic Priority: Evolve shared governance, shared responsibility, and shared accountability across residents, community organizations, the City of Hartford, Hartford Public Schools (HPS), funders, and institutions—ensuring that Hartford’s prenatal-to-career (P2C) system is jointly supported, locally aligned, and sustained for generations.

2026 Goals:

1. **Establish 2026–2030 partnership commitments that formalize shared responsibility for the P2C system.** Develop and secure annual Letters of Commitment; align partner MOUs to the shared outcomes framework and shared workflows; and launch early funding match agreements or in-kind commitments that reinforce shared investment.
2. **Stand up a cross-partner project management and implementation architecture that coordinates day-to-day execution.** Define and staff core roles (Project Director, Workstream Leads, data/evaluation functions, resident/youth engagement); create a predictable operating rhythm (weekly/biweekly/quarterly routines); and launch four work groups aligned to the Strategic Priorities.
3. **Build a culture of transparency, learning, and shared narrative across all partners and communities.** Activate a shared Ascend Together narrative; strengthen communication cadence (quarterly updates, community conversations, accessible data); and begin developing local communication strategies such as family/youth storytellers.
4. **Develop the 2026 implementation budget needed to activate the plan.** Finalize and refine the preliminary 2026 cross-cutting implementation budget; align resources across partners; and prepare for ongoing updates as the backbone and governance structures take shape.

What this will look like at the end of 2026: A more trusted, transparent, locally guided P2C system—with formalized governance, shared accountability routines, and an implementation architecture that strengthens the city’s collective mandate to move this work forward.

“We’ve had short-term initiatives before. What makes Ascend different is the commitment to stay—and to stay with the community.”

— Resident leader at the November 3, 2025 Ascend Sustainability Co-Creation Session

VI. The Call to Action: 2026 Is the Year That Decides the Next Decade

As the implementation of this plan unfolds in 2026 and beyond:

- **Shared outcomes** will anchor a unified direction for the city.
- **Shared infrastructure** will connect families, schools, hubs, institutions, and neighborhoods through an integrated system.
- **Shared investment** will provide a durable financial foundation for prevention and opportunity.
- **Shared commitment** will bind partners together in accountability and shared purpose.

If we act with intention and unity, the next five years will build the **infrastructure, trust, and investment architecture** needed to ensure every child in Hartford has a clear, supported, opportunity-rich path from before birth to a thriving adulthood.

This is the decade that will define how Hartford rises together—for our children, for our neighborhoods, and for the generations who will inherit the system we build today.

Ascend Together is our commitment to making that future real.

For More Information and to Get Involved

Click [here](#) to access the full plan that accompanies this summary. We welcome your questions, feedback, and partnership as we grow the cross-stakeholder coalition needed to *Ascend Together*.

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