

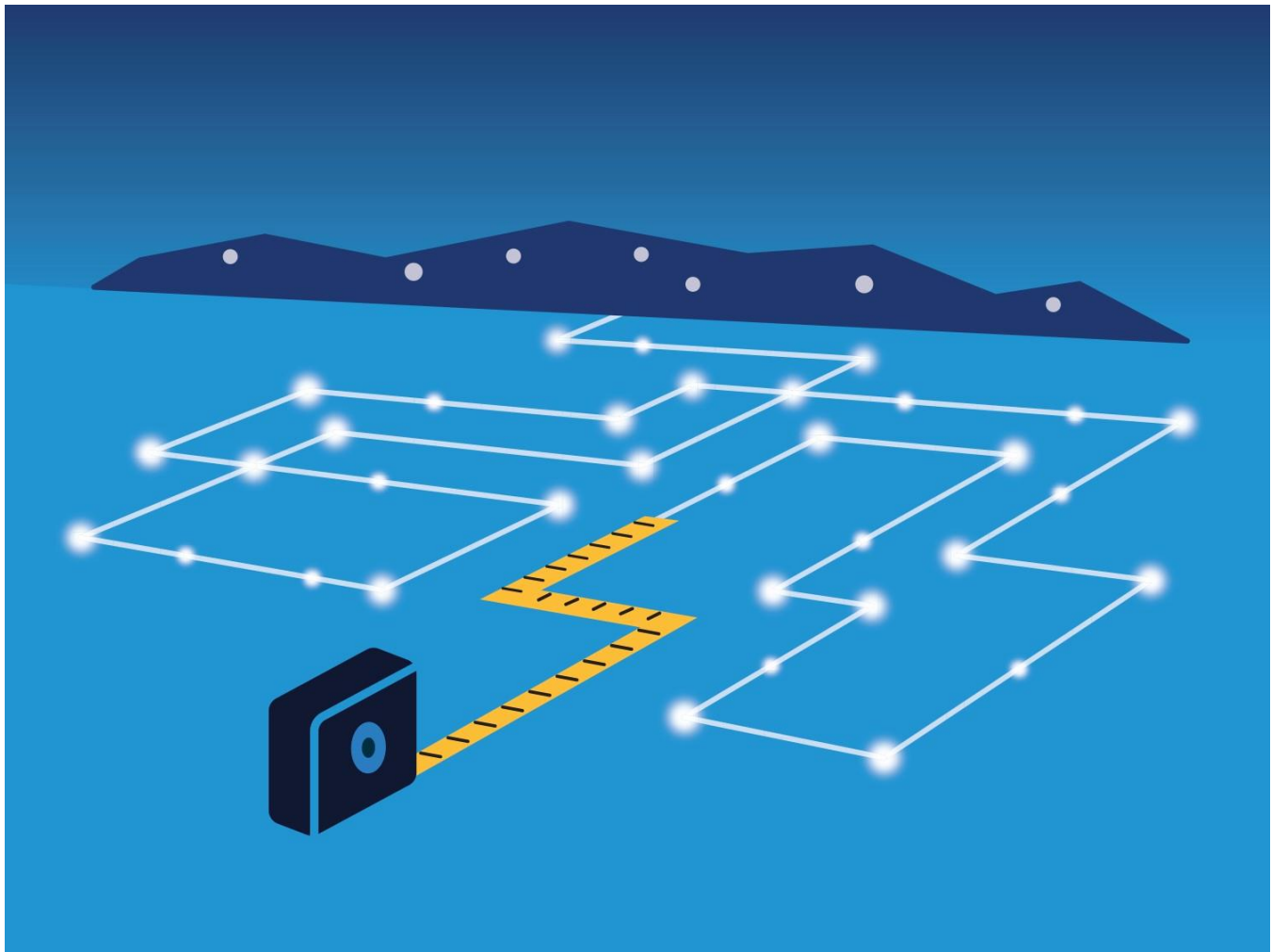


Opinion **Dynamics**

Boston | Headquarters

617 492 1400 tel
617 497 7944 fax
800 966 1254 toll free

1000 Winter St
Waltham, MA 02451



Ameren Illinois Company Market Development Initiative Partnership Study

Summary of Findings

Final
September 9, 2022



Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	1
1.1 Key Findings and Recommendations	1
2. Research Methods.....	2
2.1 Secondary Data Review	3
2.1.1 Literature Review.....	3
2.1.2 Review of MDI Database and Partnership Materials	3
2.2 Program Staff and Partner In-Depth Interviews	3
2.3 Case Study Development.....	3
3. Detailed Findings.....	4
3.1 Key Attributes of Successful Partnerships	5
3.2 MDI Partner Classification	6
3.3 Case Studies.....	9
3.3.1 Senior Services Plus (SSP).....	10
3.3.2 Embarras River Basin Agency.....	13
3.3.3 Springfield Urban League (SUL)	15
Appendix A. Literature Review References	19

Table of Tables

Table 1. Recent Activity Score Components.....	7
Table 2. MDI Partner Classification.....	8
Table 3. SSP MDI Projects	11
Table 4. ERBA MDI Projects.....	14
Table 5. SUL MDI Projects	16

1. Executive Summary

Ameren Illinois Company (AIC) created the Market Development Initiative (MDI) in 2018 to promote new economic and energy efficiency opportunities for diverse individuals and communities in AIC service territory.¹ The three primary goals of the MDI are (1) to improve the quality of life for residents by connecting underserved customers with energy efficiency resources, (2) create job opportunities in the energy efficiency industry for local and diverse job candidates, and (3) expand and create new energy efficiency business opportunities for local, diverse business enterprises (DBEs). Community partnerships are a central component of the MDI. Throughout the public and private sectors, there is increasing use of partnerships, collaborations, alliances, and networks to design and deliver goods and services. Effective partnerships drive outcomes that are greater than the sum of what individual partners contribute.

This study of AIC's MDI activities focused on creating a framework to classify and assess the effectiveness of MDI partnerships. To that end, our team completed a literature review to highlight key characteristics of successful partnerships from other industries. Additionally, we completed interviews with MDI staff and a thorough review of both supporting materials (e.g., memorandums of agreement, annual implementation plans, etc.) and information on individual partners and projects tracked in the MDI database. Further, to illustrate the nuance associated with developing partnerships and executing projects under the MDI, the evaluation team developed case studies of three successful MDI partnerships. Our team worked closely with AIC to select well-established MDI partners to include in this study with the goal of highlighting partners that serve a range of populations across AIC's service territory. The MDI partners highlighted in the case studies are Senior Services Plus, the Embarras River Basin Agency, and the Springfield Urban League.

1.1 Key Findings and Recommendations

Based on the research activities outlined throughout this document, we offer the following findings and recommendations for improvement of the MDI moving forward.

- **Finding:** The MDI staff have created a set of processes and documentation that support developing healthy partnerships based on the key attributes of successful partnerships highlighted in Section 3.1. Additionally, in all three cases described in Section 3.3, MDI staff remained attentive to partners' needs and flexible in their day-to-day working relationships; leading to mutual respect and trust between all parties involved.
- **Recommendation:** MDI staff can incorporate qualitative data from annual surveys with partners to add depth to the classification scheme outlined through this research. For example, the MDI team could include some of the basic satisfaction information collected through existing survey efforts with partners in the MDI database. Further, as part of ongoing research, AIC could collect more robust information from partners related to communication plans, goal-setting processes, and the level of trust between organizations. These data could then be incorporated into the MDI database and used to augment the types of criteria referenced in Section 3.2, thereby providing a fuller picture of the viability of different partnerships.
 - Specifically, questions in an annual survey with MDI partners could include topics such as basic satisfaction with communication processes, cadence of communication, goal setting

¹ Ameren Illinois and their established Employee Resource Groups consider diverse individuals to include the following: Military-Veteran Employees, Multi-Cultural Employees (African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American), Physically Challenged Employees, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Employees, Multi-Generational Employees, and Female Employees.

processes, and overall satisfaction with the support they receive from AIC/MDI staff. Additional question might explore the level to which partners feel they have shared decision making abilities with AIC/MDI staff, the degree to which they feel that the relationship with AIC is hierarchical in any way, and that the partners have built trust and mutual respect throughout the course of the year or their partnership more broadly.

- Finding: Partners and MDI staff work collaboratively to identify goals on a project-by-project, year-by-year, basis. All parties are heavily involved in the goal-setting process; however, the goals of the partnership itself are not as clearly delineated.
 - Recommendation: In the partner materials, the partnerships should more clearly distinguish the project-level goals (i.e., the goals for individual projects initiated between MDI and partner teams) and the higher-level goals for the partnership.
- Finding: Regular and reliable communication has been key to forming strong partnerships through the MDI. All three partnerships we highlighted through case studies began with very regular communication plans (e.g., biweekly or weekly status calls). Creating a regular venue to share progress, challenges, and successes has allowed all three partnerships to grow and evolve over the duration of each engagement. Over time, communication between MDI and partners' teams has become more flexible and the lines of communication have extended beyond the core points of contact. This sort of foundation and subsequent evolution speaks to the strong working relationships between all parties involved and the amount of trust built over the course of all three partnerships.
 - Recommendation: The MDI team should continue to encourage regular and frequent communication with partners, particularly in the early stages of the partnership. Additionally, as lines of communication extend throughout the different organizations, the MDI team should ensure their processes continue to maintain some central communication between partners. For example, MDI teams can work with partners to develop systems that openly track issues and progress to ensure all members of both the MDI and partner teams are aware of day-to-day activities.
- Finding: MDI and partners track project-level data consistently across all the different projects initiated through the MDI (e.g., customers signed up at events, measures installed, etc.). However, the teams do not track a lot of information on the partnerships themselves (e.g., community reach, segments served, etc.).
 - Recommendation: The MDI team should collect and track information on partners such as zip codes served, target market segments or populations, and other demographic information about partners and the communities they serve. These data will help AIC make strategic decisions about how to engage different partners and identify gaps in the services they offer through the MDI. Further, the MDI team might consider tracking qualitative information related to key attributes of successful partnerships (Section 3.1), such as self-reported level of trust or partner satisfaction with different components of the MDI. These data will also help to highlight areas of improvement for the MDI team.

2. Research Methods

The evaluation team conducted a series of targeted research activities to achieve the objectives of this study. As described below, we leveraged secondary data from AIC, as well as available literature in addition to in-depth interviews with MDI staff and MDI partner representatives.

2.1 Secondary Data Review

2.1.1 Literature Review

Opinion Dynamics completed a review of a set of secondary materials with the goal of identifying different ways that researchers, in both the energy industry and other fields, have been able to identify key attributes or indicators of successful partnerships (see Section 3.1). Information gathered through this literature review served as the foundation for developing a recommended set of criteria for AIC to use in classifying the various partnerships initiated under the MDI. We focused on reviewing literature related to partnerships and collaboration across a range of different industries (e.g., global health, infrastructure, governance, and energy). Based on a review of these sources (see Appendix A), we developed the recommended categorization scheme discussed in this document.

2.1.2 Review of MDI Database and Partnership Materials

Our team also reviewed the MDI database, including data collected by MDI partners and staff related to individual partnerships and projects. The AIC MDI team provided Opinion Dynamics with tracking data files that included information on the partners, such as contact information and number of projects and referrals, as well as information on the projects, such as start and end date, target market, and other key metrics. Additional data provided on the projects differed depending on the intended outcome of each project. The MDI staff also included additional information on energy efficiency measures provided through kits, total participation in different projects, and diverse spend.

The evaluation team combined the partner and project level information to create an interactive PowerBI dashboard. The dashboard links all the different datasets together and allows the user to sort, filter, and visualize the data based on different characteristics of the partners and projects. We also incorporate the partnership classification scheme in the dashboard we generated when categorizing the current MDI partners.

2.2 Program Staff and Partner In-Depth Interviews

Finally, our team conducted semi-structured interviews with key AIC staff and partner representatives. Interviews were conducted to understand the partnership development process, explore the general structure of roles and responsibilities, and identify important best practices and lessons learned. In all, we completed seven interviews: four with MDI staff and three with key partner representatives. Findings on partnership experience and structure resulting from these interviews provide AIC with feedback that can help them understand and improve their MDI partnerships.

2.3 Case Study Development

Building on the research activities described above, the evaluation team developed case studies of three successful MDI partnerships to illustrate the nuance associated with developing partnerships and executing projects under the MDI. Our team worked closely with AIC to select well-established MDI partners to include in this evaluation with the goal of highlighting partners that serve a range of populations across AIC's service territory. Additionally, for each of the selected MDI Partners, the evaluation team reviewed all documentation pertaining to the partnership, including:

- Memorandums of agreement (MOAs) between MDI partners and AIC;
- Individual project implementations; and

- Goals and milestone documentation, where applicable.

3. Detailed Findings

AIC has partnered with 31 different organizations through the MDI since its inception in 2018.² These manifold organizations serve a range of different populations across AIC’s service territory. Through the MDI, AIC has partnered with several different types of organizations to develop individual projects aimed at achieving four broad types of outcomes aligned with overall MDI goals.

- **Creating jobs.** that is, working with partners to develop internships opportunities, apprenticeships, and other positions at their own organizations or other community-based organizations (CBOs).
- **Providing grants to partners** for a range of purposes centered around advancing energy efficiency goals—for example, purchasing of equipment, adding staff capacity, workforce education and training, and general energy efficiency education and outreach.
- **Direct installation** of energy efficiency measures by trained technicians.
- **Holding events** aimed at increasing awareness of energy efficiency and AIC’s programming in different partner communities. Events range from outreach and education to energy efficiency measure distribution or workshop and training events.

Figure 1 shows the number of different projects in each outcome category based on the project description included in the program tracking database. Note that these categories are not mutually exclusive as projects may have multiple goals. Overall, findings from this study suggest that MDI partnerships and their associated outcomes to date will help AIC achieve MDI goals.

² This count does not include ad hoc partnerships (i.e., no MOA). Projects initiated through ad hoc partnerships include internal initiatives that are solely operated by AIC, but also one-off partnerships with other organizations. In total, the MDI has completed 70 projects through ad hoc partnerships.

Figure 1. 2018-2021 MDI Project Snapshot



3.1 Key Attributes of Successful Partnerships

While every partnership is unique and must be treated as such, the evaluation team identified five attributes that are key indicators of successful partnerships.

- **Clearly articulated and shared goals.** An essential aspect of a successful partnership is the presence of clearly articulated goals that all partners agree upon and are committed to working towards. While goals may be shared or distinct between organizations, they cannot be at odds with one another. Desired outcomes should be articulated across all involved organizations, despite parties having potentially different motivations for achieving their goals. The overall objectives of the partnership should be documented at the origin of the relationship, including outlining specific deliverables associated with the goals and their timelines.
- **Clearly defined roles and responsibilities.** Partnerships have the potential to drive outcomes that are greater than the sum of what individual partners contribute if they successfully fulfill and coordinate their individual roles and responsibilities. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities across partners allows the entities to optimally establish how the collaborations will fit into each party's' organizational capacity, strengths, and structure. Partners must realize that, by coordinating, they can accomplish more together than through acting alone.³
- **Open and frequent communication.** Communication is a key aspect in the success of a partnership. Establishing a clearly outlined, mutually agreed upon communication plan that is articulated between partnership entities will support valuable knowledge sharing, increased accountability, trust building, and enhanced transparency between partners.
- **Common metrics and integrated data.** Developing common goal-based metrics and processes to record and accumulate data helps to ensure that all partners are actively tracking progress and accomplishments while creating consistency, maintaining data integrity, and facilitating understanding of collected data across entities. Indicators that measure program impacts and those that measure

³ Caplan and Jones, *Partnership Indicators*, 1.

the effectiveness of the partnership itself should be differentiated. In data tracking and collection plans, partners should identify the data that are key to assessing impacts (i.e., performance indicators).

- **Mutual trust and respect within shared decision-making.** Successful partnerships are established on non-hierarchical relationships and built on mutual trust and respect between the involved members. Partnerships often rely on information and responsibility sharing between multiple entities. It is crucial that all parties feel confident in the ability to transfer the information they share safely and securely. The degree and dimension of trust is dependent on the nature of the relationship between partners. The nature of a partnership and the role of trust changes over time; therefore, trust requires continual evaluation and adjustment.⁴

Overall, AIC's efforts to date demonstrate a number of these characteristics. Specifically, MDI staff have developed a number of core processes that aim to achieve the goals outlined in several of the attributes listed above. During the onboarding process, MDI partners and staff develop a customized memorandum of agreement (MOA) between all parties involved. These include a list of the responsibilities for AIC and the community partner, detailing projects, deliverables, and services expected from each party. The MOA also outlines financial information such as project budgets, payment terms, as well as general guidelines for the program participation and additional information regarding insurance, indemnity, marketing, safety, and security. Additionally, MDI staff work closely with MDI partners to plan each specific project; developing annual implementation plans for various projects that clearly outline expectations, timelines, and plans for regular communication. This type of intentional planning serves to develop a rapport between organizations and establishes a framework that allows for continued flexibility to meet partners' needs, which in turn creates trust between all parties involved.

3.2 MDI Partner Classification

Opinion Dynamics developed a mutually exclusive classification scheme for MDI partnerships based on information available in the MDI database. Note that our team developed the scoring rubrics presented below in the absence of feedback captured directly from MDI partners related to satisfaction, trust, and other information that might speak to the strength of the partnership as it relates to the key attributes of successful partnerships presented in the preceding section. As discussed in the recommendations presented in Section 1.1, this classification scheme may be augmented by data captured through annual surveys with MDI partners.

We developed this scheme based on two broad criteria; (1) partnership tenure: the amount of time that a partner has been active within the MDI, and (2) recent activity level: an expression of the number of projects each partner has completed through the MDI recently. We classified partnerships based on these two criteria for a few reasons. First, both criteria speak to the health and vitality of partnerships based on the logic that well-established and successful partnerships will both persist for longer periods of time and will also be responsible for a higher level of regular activity (i.e., completed projects). Additionally, we had reliable and complete information available in the MDI database for most partners on both criteria, and felt that these criteria reflect the evolution of partnerships over time as exemplified in the case studies described in Section 3.3.

⁴ Nielsen, "Role of Trust," 251.

Criteria

As noted, we identified two main criteria to aid in classifying current MDI partners—tenure and activity. We developed “scores” for each criterion based on information available in the MDI database. We developed each score as follows:

- Tenure score:** We estimated the tenure of each partnership based on project start and end dates associated with that partner and used estimated tenure to develop a “tenure score.” Tenure scores are directly related to length of partnership: the longer the partnership, the higher the tenure score. We assigned partnerships initiated less than one year prior to December 31, 2021, a tenure score of 0, those initiated between one and three years ago a score of 1, and partnerships that began between three and five years ago a score of 2. Note that, given that the MDI began in 2018, no MDI partnerships have existed for more than four years as of 2022.
- Recent activity score:** The activity score is the sum of two components—one based on the average number of projects completed per year and the other based on how active partners have been recently. We first assigned a score to each partner based on the number of projects completed per year. There were also cases where partners completed many projects early in the partnership but have become less active over time. To account for the idea that partners that complete projects more recently are better. As such, when developing the final activity score for each MDI partner, we incorporated an adjustment to increase the activity score for partners that have completed projects more recently. We included this adjustment to highlight how partnerships have matured and remained active over the course of their involvement with the MDI. The final activity score includes the sum of both components outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Recent Activity Score Components

Activity Score Component	Score	Rubric
Average projects completed per year	0	Partner completed less than one project per year
	1	Partner completed between one and three projects per year
	2	Partner completed between three and five projects per year
	3	Partner completed more than five projects per year
Average end year for completed projects	0	Partner completed majority of projects more than three years prior to December 31, 2021.
	1	Partner completed majority of projects more than two years prior to December 31, 2021, but less than three
	2	Projects completed majority of projects more than one year prior to December 31, 2021, but less than two
	3	Partner completed majority of their projects in 2021

Classification

Utilizing the two criteria discussed above, we developed seven different classification bins based on the minimum and maximum potential combined tenure and activity scores (Table 2). Note that all the current MDI partners fell between bins 2 and 4, with most (22 partnerships) falling in bin 2—that is, in relatively early stages of development. This is unsurprising given the relative nascence of the MDI (four years). Additionally, we found that, in several cases partners that have higher tenure scores (i.e., partners that have had longer involvement with the MDI), tended to be more active in terms of the number of projects completed each year.

Also, there are 70 different “ad hoc” projects included in the MDI database, but not included in this classification scheme. These projects do not involve an MOA and are typically short engagements with a single community partner, but mostly capture internal pilots and initiatives managed solely by AIC. These may include specific AIC pilots (e.g., the 2019 Mobility Pilot) or internal scholarship or internship opportunities.

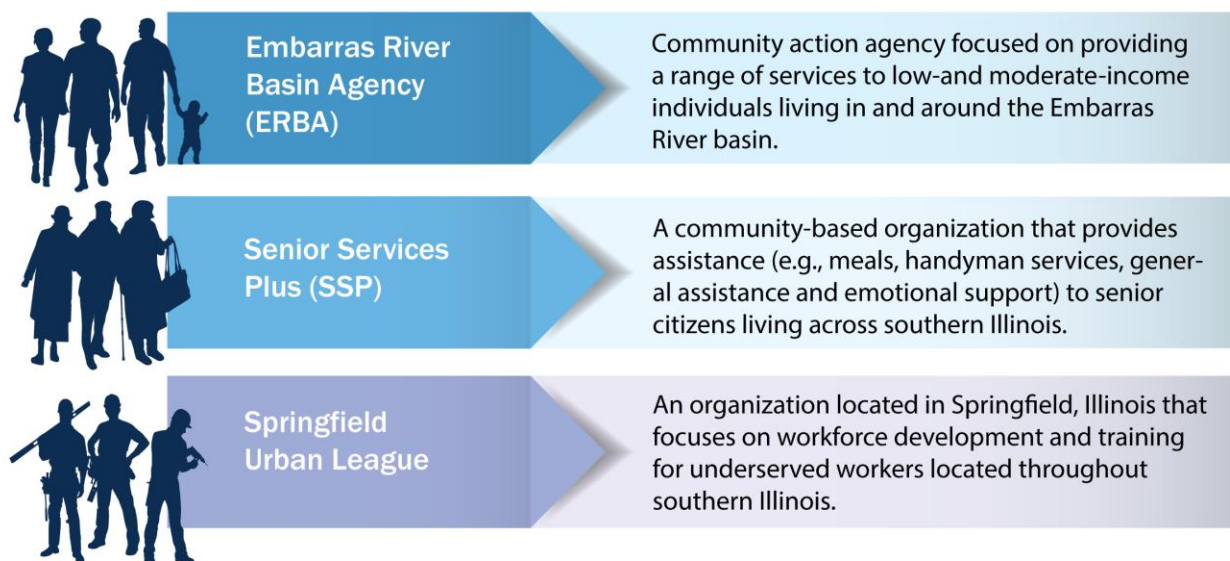
Table 2. MDI Partner Classification

Partnership Development Stage	Bin	Number of Partners	Number of Projects	Average Partnership length	Average Projects per Year	Score Description
Early Stage	1					Combined tenure and activity score of 0
	2	22	43	2.0 yrs.	1.0	Combined tenure and activity score of 1
Middle Stage	3	8	38	3.2 yrs.	1.5	Combined tenure and activity score of 2
	4	1	7	3.3 yrs.	2.1	Combined tenure and activity score of 3
	5					Combined tenure and activity score of 4
Late Stage	6					Combined tenure and activity score of 5
	7					Combined tenure and activity score of 6

3.3 Case Studies

Developing a classification scheme enabled us to gain a greater understanding of the population of MDI partner organizations to date and create a mechanism for ongoing tracking and assessment of partnerships established through the MDI. What the classification scheme could not do; however, was provide insight into how successful partnerships are instigated and progress over time or how partnerships have advanced AIC's MDI goals. To that end, we developed three case studies that highlight several partners in greater detail. We worked closely with AIC and the MDI team to select organizations with long-standing relationships with the MDI to highlight in these case studies (Figure 2). In addition to illustrating the process of initiating a partnership through the MDI, as well as how they evolve over time, we assessed each of these partnerships based on the key attributes of successful partners discussed previously (Section 3.1).

Figure 2. MDI Partnership Case Study Snapshot



Key takeaways from these case studies include:

- All three partnerships have evolved substantially over time. The MDI team worked closely with partners in all three cases to develop a structured set of processes so that all parties involved had clear expectations. At the same time, MDI staff have allowed sufficient flexibility for partners to adjust goals, bring new ideas, and contribute in meaningful ways.
- Through the MDI, all three of the partners highlighted below have been able to enhance the services they already provided. In some cases, the MDI helped partners initiate new offerings; however, those were still within the core mission of the partner organizations. There were no instances where the MDI team asked partners to stretch beyond their core competency. This has allowed the partners to focus where they excel, while allowing the MDI team to provide ancillary support.
- Trust between organizations plays a key role in the success of all three partnerships. In all instances both MDI and partner staff were clearly bought into one another's missions. Establishing a non-hierarchical relationship between partners and MDI staff has allowed partner staff to feel comfortable

communicating proactively with the MDI team, which has, in turn, led to productive problem solving in all cases.

3.3.1 Senior Services Plus (SSP)

Senior Services Plus (SSP) is a nonprofit community-based organization (CBO) that was established in Alton, Illinois in 1973 by a group of citizens to help the aging community, with an emphasis on socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals. The organization employs over 550 individuals and is one of the largest employers in the River Bend region, a region that spans Central and Southern Illinois and includes portions of Madison, Calhoun, and Jersey counties. SSP's reach extends beyond the River Bend region, serving between 30,000 and 35,000 seniors annually across seven counties throughout south central Illinois.

SSP initially focused on supporting the transportation and nutritional needs of the communities they served. Since its inception, the organization has diversified its offerings, including opening a wellness center that contains a full gym and fitness center with over 1,000 members. Additionally, the SSP owns and manages an organic farm that sells fresh produce (through local farmers markets and at the wellness center), and supplements food provided to seniors through their Meals on Wheels program. The SSP also offers several other services, including Medicare and Medicaid counseling, non-medical in-home care, assistance with yard work, and basic handyman services.

SSP began working with AIC through the MDI starting in 2019. SSP had been looking for educational and energy efficiency opportunities and after seeing a social media post related to the MDI, contacted AIC and became an MDI partner. Through the MDI, SSP has implemented 10 different projects between 2019 and 2021 (Table 3).

Table 3. SSP MDI Projects

Project Name (Year)	Job	Grant	Direct Install	Event
Energy Efficiency Event and Kit Distribution (2019)	✓	✓		✓
Energy Efficiency Services Expansion (2019)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Small Business Direct Install (2019)	✓	✓		✓
Handyman Extended Support (2020)				✓
Handyman Program (2020)	✓		✓	
Smart Thermostat Outreach and Education (2020)				✓
Energy Efficiency Room (2020)				
EE Outreach and Education (2021)		✓		✓
Handyman (2021)				
Program Ally Expansion (2021)				

Note: We highlighted outcome categories based on project-level information contained in the MDI database (e.g., number of energy efficiency measures directly installed). The 2020 Efficiency Room and 2021 Handyman and Program Ally Expansion projects did not contain information related to project outcomes.

Partnership Attributes

Goals: The MOA between SSP and AIC provides overarching goals and a framework for developing specific goals outlined in annual implementation plans. SSP staff indicated that this framework allows for sufficient flexibility to set achievable goals collaboratively at regular intervals, while also leaving room to adjust as necessary. Setting and updating goals is an open conversation between MDI and SSP staff. The general process starts with the SSP team providing ideas to the MDI project manager, who in turn develops a draft implementation plan. Both teams then iterate on the plan until all parties involved are satisfied.

[Setting goals is] very collaborative, but I'll be entirely honest, usually it's not more than about one, maybe two rounds of edits. It's collaborative enough early on that there's usually not surprises down the road.

Roles and Responsibilities: The MOA and implementation plans also specify the roles and responsibilities of the MDI and SSP teams. Generally, SSP staff have responsibility for providing services directly to their clients while the MDI staff play supporting roles (e.g., funding, project management support, support for direct installation of energy efficiency measures, education and outreach, etc.).

Communication: The implementation plan also outlines communication expectations. SSP and MDI staff have frequent conversations. The communication can be directly between the MDI project manager and the CEO of SSP, who is the main point of contact; however, the lines of communication also extend beyond this. Other staff at SSP who are involved in the process have direct access to a variety of MDI program representatives to reach out as needed. Despite the communication expectations outlined in annual implementation plans, the MDI and SSP teams have developed enough rapport that they have also established sufficient flexibility in lines of communication. Meeting frequency changes as needed and over time; however, SSP staff reports that the responsiveness from MDI staff always remains high. Representatives from both entities will discuss the cadence of meetings to figure out what works and sets the expectations based on those meetings.

Data: Similar to communication, goals, and roles and responsibilities, implementation plans also clearly outline the data collection expectations and sharing protocols. In general, data collection and data sharing expectations are consistent across MDI partners. The majority of MDI information, including SSP data, is stored in a Salesforce platform called PowerPath that is managed by a third-party organization. SSP is responsible for the capture of relevant information and reporting the information back to AIC through the data tracking portal. SSP staff go through an annual training with MDI staff on how to enter information into the database correctly. No personal identifiable information (PII) is stored on the platform.

Trust: Both SSP and MDI staff expressed high degrees of trust with one another, specifically noting that their working relationship has improved with time. Both teams indicated that with each year and each conversation, their partnership has grown and developed. According to the SSP team, the structure that the MDI has provided (e.g., MOAs, implementation plans, regular communication) combined with sufficient flexibility has helped to facilitate mutual trust and respect between all parties involved. The SSP team saw very clearly that they were going to be involved in the planning process and MDI staff have been very responsive to their suggestions. This has given the SSP staff a sense of comfort to offer more ideas and remain engaged with the MDI. The projects implemented through the partnership also evolve over time as understanding and trust grow. For example, SSP reports that they are now recording their own commercials and sending to AIC for approval, rather than AIC leading that effort, which was a requirement in the first year of the partnership. The trust has also enabled SSP staff to plan projects farther in advance. The SSP team is already discussing plans for 2025 and what projects may look like, in contrast to the first year of their involvement when they were only planning months in advance.

Challenges, Successes, and Lessons Learned

Challenges: The only challenge SSP identified was related to getting access to utility account numbers when needed. SSP did not identify this as an overarching issue in how they work with the MDI, just a discrete problem that have faced.

Successes: SSP shared that while their partnership with AIC saves money for both SSP and their clients, the partnership has also impacted the health, comfort, and safety of their clients. According to SSP staff, the MDI enables considerable enhancements to SSP clients' quality of life. SSP also identified that they can serve more individuals and provide more services in partnership with AIC than they could on their own. By partnering, AIC is not only building trust with SSP but also the clients who are served by and trust SSP.

Lessons Learned: Program and partner staff agreed on the importance of providing the flexibility and opportunity for the partnership to grow over time. The SSP partnership started out as just outreach, but has grown to include more projects, and SSP has become a program ally. SSP and MDI teams also reported that regular and frequent communication is important, especially at the beginning of a partnership, to ensure everyone is on the same page and moving forward together.

3.3.2 Embarras River Basin Agency

Embarras River Basin Agency (ERBA) is a community action agency that helps low- and fixed-income families in the Embarras River Basin community and works to assist young individuals to get out of poverty and sustain self-sufficiency. ERBA also both administers and partners with other organizations to deliver energy assistance programs to help their clients. These include state and federal programs that assist residents with energy-related costs, weatherization services, and minor home repairs (e.g., Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program [LIHEAP], the State of Illinois Program Percentage of Income Payment Plan [PIPP]). Additionally, ERBA partners with non-profits and other organizations, including AIC, to offer assistance paying energy bills (e.g., Warm Neighbors Cool Friends and Helping Hands Programs), among other offerings. In addition to bill payment programming, ERBA also partners with AIC to implement the AIC's Income Qualified Initiative.

ERBA became an MDI partner in 2018 after AIC initially approached ERBA. Given the long and productive working relationship, the ERBA team was happy for the opportunity to become an MDI partner. Through the MDI partnership, ERBA has implemented seven different projects from 2018 to 2021 (Table 4).

Table 4. ERBA MDI Projects

Project Name	Job	Grant	Direct Install	Event
Expand as Residential and Commercial Portfolio Trade Ally (2018 – 2019)	✓	✓		
Contractor Employment Scholarships (2018 – 2019)	✓	✓		
Outreach and Kit Distribution (2019)				✓
Residential Outreach and Education and Kit Distribution (2020)				✓
Equipment Grant (2020)				✓
Ameren SAVE Kits (2020)				✓
Energy Efficiency Education and Outreach (2021)		✓		✓

Partnership Attributes

Goals: As with other partnerships, the MDI and ERBA teams develop goals collaboratively. ERBA plays a large part in estimating how many people they think they can serve through MDI projects, how many people they think it is realistic for them to provide energy efficiency kits to, how many people they will reach out to, etc. The partners often look to goals from previous years as starting points to develop current goals, and work to grow the goals each year. MDI staff works to support the goals and collaborates with the ERBA team to develop implementation plans outlining the goals and how to achieve them.

Roles and Responsibilities: ERBA and AIC work in tandem to ensure that they are helping ERBA clients save energy and money. Roles and responsibilities are outlined in the implementation plan, specifically designating different support roles that are filled by MDI staff annually. The details of this support may adjust based on the project. For example, the MDI program team is responsible for providing ERBA with energy efficiency kits to distribute and may also be asked to provide additional tools and support for marketing the kit distribution events. As with other partnerships, the designated project manager on the MDI team is both the conduit to the ERBA team and an advocate on their behalf, conveying to AIC what the agency needs to be successful and ensuring those needs are met.

Communication: The implementation plan explains the communication expectations between ERBA and MDI staff. The ERBA team and the MDI project manager have a scheduled hourlong call every other week, during which they discuss goals, invoicing, new ideas, success, challenges, questions, and any support that ERBA may need from AIC. Additionally, the teams connect monthly to review established goals for individual projects to ensure that they are on-track, highlight specific challenges, offer additional support, and as needed, adjust goals and expectations accordingly.

Data: ERBA’s data collection and data sharing expectations with AIC are consistent with most other MDI partners and are laid out in the implementation plans. ERBA has a virtual private network (VPN) across all of their agencies and outreach offices with a shared spreadsheet that can be filled in remotely whenever someone signs a participant up to receive an energy efficiency kit. To collect information on people educated, staff will review how many AIC customers were engaged in a given month through other programs where ERBA provided energy efficiency education. For online/social media events, ERBA staff will pull information about interactions with a given social media post. ERBA shares this information with the MDI program team on a timeline outlined in the implementation plan.

Trust: AIC and ERBA had a positive relationship even before the development of the MDI partnership. AIC’s flexibility and cooperation make it easier for ERBA to help people and have allowed the relationship to grow and mature over time. ERBA usually proposes ideas and MDI staff work to implement them, indicating a high level of trust between the organizations and individuals involved and a positive working relationship.

We have a very good relationship with every facet of Ameren... I don't know that it could get any better.

Challenges, Successes, and Lessons Learned

Challenges: ERBA did not encounter many challenges or barriers to their MDI partnership with AIC. Initially, COVID-19 posed a challenge to energy efficiency kit distribution, but the partners were able to overcome challenges by communicating and developing processes and protocols to execute the distribution virtually.

Successes: The partnership allowed AIC and ERBA to help clients that they wouldn’t have been able to otherwise, such as those on the waiting list to receive federal weatherization assistance. The list of customers wanting help with weatherization is very long and because it is based on a point system, some customers may be continuously pushed further down the list. The MDI partnership with AIC allowed ERBA to serve a larger share of those customers by providing the necessary support.

Lessons Learned: MDI and ERBA staff identified flexibility, cooperation, and opportunities for expansion as key best practices in ERBA’s MDI partnership. The flexibility of the partnership has made it easy for ERBA to help people. ERBA staff specifically stated that this type of cooperation was “priceless” and overtime the individuals involved in this partnership have developed plans to continue to expand the number of individuals ERBA is able to serve through the MDI.

3.3.3 Springfield Urban League (SUL)

The Springfield Urban League (SUL) defines itself as, “a nonprofit, nonpartisan, civil rights, and community-based movement.”⁵ The SUL has a large offering of over 30 individual programs, including justice and advocacy programs, workforce development and support programs, and a wellness on wheels mobile unit that

⁵ Springfield Urban League, “About Us.”

previously focused on addressing HIV and diabetes but recently pivoted to provide COVID-19 rapid testing and mobile vaccination during the pandemic. Additional programming includes financial counseling and job preparedness training for individuals, among other offerings.

The MDI partnership is rooted in workforce development and support and, as such, AIC initiated this partnership based on the SUL’s long history of success in these areas. According to the SUL team, AIC has always been a strong supporter of the SUL and the work that they do. Since joining the MDI in 2018, the SUL has implemented seven different projects over a four-year period, all of which have included an event component (Table 5).

Table 5. SUL MDI Projects

Project Name	Job	Grant	Direct Install	Event
Jobs Board (2018 - 2019)				✓
Energy Efficiency Event and Kit Distribution (2019)	✓	✓		✓
Landlord Tenant Program (2019)	✓	✓		✓
Jobs Board Job Seeker Outreach (2020)	✓			✓
Residential Outreach (2020)				✓
Jobs Board (2021)				✓
Residential EE Education and Outreach (2021)				✓

Partnership Attributes

Goals: Prior to the official partnership, SUL and MDI staff had conversations about how the MDI partnership could impact the people the SUL served. Both parties discussed and shared data related to existing clients to understand the services that SUL provided and the types of clients they typically serve. The goal-setting process continues to be collaborative and occurs at the beginning of each year. SUL begins the conversation by outlining reasonable and achievable goals, typically creating targets of how many clients the SUL team can serve through MDI projects. Both MDI and SUL teams noted that they maintain open lines of communication in the event that goals need adjustment for any reason during any one year.

Roles and Responsibilities: MDI and SUL staff outline roles and responsibilities in the agreed upon implementation plans each year. The partnership leverages the vast knowledge of SUL and the work they have done for the past 95 years. As with other partnerships, the SUL team takes responsibility for serving their clients directly while MDI staff provide support in the form of funding, developing outreach and educational materials, technical assistance, general outreach support, and other necessary forms of assistance.

Communication: As laid out in the implementation plan, SUL and MDI project managers meet every other week to discuss the partnership, though the meeting cadence has become less regular as the partnership has matured. The conversations typically include status updates on specific projects, troubleshooting challenges that have arisen, and even discussing longer term strategy. SUL staff also noted that the MDI team is available to respond to calls or emails outside of their regular meeting hours.

Data: The SUL is responsible for the capture of relevant information and reporting the information back to the MDI team. The information that the SUL team collects related to MDI projects is often similar to data they already collect to support other programming. There are some cases where MDI project goals do not align with existing data collection processes; however, and the MDI and SUL teams work together to ensure that protocols are in place to collect the necessary information. The Jobs Board and Landlord and Tenant research projects implemented by the SUL required a very different set of data from what the SUL team already collected. To accommodate this, the MDI staff worked with SUL staff to generate a custom data tracking approach that provided AIC with reports on a quarterly basis. For the Jobs Board, the SUL team collected information about engagement, including the number of posts generating site traffic, the number of job seekers and employers signed up on the board, and the number of times that a link to the Jobs Board had been shared on the site and through social media. SUL and MDI staff collaboratively and iteratively generated new processes for the Landlord and Tenant research program that tracked information about selecting research questions and other important data for reporting.

Trust: AIC recognizes and trusts that SUL has the expertise on how to serve their clients best. As such, the MDI team has allowed SUL the flexibility to recommend areas of collaboration that will enable both parties to achieve their shared goals. Both teams reported that trust has grown between the partners over time. The SUL team noted that this trust now extends to their clients, as AIC has been a reliable and consistent supporter of the workforce development community.

We've (SUL) thoroughly enjoyed the partnership with Ameren, the webinars, the conferences, the technical assistance, the partner networking, it's all been beneficial to not only the market development initiative, but to the clients that we serve throughout Ameren Illinois customer territories.

Challenges, Successes, and Lessons Learned

Challenges: Both teams reported that they faced some organizational challenges (e.g., differing fiscal calendars) at the outset of the partnership, which they have since overcome. Other challenges were project dependent. For example, the Jobs Board presented some challenges initially due to the level of data required by the MDI team to support reporting on progress towards goals. The SUL team also reported that in this instance; however, as with other issues that have arisen over the years, the MDI team works closely with the SUL team to identify and navigate barriers quickly.

Successes: The SUL partnership has exceeded their goals every year. SUL calls particular attention to the steps the MDI team took to ensure that SUL had the support necessary to withstand the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lessons Learned: Three aspects of the partnership that both SUL and MDI staff highlighted as reasons for their success were (1) the flexibility allowed by both parties, (2) the MDI team's ability to listen to what support would be most beneficial to the SUL, and (3) both teams' willingness to seek common ground. First, as noted elsewhere in this report, the structure of the MDI allowed for sufficient flexibility for both teams to adjust goals, or other aspects of the partnership, as needed. The SUL team pointed out the need for this flexibility, particularly when it came to tailoring projects and support based on what the SUL actually needed to serve their clients. The MDI team's ability to listen and provide this type of customized support allowed the SUL team to focus on their areas of expertise. Finally, both teams highlighted the importance of all parties involved to commit to seeking common ground wherever possible, particularly at the early stages of developing the partnership—that is, iterating on goals and plans until both parties find mutually agreeable and beneficial terms.

Appendix A. Literature Review References

Caplan, K. & Jones, D. (2002). *Partnership Indicators: Measuring the Effectiveness of Multi-Sector Approaches to Service Provision*. London, England. Business Partners for Development, Water & Sanitation Cluster.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008). *Evaluation Guide: Fundamentals of Evaluating Partnerships*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Emerson, K. & Nabatchi, T. (2015). *Collaborative Governance Regimes*. Washington D.C: Georgetown University Press.

Innes, J. & Booher, D. (1999). "Consensus Building and Complex Adaptive Systems: A Framework for Evaluating Collaborative Planning." *Journal of American Planning Association* 65 (4): 412-23.

Mendell, M. & Keast, R. (2008). "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Interorganizational Relations through Networks: Developing a Framework for Revised Performance Measures." *Public Management Review* 10 (6): 715-31.

Nielsen, B. (2004). "The Role of Trust in Collaborative Relationships: A Multi-Dimensional Approach." *M@n@gement* 3 (7): 239-256.

Radin, B. (2006). *Challenging the Performance Movement: Accountability, Complexity, and Democratic Values*. Washington D.C: Georgetown University Press.

Siegel, B., Erickson, J., Milstein, B. & Evans Pritchard, K. (2018). *Multisector Partnerships Need Further Development to Fulfill Aspirations for Transforming Regional Health and Well-Being*. Cambridge, MA. ReThink Health: An Initiative of the Fannie E. Rippel Foundation.

Springfield Urban League, Inc. "About Us." Last modified April 1, 2022. <https://www.springfieldul.org/page.aspx?item=4>.

State and Local Energy Efficiency Action Network. (2012). *Energy Efficiency Program Impact Evaluation Guide: Evaluation, Measurement, and Verification Working Group*. US Department of Energy and US Environmental Protection Agency.

For more information, please contact:

**Paul Wasmund
Director**

617-301-4626 tel
pwasmund@opiniondynamics.com

1000 Winter Street
Waltham, MA 02451



Opinion **Dynamics**

Boston | Headquarters

617 492 1400 tel
617 492 7944 fax
800 966 1254 toll free

1000 Winter Street
Waltham, MA 02451

San Francisco Bay

510 444 5050 tel
510 444 5222 fax

1 Kaiser Plaza
Suite 445
Oakland, CA 94612

San Diego

858 270 5010 tel
858 270 5211 fax

7590 Fay Avenue
Suite 406
La Jolla, CA 92037

Portland

503 287 9136 tel
503-281-7375 fax

3934 NE MLK Jr. Blvd.
Suite 300
Portland, OR 97212