

Collective Impact and the Backbone Organization

Collective impact initiatives are long-term commitments by a group of stakeholders from different sectors to a common agenda. Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the issues and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and are supported by a backbone organization.

Three pre-conditions for Collective Impact

1. **An Influential Champion**

An individual or small group who command the respect necessary to bring CEO-level cross-sector leaders together and keep them actively engaged over time.

2. **Adequate Resourcing**

Adequate financial resources to last at least two to three year to support needed infrastructure and planning.

3. **A Sense of Urgency for Change**

A new opportunity or crisis that convinces people that a particular issue must be acted upon now and/or that a new approach is needed.

A fourth pre-condition identified by the Tamarack Institute:

4. **History of Working Together**

When a community has a history of working together, things move along at a quicker space.

Five conditions of Collective Impact work

1. **A Common Agenda:** Agreement on a proposed set of strategies.

2. **Shared Measurement Systems:** A common set of indicators for monitoring progress and impact.

3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** The distinct activities undertaken by various collective impact partners reinforce the activities of other partners, and together lead to system-wide change.

4. **Continuous Communication:** Collective impact partners communicate frequently in the spirit of continuous improvement and learning.

5. **Backbone Structure:** The structure which supports alignment and coordination across collective impact partners.

Six roles of a Backbone Organization

1. **Guiding Vision and Strategy**

2. **Aligning and Coordinating Activities**

3. **Creating and Supporting Shared Measurement**

4. **Partnering in the Building of Public Will**

5. **Advancing an Aligned Advocacy/Policy Agenda**

6. **Mobilizing Funding to Support the Collective Effort**

Sources: Stanford Social Innovation Review Winter 2011, Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement