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To: Mayor and City Council
From: Brian Phillips, Management Analyst
Date: July 15, 2015
Subject: ITEM NO. 1: Youth Collective Impact Workshop

The topic of the July 21 City Council workshop is Collective Impact Planning for Youth. The City has retained the Forum for Youth Investment (FYI) to conduct this workshop. FYI developed the Ready By 21 initiative, which is a widely used set of standards for communities to improve the likelihood of youth being prepared for college, work, and life. FYI has also facilitated planning processes in a variety of communities across the country to achieve different youth development goals.

The City Council requested that this workshop be held to gather more information about collective impact planning processes, to gather information about how other communities have approached simlar efforts, and to understand how such planning interacts with youth programming offered by non-profits and local government agencies.

During this workshop, FYI will provide an overview of collective impact, and then will provide an opportunity for the City Council to hear from representatives of two other communities that have undergone a planning process. There will then be an opportunity for questions and discussion among those present.

At the City Council's direction, invitations to attend have been extended to the ASSET funders, the Ames, Gilbert, and United school districts, Mary Greeley Medical Center, and the ASSET-funded organizations that work with youth.

Attached is some background information provided by the Forum For Youth Investment, which the Council may wish to review prior to the workshop discussion.

The Importance of "Emergence" in the Youth Field

By Karen Pittman
Posted: 5/19/14
www.collectiveimpactforum.org/blog

I don't know if he could hear it from the podium, but there was an audible "ah-hah" moment from the audience when John Kania spoke two weeks ago at the Ready by 21 National Meeting.

Our annual meeting brings together hundreds of community and state leaders from around the country who are working to improve the odds for young people through collective impact strategies to strengthen partnerships, improve practices and align policies. John's plenary session address was about "embracing emergence" – looking at how collective impact addresses complexity. Before I summarize what he said, let me stress why it was important that he said it.

The term "collective impact" has brought much-needed clarity and urgency to the kind of deep collaborative work that's needed to change conditions for young people (the population of focus here at the Forum for Youth Investment, the creator of Ready by 21®). But the movement to implement collective impact strategies has generated some unintended effects on how groups approach the challenge of creating "needle-moving change" in communities.

The heightened commitment to achieve impact, coupled with traditional ways of doing business, sometimes impedes opportunities to leverage the power of the collective. Here's why: Collective impact gets introduced as a disciplined process for narrowing goals and selecting solutions that will drive community investment – but into competitive spaces filled with underfunded providers and initiatives. That sometimes ignites a scramble to see who defines the starting point and who can provide the backbone supports. There's a sense that those who are in the inner circle set the agenda, and a fear that those who get left out will lose funding. The press to organize around the idea of collective impact sometimes leads to competitive relationships, rushed decisions and rigid implementation.

So the mid-course corrections offered by John and Mark Kramer of FSG are welcomed. At our National Meeting, John's observations about embracing emergence as an explicit framing of collective impact approach generated a low buzz from the crowd of continuous improvement enthusiasts. His introduction of the new "collectives: collective seeing, collective learning, collective doing" generated vigorous nods from those who have been saying that these are the actions that lead to impact.

What generated audible ah-hahs was his assertion that the social sector routinely limits its ability to create large-scale change by starting with predetermined solutions rather than predetermined rules of interaction that allow solutions to emerge. Juxtaposed on a slide, these words drove home an uncomfortable reality: The purpose of bringing together a cross-section of thinkers who have different perspectives on a problem is not only to gain support for taking existing solutions to scale, or even to ask why solutions haven't worked. The

purpose is to create the space and conditions to reimagine what the solutions really need to be.

The embracing emergence message flies against tradition and against the "impact" word itself. It is consistent, however, with the "big picture" approach the Forum uses to bring the multiple players focused on child and youth development to the same table to think differently, act differently and act together. The first step is getting them to "zoom out" to locate themselves in the bigger picture of what it takes to raise a child (an exercise in collective seeing), before they "zoom in" to identify, debate and dig into the specific things they can tackle together (collective learning).

That first step is extremely important. Denied the chance to be in the room to "zoom out" and find their place in the equation, too many important stakeholders either opt out or feel locked out of the opportunity to take collective action.

Returning the favor of John speaking at our meeting, I'll be speaking at FSG's upcoming Funders Meeting in Aspen, Colo., where we will continue the needed conversation about "embracing emergence."

The Culture of Collective Impact

By Paul Schmitz

"It took a lot of time to build trust. People had distrust for years. You can't undo that in a few meetings"

"They don't invite people like me to their tables. I went to a meeting and it was all clearly dominated by the same folks who have all the resources and don't know our community."

"Everyone thinks they are special and doing something no one else is doing. There is so much organizational pride. But all your special efforts are missing the mark, and we have to talk about that."

Last summer, I spoke at a conference of funders convened by the Collective Impact Forum. To prepare for the event, I contacted several trusted leaders in different communities who had been involved at various levels in collective impact initiatives. I heard enthusiastically about the promise of collective impact, but I also heard comments like those above that led me to a conviction: collective impact efforts must be as rigorous about culture as they are about data and strategy if they wish to achieve enduring change.

Coming to Believe in Collective Impact

I came to believe in collective impact from a cognitive dissonance I increasingly experienced during two decades of work in the nonprofit sector. It culminated in April, 2010, when I awoke to a headline that my hometown Milwaukee had the worst 4th grade reading scores for African American children in America. That same day I received a newsletter from a well-regarded youth organization boasting about the outcomes it was achieving for the children they served. I could not reconcile why we had great programs achieving outcomes, and yet the city-wide numbers did not seem to ever change.

My former organization Public Allies partnered annually with more than 500 local nonprofit organizations in 23 communities. We saw the great impacts of so many groups first-hand, but we also we were confounded by the issue siloes, geographic turf wars, and egos that prevented any real progress on solving complex community problems. Issues like education, economic security, housing, and health are not fragmented in peoples' lives, but the systems that serve them are. They are even fragmented at the neighborhood level. We had a project once that hired youth as community organizers to map out the assets in their neighborhoods, and the youth were shocked to find that the teachers and principals at their schools, local pastors, youthworkers at nonprofit agencies, and other neighborhood leaders did not know each other. Without more comprehensive efforts, it seemed that isolated impacts of organizations rarely sustained or spread.

In 2010, I began writing my book, *Everyone Leads: Building Leadership from the Community Up*, and sought examples of truly comprehensive collaborative efforts. Through our Allies, I learned about the Strive Partnership in Cincinnati and The United Way of Greater Milwaukee, which led efforts to bring organizations together in initiatives that had begun actually moving the needle on city-wide numbers in regard to education and teen pregnancy prevention. The White House Council on Community Solutions, which I had been appointed to, also began around that time. We decided that rather than look for great programs to scale,

that we should find communities that actually had moved the needle on long-term problems. As we began our exploration, John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG's seminal article "Collective Impact" was published in *The Stanford Social Innovation Review* and greatly influenced our work. Our own research on community solutions which we published in our Council's 2012 *White Paper on Community Collaboratives* reinforced and built on the lessons they shared.

Today there are hundreds of collective impact efforts in America and abroad that are seeking to apply the basic 5-part structure that Kania and Kramer presented: (1) Common Agenda - common understand of the problem, and a shared vision for what it takes to make progress; (2) Shared Measurement - common data and evaluation tools to support planning, learning and progress; (3) Mutually Reinforcing Work - coordinating and synchronizing work across agencies to ensure accessible, comprehensive, and non-duplicative work; (4) Continuous Communication - coordinating dozens of organizations through regular meetings to coordinate, share, learn, and adjust their work; and (5) Backbone Support - an organization with dedicated staff capacity to convene, coordinate, and align the efforts of the collective. These ingredients together were an innovation that separated collective impact from traditional collaborations that were often limited side projects for organizations rather than the center of their work.

Building a Collective Impact Culture

Another ingredient often included with the five above is a charismatic, influential, and catalytic leader who can bring leaders to the table to establish a collective effort. This type of leadership may be important for launching an initiative, but it will take other types of leadership to build and sustain it. Authentic, adaptive, inclusive, and collaborative leadership styles are essential for these efforts to truly move the needle. At Public Allies, we spent 20 years building thousands of such leaders, and evolved 5 core values that help leaders at all levels work better together. When I view collective impact through the lens of those values, principles and practices emerge that will create a greater culture for enduing collective impact success.

1. Collaboration

"Collaboration is not a natural state in the nonprofit sector," a staff member at a backbone organization started, "Nonprofits have always been rewarded for differentiating themselves as better than others, especially in this increasingly competitive funding environment. One cannot turn a switch and expect these attitudes and behaviors to change instantly or former resentments to be forgiven. You have to pay attention to the dynamics, call out the elephants in the room, surface and resolve conflicts. It is a very human process." Another backbone leader shared, "After every meeting there is someone whose ego has been bruised and another who is frustrated by the process, and I spend a lot of time just keeping everyone at the table and committed to the process."

Collaboration doesn't just happen because we put people around a table and say: "Create a common agenda and strategy - go!" Effective collaboration is about building trust, and there must be an intentional effort to build it by getting members to own their own and understand others' motivations, interests, concerns, and leadership styles. There are many tools groups can use to build such trust. Trust building cannot be viewed as an event you do and get over with, but as an ongoing process that is integrated into the work and managed by the backbone facilitators.

Some believe that the absence of conflict means a collaborative is working well. In M. Scott Peck's classic community building guide, *A Different Drum*, he describes this as pseudo-community. To create an authentic community, you must surface and address conflicts and differences. That is why it is so important to intentionally and continually build trust and pay attention to team dynamics. If you don't, the conflict will

happen outside the room - people leaving the meeting and complaining about each other and the process. If you build trust, those differences will surface in the room and produce greater learning, innovation, and progress.

Key Recommendation: Collective impact efforts should ensure that team building is part of their ongoing agenda with a goal of creating transparent and trusting environments.

2. Inclusion

Just as collaboration is not natural to the social sector, inclusion sadly is not either. The structure of collective impact efforts often bakes exclusion into its core. Some efforts begin with a steering committee of influential business, government, and nonprofit leaders who are not representative of the communities they are serving, have little direct experience with the issues they are addressing, and don't even represent or reflect the people directly working on the issue. When the steering committee, backbone, and committee leadership lacks diversity, it sends a message that inclusion is not valued. A backbone leader from a large urban area shared: "If we avoid the issue of race, we end up with caucuses of people of color not trusting the process. It continues to break down trust if not dealt with directly." Communities are of course demographically different, so inclusion goals will vary by community, but who is at every table matters.

At Public Allies, we taught that diversity and inclusion are actions you are accountable for achieving, not ideals you hold internally. Collective impact efforts that are committed to diversity and inclusion need to address it at several levels. First, they need to bake it into the structure and ensure they have diversity at every level from the steering committee down, and not just a few token people but representation that fits the community. Second, they need to ensure that organizations with diverse leadership - large and small - have equal voice and participation, especially those at the grass roots. Numerous studies indicate that the larger a nonprofit or foundation, the less likely it is to have women or people of color in leadership, so we must be careful not to just have the biggest players at the table. Third, in our most racially diverse communities, groups need to apply a racial equity lens to their work not just by analyzing the disparities that may exist for the problem they are tackling, but by understanding how power and privilege may distort how they see the problems, solutions, expertise, and goals. This becomes easier when you have diversity at the table, because when you change who is at the table, the table itself (the norms, conversations, and perspectives) will change. Leaders demonstrate their commitment by holding themselves accountable for who is at their tables and making the conversations about inclusion and equity explicit.

Key Recommendation: Make sure you demonstrate inclusion at every level from who sits at the tables and sets the agenda to how you analyze and organize the work of the initiative.

3. Community Engagement

A backbone leader shared a story of a community engagement effort that ultimately failed: "We tried to get community to buy into our process, but realized afterward that we really should have been getting them to own it." Many collective impact efforts have begun to build in community engagement efforts, but often these are limited to "voice" - inviting limited input or feedback from community residents. Some of these efforts are important and worthwhile - one collective impact effort hosted community forums in low-income zip codes sharing result data with community members to find out if it matched their lived experience. Such efforts are a start, but true, enduring change must be owned by community.

A neighborhood-based nonprofit leader shared, "The (collective impact) initiative doesn't respect community elders and the other grass roots people who know the community and are trusted. They do the frontlines work every day." If we want to create needle-moving change, we must recognize that community residents -

family members, friends, neighbors - are on the front lines of producing outcomes and change informally every day. This includes residents themselves and small faith-based and community efforts often staffed by volunteers or neighbors. As John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann of [The Asset Based Community Development Institute](#) and Maurice Lim Miller of [Family Independence Initiative](#) have so well demonstrated, we need to view community members not as clients of service but as producers of service and partners in our outcome delivery systems. If we want better outcomes for families, we must engage those they trust most. This means that efforts must consider true community organizing that builds resident leadership and participation as a critical strategy for collective impact.

Key Recommendation: Move beyond voice to partnership, engage an organizing effort to recognize and support resident-led activities that produce and reinforce the outcomes you seek.

4. Continuous learning

At a Stanford Social Innovation Review roundtable, a backbone leader shared: "The beauty of a collaborative approach is that for the first time you finally air your dirty linen. You have to look at what has worked and what hasn't worked. You look at your vulnerabilities." This last word is one I've heard many times from backbone leaders - vulnerability. To truly collaborate, learn, and grow together we must be vulnerable. This again is not a normal practice in nonprofits that fight to get recognized for their singular excellence and impact. If we have been effective at collaboration, inclusion, and community engagement, we can build the trust necessary for this.

I often tell a story of a presentation I did on "worst practices" of leadership that included a list of "things I suck at." Before sharing it publicly, I shared it with my employees. This was really scary, but as everyone viewed the list – which included my aversion to conflict, my challenge with time management, and my shyness with strangers for example – they all began nodding. The truth is that the things we suck at aren't a secret. People are rarely surprised by the feedback they receive in 360 reviews, but we are scared to view the feedback because it will reveal that we aren't fooling anyone. If you are always late, everyone notices. If you dominate every discussion and don't listen, everyone notices. This also goes for organizations - our shortcomings and mistakes are hiding in plain site.

When we own our mistakes, shortcomings, and failures, we open up the possibility that people can talk about them with us. When we don't, they talk about them without us. We will be more effective if that feedback is shared in the rooms. In a data-driven process like collective impact, we must own that our efforts - good as they may be - have not been enough, and we must open our ideas, work, and results to others' feedback. That vulnerability opens the door to more honest innovation, learning, and progress.

Key Recommendation: We need to create an environment where leaders can own what hasn't worked as well as what has, and use data together for continuous improvement.

5. Integrity

"We have to hold everyone accountable to the same standard. Everyone has to own their responsibility and they'll be called out if they are not meeting it," a backbone staff member shared. Integrity at its core is about being accountable to those we work with and those we serve for what we say and do. In collective impact, it is important that such accountability is shared. This is a results-based process, and when the process has defined agreed upon results and a roadmap, everyone must be held accountable for their part of the initiative.

The process itself must also have integrity. It is important as we define a common agenda that we also define common culture - the values, expectations, and accountability everyone will share. Everyone should understand how decisions are made, what role and influence they have, what they are expected to do, and how success will be measured and shared. This also means that the steering committee and backbone team must be clear on how they will be accountable to the collective, and treat all members with the same respect whether they are a $25,000 grass roots organization or a $25 million service provider. The integrity of the process matters.

Key Recommendation: Collective impact efforts should be clear about roles, expectations, access, and accountability at every level, and hold everyone to the same standards of communication, participation, and results.

Conclusion

Collective impact as a field is new and growing rapidly. Much of the early research and work on collective impact has emphasized the structural, strategic, and measurable. To succeed long-term, there must be more attention paid to the cultural. Culture is created through shared values, expectations, and goals. These must be built intentionally, transparently, and evolve with the project. Collective impact efforts that focus on building an effective culture will achieve greater and more enduing change.

Good Things Happen When People and Organizations Work Collectively

Examples of Improvements and Results

Cincinnati
CINCINNATI Common Measures for "Soft Skills"

If someone asked, "What are your strengths?" many would give answers such as, "I'm a techno-wiz." or "I do math really well."

But what about the ability to work as part of a team, build relationships, compromise and adapt to changing situations? Many think these "soft skills," also known as social-emotional competencies, come naturally, but the reality is that these skills are formed during childhood. Studies have shown students who receive social and emotional instruction have improved academic achievement, and employers agree soft skills are an important part of an employee's performance.

United Way of Greater Cincinnati is leading a cross-sector collaborative partnership of United Way-funded youth-serving programs to measure and improve social-emotional competencies of children in the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region. In 2012, United Way youth-serving programs piloted a tool that would allow United Way and partners to have a unified language to express the importance and impact of these programs in the region.

The results of the first year of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-mini show the social-emotional skills of children served by participating programs improved over time. Even more, participating children developed better than the national standards. The pilot testing included over 4,100 children from kindergarten through eighth grade at 21 programs around the region.

"This first year has allowed us to gather baseline data. Upcoming years will give us the opportunity to examine the factors that influence the results, deepen the collective learning and continue to increase capacity to build the social-emotional skills of the children in our region," says Patricia Nagelkirk, community impact director, United Way of Greater Cincinnati.
The second year of data collection is already underway with more than 4,600 children being screened.

"Our end goal is to use this work to increase the social-emotional competencies of children and youth in our region. In the future, we hope that social-emotional measures are valued just as highly in our region as measures of academic success, physical health, and employment," Nagelkirk says.

The DESSA-mini was chosen because of its validity and reliability, ease of use, and low cost to providers. Youth-serving providers purchase the screen forms. United Way staff drives the work, collects and analyzes aggregate data, convenes providers for continuous improvement, and consults with the Devereux Center for Resilient Children to guide the work.

United Way agencies in the partnership are Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati, Boy Scouts of America Dan Beard Council, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati, Brighton Center, Inc., Center for Greater Neighborhoods of Covington, Central Clinic, Children, Inc., The Children's Home of Cincinnati Ohio, Cincinnati Early Learning Centers, Inc., Cincinnati Youth Collaborative, Families FORWARD, Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council, Girl Scouts of Western Ohio, Holly Hill Children's Services, Jewish Family Service of the Cincinnati Area, Life Point Solutions, Redwood, The Salvation Army of Greater Cincinnati, Santa Maria Community Services, Urban League of Greater Cincinnati, and YMCA of Greater Cincinnati.
Cincinnati United Way Youth Program Quality

The Cincinnati United Way has also been the backbone for a collective effort with the Cincinnati Public Schools, a local foundation and the area 21st Century program providers to implement the Youth Program Quality Intervention. Several of the organizations are the same ones involved in the outcomes work cited above so they will be poised to connect program quality data with outcomes data. They are in their third year of quality work and the providers have found it valuable enough to recommend that the United Way "require" it for future funded programs.

Franklin County, MA

The Communities that Care Coalition is a collective impact initiative reducing substance abuse and improving well-being for teens in 30 towns in rural Western Massachusetts.

- Alcohol use decreased 37%
- Cigarette smoking decreased 45%
- Binge drinking decreased 50%
- Marijuana use decreased about 31%

Additionally, CTCC mobilized over $5 million in new funding over its first decade to support strategic planning, marketing, and the implementation of activities to reduce substance abuse.

See full case study at http://www.fsg.org/tabid/191/ArticleId/977/Default.aspx?srpush=true

New York State Juvenile Justice: Progress Toward System Excellence

New York State's juvenile justice system has seen significant improvements in community safety, coordination, data-driven decision-making, and outcomes for youth ages seven to 15 in just a few short years as the result of collective visioning and action. Results clearly demonstrate progress toward improved outcomes for both youth and communities. Between 2010 and 2012, across the state:

- Juvenile arrests were down by 24%
- Juvenile admissions to state placement were down 28%

Between December 2010 and June 30, 2013 the number of youth in state custody declined by 45%. See full case study at http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/PDF/NYS_Juvenile_Justice_Progress_Report.pdf

Nashville (Embracing Emergence)

Changing Transportation for Youth

As the task force created its youth master plan (see how), two virtual strangers were assigned to the group's transportation subcommittee: Paul Ballard, CEO of Nashville's Metropolitan Transit Authority, and Fred Carr, chief operating officer for the Metro Nashville Public Schools. Before this, "the MTA and school district did not talk at all," says Danielle Mezera, director of the Mayor's Office of Children and Youth. But through the task force, Ballard says, "All these personal relationships were developed between the schools and the MTA. This synergy developed. We started saying, 'How can we do this better, how can we do that better?'"

The men found a solution in student ID cards; kids use them for such transactions as riding school buses, getting lunch and checking out books from public libraries. Ballard and Carr worked out a deal through which a chip can be imbedded in the cards and read by the MTA fare meters. Any student ID can now be an MTA bus pass.

The chip-imbedded cards were rolled out this fall to students in free- and reduced-price meal programs who attend specialty schools. The youths can use the cards to go anywhere, anytime. Metro Nashville Public Schools pays a flat monthly fee for each student rider. (Most users are in middle and high school.) The city and school bus systems have now coordinated their routes so that connections for student travels can be made easier.

Nashville Afterschool Zone Alliance (NAZA)

Middle School performance is a key indicator of high school success, and NAZA delivers results. For example, participants' reading skills have improved by as much as one and a half grade levels.

During the 2012/13 school year, NAZA served 859 middle school students, whose average daily participation rate was 74%, exceeding our 70% target. This is critical since research has established that benefits are linked to participation levels. High participation levels result from a targeted focus on continuously strengthening program quality. NAZA is implementing a Quality Improvement Plan developed in 2009.

Each year the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality evaluates NAZA's program assessment and improvement process.

The 2012-13 report found that:
- The quality of instruction improved substantially, for the NAZA network overall as well as for the AfterZones independently.
- The greatest improvement was in the area of youth engagement, which is crucial to attracting and retaining 10-14 year-olds.
- This focus on quality improvement is having lasting positive effects at sites despite staff turnover.
- Program staff effectively produced improvement in areas they targeted for change.
- Youth participants reported very positive program experiences, where they feel supported and empowered, where positive values and a commitment to learning is promoted, and where clear expectations are established.

During 2013 an evaluation model is being developed for NAZA and Metro Schools by the American Institutes for Research, thanks to support from the Forum for Youth Investment through its Expanded Learning Initiative. Reports will provide data to both Metro Schools and NAZA to support an ongoing evaluation of how well NAZA programs are:
- Implementing programming with fidelity to quality practices
- Increasing youth participation as a result of these high-quality practices
- Supporting outcomes related to school attendance, school behavior, and academics.

Results will be posted as they become available. This work includes on time data sharing between the public schools and OST providers through a secure process. See more at http://www.nashvillez.org/about/results

Fargo

Leveraging New Resources Easier

Youth Venture Alliance (YVA), supported by a consortium of funders, fulfills the backbone function for collective work in the Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN area. Youthprize is a funder out of Minneapolis. Youthprize recently had some funding, which included Americorps volunteers, available for the Moorhead area but no intermediary or collaborative group to utilize these resources. Youth Venture Alliance was able to access these funds since they were able to show and existing collaboration and get partners to table quickly. The work will be in north Moorhead. YVA negotiated with Boys and Girls Club (BGC), Youthworks (an OST program), a university, and city parks to coordinate services. YVA met with a member of the faith community and got church space free. Services in area with few and Y had stopped serving the area recently and BGC lost their space there. Now a professor wants to do STEM programming and Concordia University wants to do robotics-both were looking for places to share talent and now have one. YVA has gotten commitments from several restaurants to provide free food, including Panera. The focus will be on middle and high school students. This is a good example of the role of an intermediary and how collaboration can leverage resources.

Youth Involved in the Work of Community Change

Youth Venture Alliance (YVA) had a small grant in the summer of 2013. Through their planning efforts, a recent program landscape had been completed identifying youth programs across the community. The grant was used to hire 18 youth (ages 13-18 including 2 homeless youth) in a summer employment project. One of the youth's primary tasks was to verify the information from the program landscape and then create a web site with the program geomapped onto it. The youth did all of the geomapping under the guidance of a local consultant who was a demographer. That site can be seen at http://www.ventureyouthalliance.com/youth/map.html

Part of the reason for the map and web site was to increase access to programs by youth. Over that past, those youth have worked as consultants to an innovations center at North Dakota State University to design an app from a youth's perspective that will further increase access and awareness of what programs are available. The app is near release and being beta tested.

Collective Impact

By John Kania & Mark Kramer

Stanford Social Innovation Review
Winter 2011

Collective Impact

LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL CHANGE REQUIRES BROAD CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION, YET THE SOCIAL SECTOR REMAINS FOCUSED ON THE ISOLATED INTERVENTION OF INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS.

By John Kania & Mark Kramer

Illustration by Martin Jarrie

The scale and complexity of the U.S. public education system has thwarted attempted reforms for decades. Major funders, such as the Annenberg Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Pew Charitable Trusts have abandoned many of their efforts in frustration after acknowledging their lack of progress. Once the global leader—after World War II the United States had the highest high school graduation rate in the world—the country now ranks 18th among the top 24 industrialized nations, with more than 1 million secondary school students dropping out every year. The heroic efforts of countless teachers, administrators, and nonprofits, together with billions of dollars in charitable contributions, may have led to important improvements in individual schools and classrooms, yet system-wide progress has seemed virtually unobtainable.

Against these daunting odds, a remarkable exception seems to be emerging in Cincinnati. Strive, a nonprofit subsidiary of KnowledgeWorks, has brought together local leaders to tackle the student achievement crisis and improve education throughout greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. In the four years since the group was launched, Strive partners have improved student success in dozens of key areas across three large public school districts. Despite the recession and budget cuts, 34 of the 53 success indicators that Strive tracks have shown positive trends, including high school graduation rates, fourth-grade reading and math scores, and the number of preschool children prepared for kindergarten.

Why has Strive made progress when so many other efforts have failed? It is because a core group of community leaders decided to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement. More than 300 leaders of local organizations agreed to participate, including the heads of influential private and corporate foundations, city government officials, school district representatives, the presidents of eight universities and community colleges, and the executive directors of hundreds of education-related nonprofit and advocacy groups.

These leaders realized that fixing one point on the educational continuum—such as better after-school programs—wouldn't make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time. No single organization, however innovative or powerful, could accomplish this alone. Instead, their ambitious mission became to coordinate improvements at *every* stage of a young person's life, from "cradle to career."

Strive didn't try to create a new educational program or attempt to convince donors to spend more money. Instead, through a carefully structured process, Strive focused the entire educational community on a single set of goals, measured in the same way. Participating organizations are grouped into 15 different Student Success Networks (SSNs) by type of activity, such as early childhood education or tutoring. Each SSN has been meeting with coaches and facilitators for two hours every two weeks for the past three years, developing shared performance indicators, discussing their progress, and most important, learning from each other and aligning their efforts to support each other.

Strive, both the organization and the process it helps facilitate, is an example of *collective impact*, the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most

collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants. (See "Types of Collaborations" on page 39.)

Although rare, other successful examples of collective impact are addressing social issues that, like education, require many different players to change their behavior in order to solve a complex problem. In 1993, Marjorie Mayfield Jackson helped found the Elizabeth River Project with a mission of cleaning up the Elizabeth River in southeastern Virginia, which for decades had been a dumping ground for industrial waste. They engaged more than 100 stakeholders, including the city governments of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach, Va., the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Navy, and dozens of local businesses, schools, community groups, environmental organizations, and universities, in developing an 18-point plan to restore the watershed. Fifteen years later, more than 1,000 acres of watershed land have been conserved or restored, pollution has been reduced by more than 215 million pounds, concentrations of the most severe carcinogen have been cut sixfold, and water quality has significantly improved. Much remains to be done before the river is fully restored, but already 27 species of fish and oysters are thriving in the restored wetlands, and bald eagles have returned to nest on the shores.

Or consider Shape up Somerville, a citywide effort to reduce and prevent childhood obesity in elementary school children in Somerville, Mass. Led by Christina Economos, an associate professor at Tufts University's Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, the program engaged government officials, educators, businesses, nonprofits, and citizens in collectively defining wellness and weight gain prevention practices. Schools agreed to offer healthier foods, teach nutrition, and promote physical activity. Local restaurants received a certification if they served low-fat, high nutritional food. The city organized a farmers' market and provided healthy lifestyle incentives such as reduced-price gym memberships for city employees. Even sidewalks were modified and crosswalks repainted to encourage more children to walk to school. The result was a statistically significant decrease in body mass index among the community's young children between 2002 and 2005.

Even companies are beginning to explore collective impact to tackle social problems. Mars, a manufacturer of chocolate brands such as M&M's, Snickers, and Dove, is working with NGOs, local governments, and even direct competitors to improve the lives of more than 500,000 impoverished cocoa farmers in Cote d'Ivoire, where Mars sources a large portion of its cocoa. Research suggests

that better farming practices and improved plant stocks could triple the yield per hectare, dramatically increasing farmer incomes and improving the sustainability of Mars's supply chain. To accomplish this, Mars must enlist the coordinated efforts of multiple organizations: the Cote d'Ivoire government needs to provide more agricultural extension workers, the World Bank needs to finance new roads, and bilateral donors need to support NGOs in improving health care, nutrition, and education in cocoa growing communities. And Mars must find ways to work with its direct competitors on pre-competitive issues to reach farmers outside its supply chain.

These varied examples all have a common theme: that large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is still limited, but these examples suggest that substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact. It doesn't happen often, not because it is impossible, but because it is so rarely attempted. Funders and nonprofits alike overlook the potential for collective impact because they are used to focusing on independent action as the primary vehicle for social change.

ISOLATED IMPACT

Most funders, faced with the task of choosing a few grantees from many applicants, try to ascertain which organizations make the greatest contribution toward solving a social problem. Grantees, in turn, compete to be chosen by emphasizing how their individual activities produce the greatest effect. Each organization is judged on its own potential to achieve impact, independent of the numerous other organizations that may also influence the issue. And when a grantee is asked to evaluate the impact of its work, every attempt is made to isolate that grantee's individual influence from all other variables.

In short, the nonprofit sector most frequently operates using an approach that we call *isolated impact*. It is an approach oriented toward finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely. Funders search for more effective interventions as if there were a cure for failing schools that only needs to be discovered, in the way that medical cures are discovered in laboratories. As a result of this process, nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other and exponentially increasing the perceived resources required to make meaningful progress. Recent trends have only reinforced this perspective. The growing interest in venture philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, for example, has greatly benefited the social sector by identifying and accelerating the growth of many high-performing nonprofits, yet it has also accentuated an emphasis on scaling up a few select organizations as the key to social progress.

Despite the dominance of this approach, there is scant evidence that isolated initiatives are the best way to solve many social problems in today's complex and interdependent world. No single organization is responsible for any major social problem, nor can any single

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TYPES OF COLLABORATIONS

Organizations have attempted to solve social problems by collaboration for decades without producing many results. The vast majority of these efforts lack the elements of success that enable collective impact initiatives to achieve a sustained alignment of efforts.

Funder Collaboratives are groups of funders interested in supporting the same issue who pool their resources. Generally, participants do not adopt an overarching evidence-based plan of action or a shared measurement system, nor do they engage in differentiated activities beyond check writing or engage stakeholders from other sectors.

Public-Private Partnerships are partnerships formed between government and private sector organizations to deliver specific services or benefits. They are often targeted narrowly, such as developing a particular drug to fight a single disease, and usually don't engage the full set of stakeholders that affect the issue, such as the potential drug's distribution system.

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives are voluntary activities by stakeholders from different sectors around a common theme. Typically, these initiatives lack any shared measurement of impact and the supporting infrastructure to forge any true alignment of efforts or accountability for results.

Social Sector Networks are groups of individuals or organizations fluidly connected through purposeful relationships, whether formal or informal. Collaboration is generally ad hoc, and most often the emphasis is placed on information sharing and targeted short-term actions, rather than a sustained and structured initiative.

Collective Impact Initiatives are long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and are staffed by an independent backbone organization.

organization cure it. In the field of education, even the most highly respected nonprofits—such as the Harlem Children's Zone, Teach for America, and the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)—have taken decades to reach tens of thousands of children, a remarkable achievement that deserves praise, but one that is three orders of magnitude short of the tens of millions of U.S. children that need help.

The problem with relying on the isolated impact of individual organizations is further compounded by the isolation of the nonprofit sector. Social problems arise from the interplay of governmental and commercial activities, not only from the behavior of social sector organizations. As a result, complex problems can be solved only by cross-sector coalitions that engage those outside the nonprofit sector.

We don't want to imply that all social problems require collective impact. In fact, some problems are best solved by individual organizations. In "Leading Boldly," an article we wrote with Ron Heifetz for the winter 2004 issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, we described the difference between *technical problems* and *adaptive problems*. Some social problems are technical in that the problem is well defined, the answer is known in advance, and one or a few organizations have the ability to implement the solution. Examples include funding college scholarships, building a hospital, or installing inventory controls in a food bank. Adaptive problems, by contrast, are complex, the answer is not known, and even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change. Reforming public education, restoring wetland environments, and improving community health are all adaptive problems. In these cases, reaching an effective solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution.

Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public-private partnerships. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of nonprofit management organizations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed.

THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE SUCCESS

Our research shows that successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

Common Agenda | Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Take a close look at any group of funders and nonprofits that believe they are working on the same social issue, and you quickly find that it is often not the same issue at all. Each organization often has a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate goal. These differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives, yet these differences splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field as a whole. Collective impact requires that these differences be discussed and resolved. Every participant need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem. In fact, disagreements continue to divide participants in all of our examples of collective impact. All participants must agree, however, on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole. The Elizabeth River Project, for example, had to find common ground among the different objectives of corporations, governments, community groups, and local citizens in order to establish workable cross-sector initiatives.

Funders can play an important role in getting organizations to act in concert. In the case of Strive, rather than fueling hundreds of strategies and nonprofits, many funders have aligned to support Strive's central goals. The Greater Cincinnati Foundation realigned its education goals to be more compatible with Strive, adopting Strive's annual report card as the foundation's own measures for progress in education. Every time an organization applied to Duke Energy for a grant, Duke asked, "Are you part of the [Strive] network?" And when a new funder, the Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile Jr./U.S. Bank Foundation, expressed interest in education, they were encouraged by virtually every major education leader in Cincinnati to join Strive if they wanted to have an impact in local education.[1]

Shared Measurement Systems | Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

It may seem impossible to evaluate hundreds of different organizations on the same set of measures. Yet recent advances in Web-based technologies have enabled common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes. These systems increase efficiency and reduce cost. They can also improve the quality and credibility of the data collected, increase effectiveness by enabling grantees to learn from each other's performance, and document the progress of the field as a whole.[2]

All of the preschool programs in Strive, for example, have agreed to measure their results on the same criteria and use only evidence-based decision making. Each type of activity requires a different set of measures, but all organizations engaged in the same type of activity report on the same measures. Looking at results across multiple organizations enables the participants to spot patterns, find solutions, and implement them rapidly. The preschool programs discovered that children regress during the summer break before kindergarten. By launching an innovative "summer bridge" session, a technique more often used in middle school, and implementing it simultaneously in all preschool programs, they increased the average kindergarten readiness scores throughout the region by an average of 10 percent in a single year.[3]

Mutually Reinforcing Activities | Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder's efforts must fit into an overarching plan if their combined efforts are to succeed. The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations.

All participants in the Elizabeth River Project, for example, agreed on the 18-point watershed restoration plan, but each is playing a different role based on its particular capabilities. One group of organizations works on creating grassroots support and engagement among citizens, a second provides peer review and recruitment for industrial participants who voluntarily reduce pollution, and a third coordinates and reviews scientific research.

The 15 SSNs in Strive each undertake different types of activities at different stages of the educational continuum. Strive does not prescribe what practices each of the 300 participating organizations should pursue. Each organization and network is free to chart its own course consistent with the common agenda, and informed by the shared measurement of results.

Continuous Communication | Developing trust among nonprofits, corporations, and government agencies is a monumental challenge. Participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Even the process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to developing shared measurement systems. All the collective impact initiatives we have studied held monthly or even biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations' CEO-level leaders. Skipping meetings or sending lower-level delegates was not acceptable. Most of the meetings were supported by external facilitators and followed a structured agenda.

The Strive networks, for example, have been meeting regularly for more than three years. Communication happens between meetings too: Strive uses Web-based tools, such as Google Groups, to keep communication flowing among and within the networks. At first, many of the leaders showed up because they hoped that their participation would bring their organizations additional funding, but they soon learned that was not the meetings' purpose. What they discovered instead were the rewards of learning and solving problems together with others who shared their same deep knowledge and passion about the issue.

Backbone Support Organizations | Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. Strive has simplified the initial staffing requirements for a backbone organization to three roles: project manager, data manager, and facilitator.

Collective impact also requires a highly structured process that leads to effective decision making. In the case of Strive, staff worked with General Electric (GE) to adapt for the social sector the Six Sigma process that GE uses for its own continuous quality improvement. The Strive Six Sigma process includes training, tools, and resources that each SSN uses to define its common agenda, shared measures, and plan of action, supported by Strive facilitators to guide the process.

In the best of circumstances, these backbone organizations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders.

FUNDING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Creating a successful collective impact initiative requires a significant financial investment: the time participating organizations must dedicate to the work, the development and monitoring of shared measurement systems, and the staff of the backbone organization needed to lead and support the initiative's ongoing work.

As successful as Strive has been, it has struggled to raise money, confronting funders' reluctance to pay for infrastructure and preference for short-term solutions. Collective impact requires instead that funders support a long-term process of social change without identifying any particular solution in advance. They must be willing to let grantees steer the work and have the patience to stay with an initiative for years, recognizing that social change can come from the gradual improvement of an entire system over time, not just from a single breakthrough by an individual organization.

This requires a fundamental change in how funders see their role, from funding organizations to leading a long-term process of social change. It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single nonprofit or to build that organization's capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive.

This is a shift that we foreshadowed in both "Leading Boldly" and our more recent article, "Catalytic Philanthropy," in the fall 2009 issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. In the former, we suggested that the most powerful role for funders to play in addressing adaptive problems is to focus attention on the issue and help to create a process that mobilizes the organizations involved to find a solution themselves. In "Catalytic Philanthropy," we wrote: "Mobilizing and coordinating stakeholders is far messier and slower work than funding a compelling grant request from a single organization. Systemic change, however, ultimately depends on a sustained campaign to increase the capacity and coordination of an entire field." We recommended that funders who want to create large-scale change follow four practices: take responsibility for assembling the elements of a solution; create a movement for change; include solutions from outside the nonprofit sector; and use actionable knowledge to influence behavior and improve performance.

These same four principles are embodied in collective impact initiatives. The organizers of Strive abandoned the conventional approach of funding specific programs at education nonprofits and took responsibility for advancing education reform themselves. They built a movement, engaging hundreds of organizations in a drive toward shared goals. They used tools outside the nonprofit sector, adapting GE's Six Sigma planning process for the social sector. And through the community report card and the biweekly meetings of the SSNs they created actionable knowledge that motivated the community and improved performance among the participants.

Funding collective impact initiatives costs money, but it can be a highly leveraged investment. A backbone organization with a modest annual budget can support a collective impact initiative of several hundred organizations, magnifying the impact of millions or even billions of dollars in existing funding. Strive, for example, has a $1.5 million annual budget but is coordinating the efforts and increasing the effectiveness of organizations with combined budgets of $7 billion. The social sector, however, has not yet changed its funding practices to enable the shift to collective impact. Until funders are willing to embrace this new approach and invest sufficient resources in the necessary facilitation, coordination, and measurement that enable organizations to work in concert, the requisite infrastructure will not evolve.

FUTURE SHOCK

What might social change look like if funders, nonprofits, government officials, civic leaders, and business executives embraced collective impact? Recent events at Strive provide an exciting indication of what might be possible.

Strive has begun to codify what it has learned so that other communities can achieve collective impact more rapidly. The organization is working with nine other communities to establish similar cradle to career initiatives.[4] Importantly, although Strive is broadening its impact to a national level, the organization is not scaling up its own operations by opening branches in other cities. Instead, Strive is promulgating a flexible process for change, offering each community a set of tools for collective impact, drawn from Strive's experience but adaptable to the community's own needs and resources. As a result, the new communities take true ownership of their own collective impact initiatives, but they don't need to start the process from scratch. Activities such as developing a collective educational reform mission and vision or creating specific community-level educational indicators are expedited through the use of Strive materials and assistance from Strive staff. Processes that took Strive several years to develop are being adapted and modified by other communities in significantly less time.

These nine communities plus Cincinnati have formed a community of practice in which representatives from each effort connect regularly to share what they are learning. Because of the number and diversity of the communities, Strive and its partners can quickly determine what processes are universal and which require adaptation to a local context. As learning accumulates, Strive staff will incorporate new findings into an Internet-based knowledge portal that will be available to any community wishing to create a collective impact initiative based on Strive's model.

This exciting evolution of the Strive collective impact initiative is far removed from the isolated impact approach that now dominates the social sector and that inhibits any major effort at comprehensive, large-scale change. If successful, it presages the spread of a new approach that will enable us to solve today's most serious social problems with the resources we already have at our disposal. It would be a shock to the system. But it's a form of shock therapy that's badly needed. ∎

Notes

1 Interview with Kathy Merchant, CEO of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, April 10, 2010.

2 See Mark Kramer, Marcie Parkhurst, and Lalitha Vaidyanathan, *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*, FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2009.

3 "Successful Starts," United Way of Greater Cincinnati, second edition, fall 2009.

4 Indianapolis, Houston, Richmond, Va., and Hayward, Calif., are the first four communities to implement Strive's process for educational reform. Portland, Ore., Fresno, Calif., Mesa, Ariz., Albuquerque, and Memphis are just beginning their efforts.