Community Engagement

Component 1

Version 1
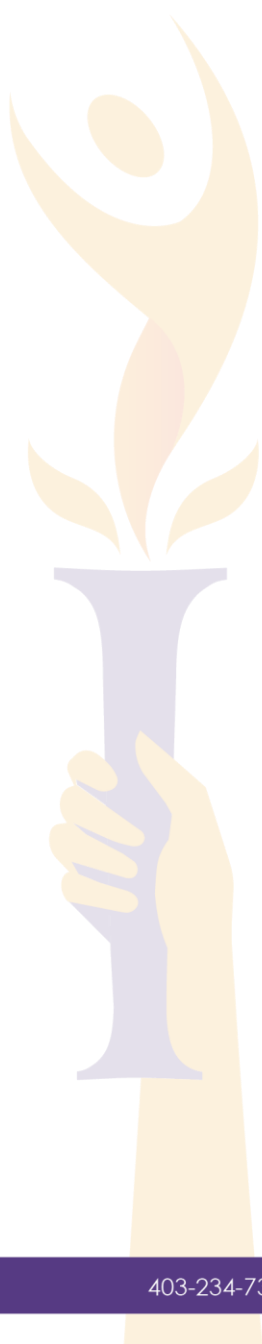
Guide

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COLLECTIVE IMPACT OVERVIEW

Collective impact (sometimes collaborative governance or collective governance) is an innovative model of governance that is solutions-oriented, with a focus on what is valuable for the community. The **collective impact model** believes that no single government entity, policy, or organization can deal with deeply entrenched social problems alone. The concept moves beyond the traditional 'partnership' or 'collaboration' in that it calls for long-lasting commitment between various organizations all working towards a common goal.

First defined by John Kania and Mark Kramer in 2011, the basic model consists of five conditions and three pre-conditions. When applied in a comprehensive way, this approach has demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in addressing a broad range of issues. Collective impact has garnered rapid uptake and is an evolving body of practice that is becoming more effective as practitioners share their learning, insights, and experiences.

To maintain a strong foundation and truly "move the needle" in your community, efforts should strive towards these **five adapted conditions of collective impact**:

- A common understanding of the purpose, problem, and a shared vision for change
- Individuals, organizations, systems, and communities reaching their full potential
- Shared outcomes, accountability and means of sharing data
- Effective coordination, communication, and credibility
- Supporting the vision, aligned activities, and operations

IN THIS COMPONENT

In this component, we will take a deeper dive into the building blocks of community engagement and the early conversations needed to move your initiative forward. This guidebook and its accompanying webinar (titled Community Engagement) will explore these concepts:

- The role and importance of community engagement
- Methods & levels of community engagement
- The role of equity in community engagement
- Challenges in community engagement
- Assessing readiness
- Engagement strategies

We acknowledge that each of you holds various levels of knowledge, years of experience, and understanding of collective impact, collaboration, and community engagement. The information within this guide is a wide-cast net. We ask you to take the opportunity to lean in and learn something new. Perhaps you will learn a new approach or explore ways that you can support those within your network who are stepping into the arena for the first time. If you are new to collective impact, we hope you take key learnings with you as you embark on your community work and use them to build a strong initiative.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement builds deeper, stronger, and more trusting relationships between public organizations and communities. It is most effective when it centers on collaborating with community members to incorporate their voices and preferences into a project. "It is a way of communication, decision making, and governance that gives community members the power to own the change they want to see." (Bergstrom, Rose, Olinger & Holley, 2012 p. 2)

> "Simply put, community engagement seeks to engage the community to achieve sustainable outcomes, equitable decision-making processes, and deepen relationships and trust between government organizations and communities." (Hussey, 2020 pg. 6)

"The Spark Report - Pre-Community Engagement Setting the Stage for Authentic Community Engagement" (2019) states "In community engagement work, the process is just as important as outcomes." This is a crucial piece of guidance, as it is tempting to jump ahead in the process. But doing so will lead to failure in moving the needle on the complex social problem you are trying to address.

Importance of Community Engagement

Community Engagement is a foundational practice central to the work of community change. It increases the visibility and understanding of issues as well as empowers communities' voices to be heard where it affects their lives, towns, cities, and neighborhoods. It informs and educates communities on pressing social issues and gives community members the opportunity to influence policies that impact their well-being. Community engagement creates opportunities for community members to contribute to the decision-making process and allows for the collaborative design and delivery of services.

Community engagement accomplishes the following:

- **Builds and sustains cohesive communities:** Community engagement is primarily a part of dialogue where organizations and communities can make decisions to create social capital.

- **Leads to improved outcomes:** Community engagement allows government organizations and public decision-making entities to seek out the aspirations, concerns, and values of communities. The community in turn shares its aspirations, concerns, and values with governing entities. When incorporated into decision-making processes, public decision-makers are better informed and better able to meet community needs.

- **Ensures access and community empowerment:** Inclusive community engagement is critical to community wellbeing. Community engagement ensures that community members have access to valued social settings and activities. It also ensures community members feel that they can contribute meaningfully to those activities and develop functional capabilities that enable them to participate fully. By including diverse voices who are usually marginalized or overlooked, they

can be actively empowered within their community to participate in decision-making that affects their everyday lives.

- **Influences local governments to promote sustainable decisions**: Community engagement helps governments improve the efficiency, legitimacy, and transparency of their decision-making. Embracing and encouraging participation enables policymakers to make more informed decisions. They can engage with and carefully map out the needs, opinions, as well as visions of local communities on issues that matter to them.

- **Drives social transformation**: With an emphasis on collaboration and the promise of influence on decision-making, community engagement drives social transformation. It promotes advocacy by raising awareness and allowing locally informed voices to be heard. Advocacy campaigns are at their most effective when local governments and citizens can mobilize on an issue that impacts everyday lives. It is in the local arena that community members can have their most direct impact on policy

- **Critical to deepening community decision making:** Decisions must be made with those who have the expertise (whether it is content or context experts). When decision-makers better understand their community, their decisions for the community have greater outcomes. They meet the needs and people where they are at.

Engaged citizens are an untapped resource for solving complex social issues and a tremendous source of ingenuity. It is important that engagement processes authentically engage participants. Authentic community engagement requires a long-term commitment to relationship-building and an investment of adequate resources so that engagement becomes more than a "one-off" event that is budgeted for and occurs only at the start of an initiative.

"To fully harness the "extraordinary power of ordinary people," community engagement should be a pillar within every effective community change strategy. The need to continually engage throughout a change effort is part of what contributes to the ripple effect of community change. The Harwood Institute encourages communities committed to change with the importance of "making sure they are continually inviting new individuals and groups to join with them…to reach beyond the usual players in town and even the newer ones that are now engaged." (Harwood, 2015, p. 29) Community engagement is a practice that does take work and, for organizations and individuals who embrace it as part of how they operate, it also requires a recognition that engagement work is often "messy and unpredictable."" (Cheuy, 2018 p. 4)

Role of Community

An assumption of collective impact is that if the appropriate individuals, leaders, and specialists are present with sufficient data that can be analyzed then a "shared agenda" can be developed that will garner support from the community. This may be effective in most projects and communities in the near term, but it won't be able to last over time. The effectiveness of collective impact depends on the greater community's genuine and authentic ownership. Community ownership begins with giving equal weight

to public information and expert knowledge. Public knowledge can only be obtained by truly including the community.

"It is simply not possible to impose a strategy on a community, nor is it possible for a group to impose its own will. Rather, the truth is that it is necessary to work with the community." (Harwood, 2014 para. 3)

Community engagement and community involvement are different. They are both important but the difference is in the act of reciprocity or mutual benefit.

- **Community engagement** can be defined as a mutually beneficial interaction that results in participants feeling valued for their unique contributions

- **Community involvement** is meaningful, consistent participation in activities that support and improve social well-being

A community that takes responsibility for its own development comes together to find solutions, celebrate successes as well as learn from the challenges and failures. A community that does this will improve the lives of its citizens, establish trust, deepen connection, and simply care for each other. When we bring people together who hold different perspectives, insights, experiences and knowledge, we can find the best solutions to complex social issues.

METHODS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The three methods of community engagement are:

1. **Communication**

   Communication is the common thread that ties together all types of community engagement. It is not possible to consult with or involve the public in decision-making processes unless they are first adequately informed about the matter at hand. Communication enables members of the public to gain an understanding of the services, issues, and/or prospective development in question.

   The goal is to cast a wide net to reach as many citizens as possible and provide as much information as possible, particularly those who are most likely to be affected by the social issues your initiative is addressing.

2. **Consultation**

   Consultation is the process by which people, organizations, or governments seek the opinions, criticisms, and suggestions of the community. Common consultation focuses on bringing information from the public into the internal decision-making processes of the organization leading the consultation process. Common consultation processes include focus groups, public meetings without voting, public hearings, public input sessions during council meetings, surveys, workshops, etc.

Consultation provides the means to test assumptions, invite new ideas, and give a broader view of an issue more than planning and policy teams might otherwise be able to offer. Consultation is also effective in improving the accountability of officials to the public while encouraging public ownership over the direction of municipal activities and developments that involve or impact them. This is because consultation builds public understanding and encourages public ownership of policies.

3. **Participation in decision-making**

Public participation in decision-making is an important method of engagement that can lead to better decisions and outcomes. Some common examples of public participation include polling, focus groups, surveys, and advisory committees. Involving the public in decision-making serves to legitimize the final decision, which can improve public confidence and support for the decisions that are made. It also leads to mutual accountability, awareness, and understanding among and between decision-makers and the public. Public participation fosters important principles such as freedom of expression by providing individuals space for sharing their ideas on matters that concern their lives.

Levels of Community Engagement

There are varying levels of engagement, and each level generates different responses from those who are engaged. Regardless of which level of engagement you are embarking on, it is important that you consider the purpose of your engagement and what you are hoping to achieve.

You will want to explore the following questions:

- Why are we engaging the community?
  - To share information with the community or to get feedback and learn from the community as well?
- What are we hoping to achieve through engaging the community?
- Which parts of the issue are open for discussion, and which are not?

Below is our adaptation of the "Levels of Community Engagement" as presented through Tamarack Institute, Foundations of Community Engagement:

Participation		Engagement		Partnership
Level 1 INFORMING **What is our intent?**	**Level 2 CONSULTING** **Where are we now?**	**Level 3 INVOLVING** **Where do we need to be?**	**Level 4 COLLABORATING** **What's necessary to achieve the change we seek?**	**Level 5 EMPOWERING**
Providing balanced and objective information about new programs, services, and about the reasons for choosing them.	Inviting feedback on alternatives and decisions related to new programs or services.	Working with community members to ensure that their aspirations and concerns are considered at every stage of planning and decision-making.	Enabling community members to participate in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programs and services. Community members actively produce outcomes.	Giving community members sole decision-making authority over new programs or services, and leading work to implement solutions. Professionals only serve in consultive and supportive roles.
We will keep you informed.	We will listen to your input and feedback as it will influence decisions.	We will ensure our input and feedback are directly reflected in alternatives and let you know how your involvement influenced decisions. We will engage with you as partners to implement solutions	We will co-create and co-produce solutions with you. You will be true partners in making and implementing decisions for the community. Your advice and recommendations will be incorporated as much as possible.	We will support your decisions and work to implement solutions.
Fact sheets, newsletters, websites, and open houses.	Surveys, focus groups, community meetings, and forums.	Community organizing, leadership, development, and workshops.	Advisory boards, seats on governing boards, engaging, and funding as partners.	Support full governance, leadership, and partnerships.
"Here is what is happening"	*"Here are some options, what do you think"*	*"Here is the problem, what ideas do you have"*	*"Let's work together to solve this problem"*	*"You care about this issue and are leading an initiative; how can we support you?"*

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Effective community engagement is a critical factor in the long-term success of collective impact initiatives. CoCreative's 5 Levels of Engagement (2021 p. 4) states that all 5 levels of engagement must share all of these:

- Shared **Information**: We all have information about what's going on
- Shared **Problem**: We share the belief that something needs to change
- Shared **Intent**: We share the intent to do something about it
- Shared **Commitment**: We share a collective commitment to the goals, outcomes, one another, and the greater purpose
- Shared **Analysis**: We've studied the issue and share the same hypotheses
- Shared **Shifts**: We've clearly identified the strategic shifts or leverage points
- Shared **Plan**: We share an overall plan of action
- Shared **Role Clarity**: We each know our part in that plan
- Shared **Solutions**: We are all advancing the same set of solutions and interventions, though we might be working on different parts
- Shared **Value**: We can all see how each party will benefit from the change
- Shared **Priorities**: We all know what needs to happen first
- Shared **Criteria**: We share evaluation criteria and data to evaluate progress
- Shared **Vision**: We share a big vision of what we're creating together

ACTIVITY: ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

Your initiatives will require an appropriate level of community engagement. Ask yourself the following questions to consider what level of engagement is needed from the community.

- Where are your community engagement efforts now on the spectrum above? Where do you aspire to be?
- For where you aspire to be, what steps will you need to take to pursue that level of engagement?
- What power or control do you have to give up? What expectations will you need to communicate and fulfill for community members?

ACTIVITY: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR ENGAGEMENT?

Below are some key questions with prompts to guide and direct you before and during your engagement process. Reference the Level of Community Engagement chart above to determine the level and methods of engagement that best suit the type of work you are doing.

It is important to be clear, direct, and transparent about your purpose for engaging the community. If you see engagement as something nice to do or just want to check a box, your engagement will fail and likely lead to greater distrust and conflict. If you sincerely see engagement as necessary to achieve better results, then proceed.

- Why are you doing community engagement?
- What do you hope to achieve?

- What is your main purpose for involving community members?

- How do you think engagement might advance those results? What roles do you see community members playing to advance those results?

- When identifying partners to achieve your desired results for your initiative, start local. First, you should assess the following:
  a) Are there other programs or organizations in the specific community providing similar services already?
  b) Are there organizations or programs that have strong community trust that could expand programming to include the social issue you are wishing to address in your initiative?
  c) Do community residents and partners see the new program or imported group as an asset they welcome?

Whether the best strategy turns out to be building the capacity of existing providers, bringing in a new provider, or both, doing the work to make sure it is trusted, and welcome will set it up for greater success. Use the chart below to take stock of what is currently in your community and how you will engage those entities in your initiative. You can use a table like the one below to organize your thoughts.

	List Organizations	How will you partner with them
Organizations that currently work on your result with intended beneficiaries		
Organizations that serve the specific geographic neighbourhoods		
Organizations most trusted by intended beneficiaries. (How do you know?)		

- What current relationships do you or others have in the community that you can leverage?

- Consider the various layers of people who need to be involved. How might you identify who needs to help champion the work?

- How do community members already contribute to your impact/result outside of any formal initiative/project?

For additional information please reference Building the Architecture Resources.

EQUITY IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

"Equity is the fair distribution of opportunities, power, and resources to meet the needs of all people regardless of age, ability, gender, or background" ("Healthy Housing", 2019 p. 2). Importantly, all three contribute to society becoming more just.

To ensure we have a common understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion we have defined them as:

- **Diversity:** Engaging people with different backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and recognizing the differences as assets to learning and innovation
- **Equity:** Recognizing that everyone does not start at the same place, so some people will need different resources or support to achieve the same outcome. The goal is to eliminate disparities and level the playing field
- **Inclusion:** Authentic and empowered participation; a true sense of belonging

One of the main reasons we need equity at our tables is so that neighbourhoods and individuals with contextual or experiential knowledge can enlighten our decision-making. Privilege, bias, and a lack of community involvement can lead to blind spots or skew the lens through which we evaluate and make decisions.

Understanding the history of racism and discrimination is crucial in understanding the root causes of disparities we face today. It is also necessary to comprehend how our current systems, institutions, and behaviors maintain disparities in the present. "An equity analysis asks community engaged participants to acknowledge that in every interaction there are power imbalances mediated by these structural forces. These power imbalances create barriers to full participation" (McKnight, Grise, Secord, Vengris, Churchill, Piskuric, Balcom, Dej & Carter, 2021).

You can make sure that your collective impact effort represents the views and goals of your community by intentionally and thoughtfully bringing together a variety of stakeholders throughout the community engagement process. Without their participation, you risk overlooking potential causes at the root of the problem and local solutions that might not otherwise be found in your general data collection or in a literature review.

ACTIVITY: MAPPING YOUR ENGAGEMENT STAKEHOLDERS

Understanding who is sitting at your table or on your committee can help you identify what strengths or gaps you have in terms of experience and context expertise. Map those you have engaged using the quadrants outlined in figure 1.

Figure 1: *7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization*
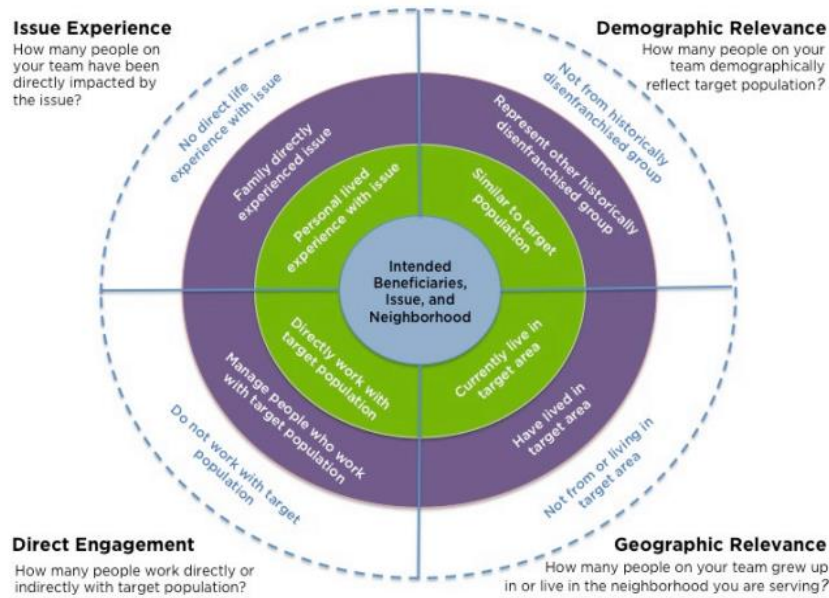
[1] *7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014 is a great resource for this work.

(Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015)

You can use a table like the one below to organize your stakeholders into those who have content experience, context experience or limited experience.

	Content Experience	Context Experience	Limited Experience
Demographic Background			
Geographic Relevance			
Direct Engagement			
Issue Experience			

Once you've mapped your engagement stakeholders, answer the following questions:

- Do you feel you have the right mix of participants involved to understand the population, issue, and neighbourhoods you wish to help?
- What gaps are at your tables? What steps could you take to correct that?

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CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Challenges and obstacles are an inevitable part of community engagement and should be considered in the development of your community engagement plan. The Tamarack Institute has highlighted common challenges that should be anticipated and planned for:

- **Lack of Representation**: The reality that not all members of a community can or choose to engage in the same way often affects the representation of the input you'll receive throughout your project. Offer a variety of different accessible engagement activities both in-person and online, in different locations and at different times of the day.

- **Lack of Equity**: Communities are diverse. Special care must be taken to ensure that all voices and groups are engaged and not marginalized or tokenized. Include people with diverse backgrounds, disabilities, youth, non-English speaking backgrounds, and Indigenous people.

- **High Expectations**: Be sure to establish the scope of your engagement upfront and be clear about what aspects of an issue are open to public influence.

- **Negative Past Experiences**: Everyone has negative past experiences taking part in addressing community issues, which can impede future projects. Conducting your community engagement initiative with transparency, openness, and consistently communicating with participants about how their feedback is assisting will help to build trust throughout the project.

- **Consultation and Volunteer Fatigue** (asking too much of community members): Avoid making community actions too dependent on just a few voices. Rather, build a platform to consider a wide range of community members in a variety of forums.

- **Not Valuing Context Experts**: Understanding the value of involving both content (knowledge of theory and practice) and context (knowledge from lived experience) experts in tackling community issues cannot be understated. Context experts play a meaningful role in your engagement project. Power dynamics should be considered when planning your engagement activities to ensure all voices are given a platform to contribute.

- **Engagement as a Checkbox**: Community engagement is only successful when the end justifies the means. If engagement is conducted in a way that is tokenistic or fails to truly value the role the community can play in influencing decision-making, it will fail to create positive change and will run the risk of causing further damage within the affected community. Do not view community engagement as a checkbox. Rather, view community engagement as leverage regarding the gifts and assets that exist in a community to create positive, relevant, and sustainable outcomes for the betterment of all.

- **Potential Conflict**: All community engagement efforts will encounter conflict to some degree at some point. The key is to manage conflict in ways that foster trust and build relationships. Try to uncover the root issue. Opposition is often easier to address when we understand what the real resistance is all about.

- **Directional Shifts**: Community engagement is 'messy'. The process may not play out exactly as you planned. Be mindful of other commitments made at the outset of your engagement. If you have committed to collaborating, be sure to remain open to compromise on the plan you've laid out.

- **Addressing Capacity when Resources are Scarce**: Capacity will always be a barrier when it comes to planning your engagement, but don't let that deter you. Being conscious of capacity and resourcing pushes us to plan more strategically and intentionally. It requires us to target the right audience, meet people where they are and garner meaningful input from those who are most affected by the issue being addressed. Being honest, authentic, and responsive in your approach is more important than the number of engagement activities you conduct.

- **Dissatisfaction with Engagement Techniques Selected**: When selecting your engagement techniques; it is important to use a variety of approaches to reach community members in a medium and environment they feel comfortable and empowered within. For some, traditional methods such as public meetings, advertising, and posting announcements may not be adequate in engaging the community to address the complex social issue before us. Others may be dissatisfied when online engagement is too heavily relied upon as it may not be accessible to all individuals in a community. Offering an array of options for people to get involved will help to make sure people who are interested in getting involved have a way to do so that is comfortable and convenient for them.

- **Deciding who Should Lead and Facilitate the Engagement**: Facilitation is not the practice of taking the reins, but of providing constructive leadership. Whereby others take responsibility to craft answers to complex issues without necessarily being subject matter experts. Facilitators should balance time, the degree of uncertainty surrounding the issues, and the process maturity of the organization/group to help them find the best possible actions to address the issues they are confronting.

- **People Don't Show Up**: When planning an engagement activity, there is always the fear that you won't get the participation you hope for. Ensure your event is meaningful, fun, and effective. The best way to lose participation is to invoke a poor experience or memory leading to lower involvement in the future.

- **Overbearing Participants**: When hosting a community engagement event, you will want to prepare for participants who might try to hijack the agenda. To combat this, ensure you are well-staffed to address issues that arise. Have a strong facilitator who can respond appropriately to polarizing voices. Offer a variety of formats to share so that people remain engaged and have a chance to speak. Set a clear agenda and create a 'parking lot' for ideas that arise outside of the planned activities. And always maintain a respectful space.

ACTIVITY: CHALLENGES TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Take some time to think of what challenges and barriers you are currently facing and some possible solutions to them.

- What do you perceive as challenges and barriers to doing this work? Are there issues among members of the public or a community that may prevent full engagement (i.e., social, political, cultural, gender-specific)? How will you address the diverse cultural differences among affected communities?
- Is there adequate justification for proceeding with your collective impact concept (i.e., time, cost, level of interest)? Is there community and public support for your initiative? What are some unintended consequences of the initiative if not done effectively? Are there strategies in place to address unintended consequences?
- Which challenges are most concerning for you?
- What steps can you take to work through these challenges?
- What might you do to create opportunities for building trust within your community? When might it be most important?
- What ideas do you have for ensuring people feel listened to, heard, and understood?

ASSESSING READINESS

Is your Community Ready to Mobilize?

The goal of community mobilization is to involve as many members of the community as possible to create, implement, and monitor initiatives/programs. When everyone participates, there is a better chance of the initiative meeting everyone's needs.

The benefits of community mobilization are:
- Sharing of resources and funding
- More effective problem-solving
- Diversity of voices within the community
- Accountability

Questions to ask members as you mobilize:
- What organizations or individuals represent pieces of the systems we are trying to change?
- Who has decision-making power or who influences those decision-makers?
- Who has relationships and networks that are relevant to the social issue we are addressing?

Community Engagement vs Being Connected to Your Community

Being connected to your community means knowing whom you live next to. It also means knowing the resources within the community and how to connect people to those resources.

Community engagement is the process by which a diverse group of citizens is engaged to work and learn together on behalf of their communities to create and realize bold visions for the future.

"Doing to us, not with us, is a recipe for failure." -Dr. Howard Fuller

There are three pre-conditions of collective impact. Together, they identify community elements that determine the success of a collective impact effort:

- **Influential Champions**: Are influential community champions drawn to the issue and willing to commit their collective resources and networks to move the issue forward?
- **The Urgency of Issue**: Does the community perceive the issue to be both important and urgent? What data is required to gain greater clarity about the issue?
- **Adequate Resources**: What resources are required to ensure that the partners have sufficient capacity to move the issue forward? These can include resources for convening meetings, research, and community engagement.

A good assessment of these conditions enables groups to undertake the groundwork needed to build awareness, and ultimately momentum around its issue.

ACTIVITY: ASSESSING READINESS FOR THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The following Collective Impact Readiness Assessment, developed by Cassandra O'Neill and Sarah Griffiths (2011), can help you determine whether your organization or community is ready to take the plunge into collective impact.

1. **Identification of common agenda:** Readiness assessment questions to ask:
   - What exists now among partners?
   - What is desired?

2. **Mutually reinforcing strategies:** Readiness assessment questions to ask:
   - What exists now among partners?
   - What is desired?

3. **Continuous communication:** Readiness assessment questions to ask:
   - What exists now among partners?
   - What is desired?

4. **Shared measurement:** Readiness assessment questions to ask:
   - What exists now among partners?
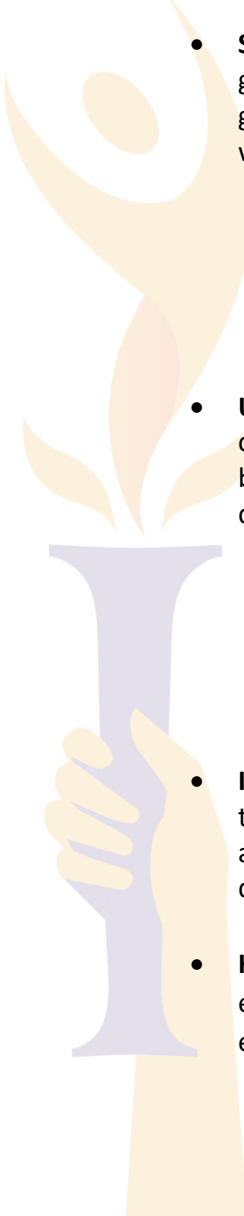   - What is desired?

There are many readiness assessment tools available to help your group assess its readiness for collective impact. For additional and more thorough assessment tools, please reference Building the Architecture Resources.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Community engagement requires you to do the pre-engagement work of holding early conversations. Early conversations should help you understand the community dynamics and identify effective, respectful ways of engaging with the citizens in that community. The uniqueness of each community, their differing history, demographic makeup, and methods of interacting should be considered when planning for any community engagement activity.

For early conversations to be effective and sustainable, there needs to be a fundamental focus placed on answering the questions "who/what is at the center of the engagement?" and "who are we doing this for?"

Your approach to early conversations and community engagement should be meaningful, relevant, and personalized to a particular community. To ensure your approach is sound, include these strategies:

- **Seek to Understand the Layers within a Community:** "Community" should not be limited to geographical areas, and we cannot assume that the community is unified. There are different groups and sectors within a community that one cannot ignore. Seeking to understand the layers within a community can be done in a variety of ways but should start with at least four activities:

    o Identify existing relationships within a community
    o Understand community networks
    o Understand the history of place
    o Understand previous engagement efforts

- **Understand a Range of Community Member Perspectives:** Once an initial understanding of the community has been established. Connect with those you have existing relationships with and begin building new relationships to better understand community member perspectives from different groups. Ask about their barriers to engagement.

    o It is important to note that this initial engagement is not only about understanding community perspectives but about setting the tone and enhancing trust by validating resident expertise prior to beginning any formal engagement work. The process is just as important as outcomes in community engagement work.

- **Identify Engagement Strategies that Support Community Preferences:** Identifying the strategies that support community preferences should be done prior to developing your engagement plan and formally engaging a community. Understanding community preferences will allow for a deeper engagement experience.

- **Honor the Value of Lived Experience**: Lived Experience refers to the inherent knowledge and expertise of a community member given their life experiences. It is as important as formal expertise in each project.

- **Recognize the History of Place**: Every community has a history, and any community engagement effort needs to become familiar with the historical context that ultimately impacts dynamics, design, and connection.

- **Promote Power to Influence**: It is important that any community engagement plan be developed in a way that allows for community input to influence the trajectory of the project. This means that community members hold power in how a project develops and are not just providing feedback for the sake of information.

- **Operate with Transparency**: One of the best ways to build trust is to be open and transparent from the beginning. This involves being open about the process, how community members will influence it, and then providing feedback on the ultimate results and ways in which they influenced the work.

- **Approach with Humility**: Community engagement work should come from a place of humility, by valuing the community members' lived experiences and ultimately their expertise. Community engagement leaders should serve as facilitators of the information and not be directive.

- **Center Authenticity**: Authenticity means doing this work beyond the transaction. Community engagement requires connection and not just treating people as data points. It is about building relationships to have meaningful methods for community members to influence what happens in their neighborhoods.

- **Value People's Time**: So often community members are expected to be involved in community engagement for free. This sets up an inequitable dynamic and centers those that have the privilege to participate without supportive resources. A more equitable approach is to value people's time in a tangible way such as by providing participation stipends, childcare, and/or a meal.

ACTIVITY: A PATH TO AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Hafizah Omar and Shanee Helfer developed The Path to Authentic Community Engagement tool (2018) to provide guiding questions that should be kept in mind as you plan and implement your community engagement work. They are intended to help uncover blind spots and "interrogate the unavoidable power dynamics at play."

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Do we constantly interrogate power dynamics? Do we question preconceived ideas and biases towards communities?
- Do we acknowledge our limitations as an outsider?
- Do we provide authentic spaces for residents to be involved?
- Do we hire community members to serve on our backbone team?

- Do we compensate community members for their time and contributions?
- Do we cover transportation fees for community members to attend meetings?
- Do we provide childcare during meetings?
- Are all racial/ethnic groups who are affected by the policy/practice/decision at the table?
- Do we include residents in addition to professional leaders in community-based organizations?
- Do we host meetings in community spaces instead of asking community members to come to us?
- Do we regularly disseminate information and updates about plans and activities to ensure accountability and transparency? Do we do this through channels that community members utilize?
- Are we providing communities space to unpack what they want from themselves instead of putting constraints on their goals and vision?
- Do we entrust communities with genuine tasks, real resources and true leadership?
- Do we treat community members as producers and actors, rather than subjects or passive service recipients?

For additional tools and information, please reference Building the Architecture Resources.

HOW COMMUNITIES SOLVE SOCIAL ISSUES

Solving social issues in communities is not an easy thing to do, which is why it requires strategies and effort. We know that communities take on many different shapes and are formed based on all kinds of commonalities, including shared interests, geography, and identity.

The following are the three most common ways communities address social issues:

1. Working in **Isolated Impact** (silos) in the community is when organizations or entities intentionally insulate themselves from each other. This typically involves hiding information, not collaborating well, and not aligning with work that is occurring within the community. Working in isolation creates stressful environments, reduces efficiency, creates pressure on resources, and increases the complexity of social issues. Other dangers of working in silos include, but are not limited to, poor communication, reduced trust, possibly duplicated effort, misunderstanding, and diminished impact on the community. In short, the nonprofit sector most frequently operates using Isolated Impact. It is an approach oriented toward finding and funding a solution within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely.

2. **Collaborations** and **Coalitions** bring together community citizens and organizations, both private and public to agree upon a vision, mission, and goals. They involve organizations, institutions, and community agents cooperating to tackle larger social issues and improve the living conditions of the community. Like a collaborative partnership, community coalitions have become more popular in recent years following cutbacks to funding for social services, therefore putting pressure on communities to do more with less. Collaborations and Coalitions are effective in their own way. Collective impact can involve these ways of working together. However, as stand-alone, neither of these ways of working together is the same as collective impact.

3. **"Collective impact** is a network of community members, organizations, and institutions that advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems-level change" (Kania, Williams, Schmitz, Brady, Kramer & Splansky Juster, 2022 para. 5). Collective impact is used to tackle complex social problems with various root causes that necessitate the coordinated efforts of numerous actors to produce long-lasting, community-wide change. Collective impact initiatives promote alignment and cohesion toward long-term, effective solutions. These initiatives can refocus, transform, and improve your community's efforts to solve the issue.

SUMMARY

In this component we took a deep dive into community engagement as essential for building the relationships required to advance the work of your collective impact initiative.

We explored the methods, levels, and strategies for structuring your engagement. We discussed equitable community engagement as a means of hearing from diverse voices. We reviewed the challenges your initiative is likely to face during engagement processes. Finally, we shared tools for assessing your initiative's readiness to engage the community.

In next component, Building Blocks of Collective Impact, we will review some of the foundations upon which a solid collective impact initiative is built.
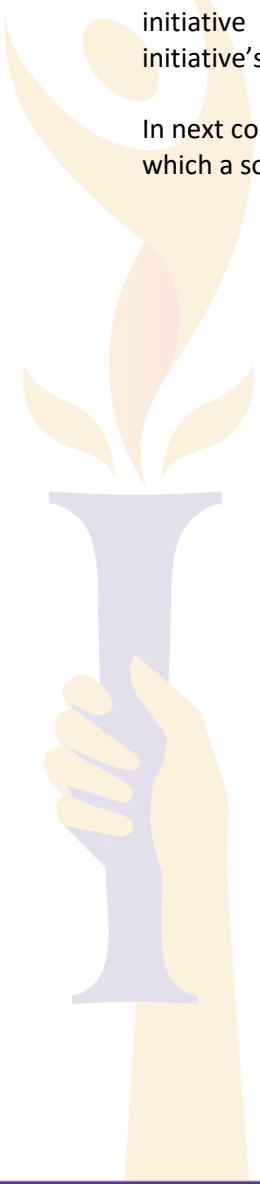
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A Sector: is a group of organizational actors that are similar in society, e.g., philanthropy, business, government, non-profits, etc.

A System: is a group of interdependent actors and factors, both formal and informal, forming a complex social problem. No one person or organization can influence the entire system, but by working together, the group can move toward systems change.

Accountability: an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

Action Teams: (also called working groups, task forces, community action networks, strategy teams, and a variety of other names) are the heartbeat of collective impact: where the action occurs, and goals are brought to life.

Alignment: when the participants of an initiative understand a set of shared objectives or goals and know what to do to achieve them.

Authentic Community: is the intentional process of co-creating solutions in partnership with people who know best through their own experiences the barriers to opportunity. Authentic community engagement is grounded in building relationships based on mutual respect that acknowledges each person's added value to developing solutions together.

Backbone: provide dedicated staff. Supports the work of partners by assisting with strategic guidance, supporting aligned activity, establishing shared measurement, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilizing resources.

Backbone Entity: is a team of community leaders who work collaboratively to drive the collective impact effort forward. A backbone entity is a critical component of a collective impact effort. The backbone organization mobilizes, coordinates, and facilitates the process of collective impact.

Backbone Support: the backbone organization mobilizes, coordinates, and facilitates the process of collective impact. Key functions include Guiding vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement systems, building public will and mobilizing funding to support the initiative.

Care: is the assessment that you have the other person's interests in mind as well as your own when you make decisions and take actions.

Collective Governance (sometimes 'collaborative'): is an innovative model of governance that is solutions-oriented with a focus on public value, where diverse stakeholders can work in partnership to improve the management of public resources and delivery of services.

Collective Impact: describes an intentional way of working together and sharing information for the purpose of solving a complex problem. Proponents of collective impact believe that the approach is more

likely to solve complex problems than if a single non-profit were to approach the same problem(s) on its own.

Common Agenda: 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.

Community: is a group of people living in the same place. You can define communities at different geographic scales: neighbourhood, city, county, province, state, nation, or international.

Community Engagement: can be defined as a mutually beneficial interaction that results in participants feeling valued for their unique contributions. It is based on the democratic idea that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts their community should have a say in the decision-making around it. It, moreover, holds the promise that public participation can influence decisions that affect the provision of services, future visions, and sustainability of our communities.

Community Involvement: is meaningful, consistent participation in activities that support and improve upon social well-being.

Community Partner: individual organizations and members of the community (e.g., non-profit, funder, business, public agency, student, parent,). Partners should have access to a variety of opportunities to learn about and engage in the initiative which will be key to implementing strategies. Ultimate "power" resides within the community at large.

Competence: is the assessment that you can do what you are doing or propose to do. In the workplace, this usually means the other person believes you have the requisite capacity, skill, knowledge, and resources to do a particular task or job.

Content Expert: are professionals, staff in an organization, service providers, and leaders with formal power who have knowledge, tools, and resources to address the issue.

Context Expert: are people with lived experience of the situation, including children and youth. They are the people who experientially know about the issue.

Diversity: the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

Equity: is fairness and justice achieved through systematically assessing disparities in opportunities, outcomes, and representation and redressing [those] disparities through targeted actions.

Evaluation: is defined by the Canadian Evaluation Society as a systematic assessment of the design, implementation, or outcomes of an initiative for the purpose of learning or decision-making.

Executive Committee: is a group comprised of cross-sector community partners representative of the relevant ecosystem that provides strategic direction for the collective impact initiative and champions its work. Alternative terms for this group include Advisory Group, Advisory Council, and Leadership Table.

Indicator: is a *measure* used to evaluate or assess the result of an action. It allows you to assess qualitatively or quantitatively using data or information as benchmarks.

Linearly: in a way that progresses from one stage to another in a single series of steps.

Mindset: refers to an individual's deeply held beliefs and attitudes. Our mindset shapes our behaviors and practices.

Principles: are usually part of most traditions and philosophies. The concepts of integrity, honesty, and justice are principles that transcend people and cultures. The principles govern how people behave and interact in various situations, often with a firm and consistent stance.

Reliability: is the assessment that you meet the commitments you make, and that you keep your promises.

Sincerity: is the assessment you are honest, that you say what you mean and mean what you say, and you can be believed and taken seriously. It also means when you express an opinion, that it is valid, useful, and can be backed up by social thinking and evidence. Finally, it means that your actions will align with your words.

Stakeholders: are individuals or organizations with the ability to influence the social issue. They may represent the public, private, non-profit, or philanthropic sectors, or the population targeted for change.

Steering Committee: provides strategic direction for the initiative. Champions the work. Aligns own work to common agenda. Steering committee members can serve on working groups.

Strategic Planning: is the ongoing organizational process of using available knowledge to document a business's intended direction.

Strategic Thinking: is a mental or thinking process applied by an individual in the context of achieving a goal or set of goals. As a cognitive activity, it produces thought.

Terms of Reference: a document that explains what will be done and by whom when making or implementing a plan.

Trust: is a assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.

Values: are beliefs and opinions that people have regarding specific issues or ideas. Values can change as the environment, demands, or needs change. They are fundamental beliefs that help us to prefer, appreciate and choose some things over others or one behavior over another.

Working Groups: comprised of cross-sector community partners targeting elements of common agenda. Typically led by co-chairs, supported by the backbone. Designs and implements strategies, involving non-working group members as needed.

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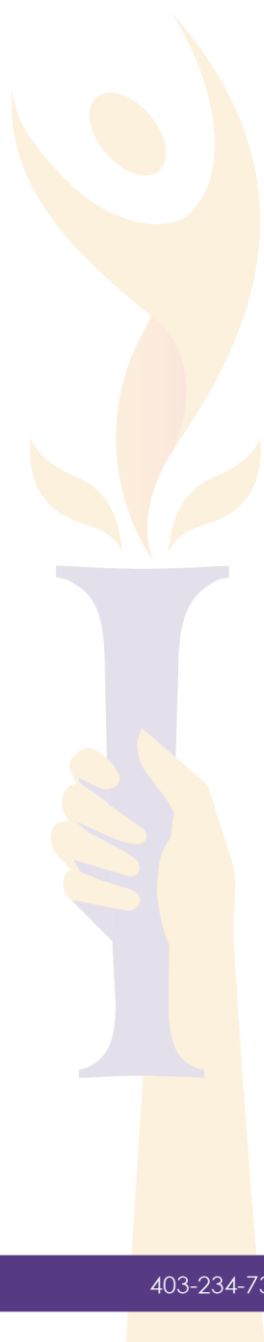
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