

Comparison of Collective Impact and the Synergy Initiative January 2017

Definition of Collective Impact

“Collective Impact” was introduced to the field of philanthropy in 2011 and was immediately heralded as a clarion call for changing the way social issues are addressed. It has since gained increasing attention and is now a buzzword among foundation and nonprofit professionals.

“Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations. 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 **continuous communication**, and are staffed by an independent **backbone support organization**.”

From Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011) Collective Impact. **Stanford Social Innovation Review**, 36-41.

Kania and Kramer’s research of initiatives that had produced powerful results identified these five conditions were typically present, and thus, were named by them as the key elements in defining Collective Impact. They clarified that the successful initiatives they surveyed called these aspects by various names.

Common Agenda – all participants share a vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions.

Shared Measurement – all participating organizations agree on the ways success will be measured and reported with a short list of common indicators identified and used for learning and improvement.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities – a diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinate a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

Continuous Communication – all players engage in frequent and structured open communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives and create common motivation.

Backbone Support – an independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative provides ongoing support by guiding the initiative’s vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy and mobilizing resources.

Synergy Initiative Guidelines

The Health Care and Health Promotion Synergy Initiative supports collaborative projects that target significant anomalies of poor health status in Central Massachusetts with integrated, comprehensive strategies designed to redress the disparities by enhancing systemic access to care and promoting healthier lifestyles.

Key criteria for successful Synergy Initiative projects include:

Significance of the Problem – Evidence that the proposal addresses a significant community health issue, in terms of both scope and seriousness, as well as a key criterion of addressing the underserved.

Level of Integration – The degree to which the proposed approach to the issue being addressed by the applicant(s) is integrated, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive, involving both public health and medical strategies. Where an individual organization lacks the resources to mount such an integrated program itself, it will be expected to partner with other agencies with complementary goals and capacities, and to demonstrate that the collaboration proposed is serious and effective, rather than creating duplicative programming.

Soundness of the Approach – The degree to which the proposed approach to the health issue addressed by the applicant(s) is based on an in-depth understanding of the issue and the principal factors affecting it; knowledge of “best practices” developed by others working on the same issues; and a strong connection with the community in which the proposed program or intervention will be mounted, including involvement, when appropriate, of the intended population of focus in proposal planning and implementation.

Capacity for Enduring Systems Change – The potential for the approach proposed by the applicant(s) to bring about long-term changes in the systems, policies, and practices that directly influence the conditions affecting the health problem addressed and its prevention, treatment, or management.

Potential for Impact – Evidence that the applicant organization has the capacity and capability to implement the proposed program effectively.

Potential for Replication – The likelihood that the approach proposed, if proven effective, can be replicated elsewhere.

Quality of the Evaluation Plan – The soundness of the proposed strategy for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the approach being taken by the applicant(s), and how the lessons learned will be applied and used.

Exit Strategy – The appropriateness of the plan proposed by the applicant(s) for dealing with the eventual phasing out of Foundation funding.

Comparison of key conditions of Collective Impact and the Synergy Initiative

Key Conditions	Collective Impact	Synergy Initiative
Common Agenda	All participants share a vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions.	These projects address a significant health problem as identified by the community. The issue is approached with integrated, interdisciplinary and comprehensive strategies. Grantees are expected to partner with other organizations with complementary goals and capacities to address the problem.
Shared Measurement	All participating organizations agree on the ways success will be measured and reported with a short list of common indicators identified and used for learning and improvement.	These projects use an evaluator, supported by the grant, to help the project partners develop a logic model and a set of common indicators and measurements to capture the outcomes of their efforts. Their work relies on evidence-based interventions developed by others and adapted to their particular situation.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	A diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinate a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.	These projects involve a partnership of organizations with complementary goals and capacities. The partnership is expected to represent a true collaboration, and not just to create duplicative programming or enhance a single organization.
Continuous Communication	All players engage in frequent and structured open communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives and create common motivation.	These projects are typically guided by a Steering Committee with a larger Advisory Council that meet regularly to ensure communication regarding the progress of their efforts. In addition, a Grant Management Team (including the Project Director, Project Coordinator, Evaluator and Foundation staff) meets quarterly to oversee the work and make “real time” changes.
Backbone Support	An independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative provides ongoing support by guiding the initiative’s vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy and mobilizing resources.	The grantee is typically the lead organization with the Project Director responsible for the guiding and overseeing the project. A Project Coordinator position, supported by the grant, is responsible for managing the day-to-day work. Members of the Steering Committee and Advisory Council are engaged in advocacy efforts to win public support and change public policies.