

The Collective Impact Framework¹ – Part A, Overview

The Collective Impact Framework is an approach to collaboration that has been developed to address complex social issues that warrant collaboration across multiple sectors (such as community, business, education, government, media, etc.). It is less about collaborative project management than about having multiple and diverse organisations making progress toward a shared vision through complementary activities.

The collective impact approach was first outlined in a 2011 publication in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*². Researchers Kania and Kramer write: “Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations” (p.36). To address this problem, Kania and Kramer identify the following five components of a collective impact approach:

- a common agenda,
- common progress measures,
- mutually reinforcing activities,
- continuous communications, and
- a backbone organisation.

This “Part A, Overview” document summarises Kania and Kramer's article and offers links for further information. A separately downloadable “Part B” illustrates how the approach was sketched out with respect to regional biodiversity initiatives at a 2014 facilitated Environment Network Manawatu workshop on collaboration³.

A common agenda

Collective impact requires a “shared vision for change,” comprised of:

- “a shared understanding of the problem,” though not necessarily “on all dimensions of the problem,”
- agreement on primary goals, and
- a joint approach to solving problems through agreed actions (Kania and Kramer p.39).

Common progress measures

An agreed set of collective measures supports collective impact. In support of this, Kania and Kramer point to a range of working examples. They conclude that “Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported” (p.40).

To hold progress measures in common requires:

- “A short list of indicators,”
- “Measurement at the community level and across all organizations,” and
- Consistency in data collection.

1 This document is based on online sources (see footnotes) and on notes from the Environment Network Manawatu's 15 February 2014 workshop on collaboration, a workshop with a biodiversity theme facilitated by Richard Thompson. The document has been prepared by Sharon Stevens, ENM Project Coordinator. It is available from the Environment Network Manawatu web site (<http://enm.org.nz>) under the menu items “resources” for “collaboration.”

2 Kania, J., & Kramer, M. 2011. Collective impact, *Stanford Social Review* 66 (Winter): 36-41. Available online: http://www.ssireview.org/images/articles/2011_WI_Feature_Kania.pdf. Accessed 13 May 2014. The authors note: “Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations.”

3 This “Part B” document is also available from the ENM web site “resources” page.

This approach “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” (p.40).

Mutually reinforcing activities

When different activities are coordinated within an overarching plan, the result is that different organizations can each follow their own strengths while still contributing to the collective impact. Kania and Kramer write: “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” (p.40).

Continuous communications

Many years of regular communication can be required for organisations to start trusting that all collaborators are truly seeking common goals (Kania and Kramer p.40)

They provide key examples indicating how collective impact can be established through regular face-to-face meetings, especially when these are supported by an outside facilitator and a structured agenda. Consistent meeting attendance is important, and problems arise when participation is delegated to subordinates. Meetings can be supplemented with web-based and other forms of communication.

A backbone organisation

Often, state Kania and Kramer, collaborations will fail because of the lack of a dedicated infrastructure, and because no one from the participating organisations can set aside the time to make sure the project works. They stress that collective impact requires a “backbone” or coordinating organisation to handle administration and logistics.

The backbone organisation requires its own dedicated staff with skills such as project management, data management, and facilitation. A “highly structured process” is required for effective decision making. “In the best of circumstances,” write Kania and Kramer, “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” (p.40).

Sources of additional information

The collective impact approach has since been adopted in a number of international contexts. The following links may be of use to those who wish to know more.

<http://collectiveimpactforum.org/>

<http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/>

<http://collectiveimpactaustralia.com/>

http://www.ssireview.org/images/articles/2011_WI_Feature_Kania.pdf

http://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/sites/inspiringcommunities.org.nz/files/bop_workshop_-_collective_impact_overview.pdf

<http://www.elizabethriver.org/> (for the Elizabeth River Project, one of Kania and Kramer's major examples).