

ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Study of Collective Impact: Understanding the Need for Community Engagement

Trent Sutton

Director: Dr. Gaynor Yancey, DSW

Using a qualitative study comprised of five in-depth interviews, this thesis considers the method of collaborative community change known as collective impact, specifically in regards to community engagement. The study targeted five key leaders involved in a collective impact initiative in a midsize Southern community and used the interviews to discover key information about the process of collective impact and particularly the process of community engagement within collective impact, a topic which has largely been neglected within the current body of research. This paper will first place collective impact within the context of the current literature on the subject, and then provide the study's methodology, state the results of the study which manifested in 10 emerging themes from the conducted interviews, and finally discuss these results and the implications which they hold for professional practice.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

Dr. Gaynor Yancey, Garland School of Social Work

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: _____

A Qualitative Study of Collective Impact: Understanding the Need for Community
Engagement

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Trent Sutton

Waco, TX

May 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Literature Review.....	1
Chapter Two: Method.....	13
Chapter Three: Results.....	17
Chapter Four: Discussion.....	45
Bibliography.....	58

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Introduction to Collective Impact

Collective impact is a relatively new approach to collaboration and community action, first appearing in the literature in the Social Stanford Innovation Review (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Therein, they claimed that “large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations” (p. 36). The form of cross-sector coordination for which they advocated was collective impact, a system in which five core tenets comprise the process. According to these authors, collective impact initiatives require that certain conditions be met in order to be successful. These are a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization (p. 39). Before these five conditions come into play, however, Weaver (2014) suggests that there are also three pre-conditions that must be met in order to maximize an initiative’s effectiveness: influential leaders, a sense of urgency to the issue, and adequate resources (p. 12). These three preconditions and five conditions are recognized across the research as necessary for a successful collective impact initiative, which undergoes three phases. Collective impact begins with initiating action, proceeds to organizing for impact, and finally exists within the phase of sustaining action and impact (Estrada, Falbe, Flood, Lavery, & Minkler, 2015). These phases are the

natural life cycle of collective impact, but the preconditions and conditions listed above are necessary for this life cycle to be fulfilled fully and effectively.

Power Dynamics within Collective Impact

In examining collective impact more closely, we will begin with the role of power, which is different within the context of collective impact than it is within other movements or organizations. Power is shared collectively across multiple organizations and professions, generating power from their respective spheres to fuel a common agenda. When so many players are involved, it must be accepted that conflict is inevitable. Collective power accepts the role of conflict in the process of social change, understanding that respectful and productive conflict can actually be beneficial to broadening perspectives, improving strategies, and furthering goals and programs. Social change requires entities to work together which would normally be in conflict. Accepting the role of conflict then, and minimizing its negative implications, is important in succeeding within one's initiative. This increases collective power, as it applies pressure to the issue from the various stations which the entities previously held, now in a unified manner due to their alignment of goals and measures of success (Ryan, 2014).

Power within a collective impact initiative is unique, largely related to the fifth tenet of collective impact, the backbone support organization. Backbone organizations promote the collective power of the initiative, not taking on the leading role themselves, but also ensuring that those involved remain of one accord. The roles they play within the initiative are crucial, such as guiding the vision and strategy of the movement, supporting aligned activities of the organizations, establishing shared measurement practices to

determine progress, building public will, advancing public policies, and mobilizing funding. Collective impact initiatives reportedly could not exist without these backbone organizations, as it is these which provide the collective vision for the initiative, thus ensuring that the shift from individual effort to collaborative cross sector action is a successful one (Kania, Martin, Merchant, & Turner, 2012). Power operates differently within collective impact, but does so effectively, aligning with its purposes and values.

Necessary Shifts in Mindset

Additionally, collective impact is a framework which, as Kania and Kramer pointed out in their original article, which is countercultural to the approaches that have been undertaken traditionally in regards to community change. This in mind, it is important also to recognize the shifts in mindset that must take place as well, concerning who is engaged, how they work together, and how progress happens. The first mindset shift is ensuring that the right people are involved in the process, which often involves a diverse array of professionals from governmental, nonprofit, corporate, philanthropic, educational, and other settings. Complex problems require cross-sector collaboration, which may involve thinking outside the realm of what is comfortable and bringing new organizations, perspectives, and individuals into the process. The second shift is in regards to the relational component of collective impact. As quoted in the 2014 article “Essential Mindset Shifts for Collective Impact,” Stephen M. R. Covey says that “change happens at the speed of trust.” Change being the goal of collective impact, trust is key to successfully sustaining positive change, and relationships are the foundation of building trust. In collective impact, these relationships are important both in terms of

organizational relationships among collaborators as well as with relationships with stakeholders, community leaders, and recipients of services. Lastly, one's view of progress must change. Technical solutions are often the goal of initiatives, but collective impact takes a more adaptive approach. Additionally, rather than seeking a single solution, collective impact recognizes the need for a variety of services and interventions coming together to solve a problem (Kania, Hanleybrown, & Juster, 2014).

Collective impact is not a formula; rather, it is an emergent process, rather than one which is predetermined. It is based upon the assumption that often, the resources and services to promote change often already exist, they simply have not yet been recognized, connected, or supported. Due to the complexity of social problems, predetermined solutions are rarely successful. Further, even if collective impact did seek to discover a solution, "there is no ultimate solution beyond the process of continual adaptation within an ever-changing environment" (Kania & Kramer, 2013, p. 2). In each of these three examples, collective impact serves as a break from the traditional approach, and shifts in mindset are essential to successfully carrying such initiatives out.

Collective Impact's Longevity

Thus far, we have looked at what is necessary for collective impact to begin, but it is also important to see what the research has to say about its successful continuation. Four principles have been identified which lead to the long-term sustainability of collective impact initiatives: creating a culture of continual improvement, eliminating disparities, utilizing existing resources, and engaging local expertise and leadership within the community (Edmonson & Hecht, 2014, pp. 6-7). Another strategy that can be

employed to increase collective impact's chances at success and longevity is to work to make public policy more suited to it. Often, policies unintentionally impede and even prohibit the progress of cross-sector partnerships due to rigid funding techniques and the silo structure of agencies and committees. Specifically, there are three areas in which public policy could be altered in ways that would benefit the practice of collective impact. Those striving toward collective impact initiatives should encourage policymakers to create structures that focus on a particular issue or population group, which would allow for interagency participation. In terms of funding, accountability ought to be changed from funders looking at the services an organization provides to the outcomes than an organization achieves. Finally, policymakers should be urged to alter accounting and auditing practices to accommodate collaborative efforts rather than hinder their progress through excessive paperwork (Ferber & White, 2014). In these ways, public policy can be enhanced, thus creating a more fruitful environment in which collective impact initiatives may flourish.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important piece of any program, movement, or initiative, though it is a part of the process which is often overlooked. The current research, however, has not neglected evaluation in regards to collective impact, which may look different than in practice than when evaluating other things. Typically, episodic evaluation is used, looking at the specific results of an initiative in order to determine its success or failure. When evaluating collective impact, however, developmental evaluation ought to be utilized, as it is particularly well-suited to dealing with complex and adaptive processes.

It focuses on the relationships between participants in the initiative over time, and the problems and solutions stemming from those relationships. This also allows for continual revision of goals and strategies based upon the constantly changing landscape of the social problem, the community, and the initiative itself (Kania & Kramer, 2013).

Developmental evaluation is excellent for the early stages of collective impact initiatives, as it seeks to answer the question ‘what needs to happen?’ Later in the process, however, there are other types of evaluation that need to be employed. Formative evaluation seeks to answer the question ‘how well is it working?’ which makes it particularly useful in the process of refining the initiative once it is established. Lastly, summative evaluation seeks to understand the tangible difference that the initiative is making, which makes it useful in the later stages of collective impact. In each of the three cases, the goal is not to determine success or failure, but rather to further the collaborators’ continued learning so that they may continually improve their structure, process, goals, and more (Parkhurst & Preskill, 2014). Evaluation, though often overlooked by many, is a fundamental part of collective impact strategies.

The Funder’s Role

The role of the collaborators is clear within the collective impact process, being identified within the core tenets and being further identified within the unique emergent process of the individual initiative. What is less clear, however, is the role of the funder within the process, as foundations and other funders begin to shift their focus from individual effort to collaboration as well. It has been pointed out that seeking funding is one of the roles played by the backbone organization (Kania, Martin, Merchant, &

Turner, 2012), but the role of the funders themselves is less defined. To this end, it has been argued that “cross-sector collective action does not naturally arise without leadership by an actor who brings a larger frame of reference” (Easterling, 2013, p. 68). Funders, then, can actually play a role within the development of collective impact. Funders are often uniquely situated with an understanding of the key players in the region and relational ties to an array of organizations. This allows for purposeful networking, which marks the beginning of a visioning process that naturally leads to coordinating and supporting one another’s activities and programs, thus allowing a strategic framework for collective impact to naturally arise. Funders are able to guide this process from an objective standpoint, becoming co-learners with the organizations. In this way they are able to better understand what is needed by the initiative, and the initiative is able to better understand what it is that the funders seek in return for their investment (Easterling, 2013).

Case Studies

One of the biggest contributors to the current literature surrounding collective impact is case studies. They draw on their experience in order to teach valuable lessons about the planning, structuring, and implementing of collective impact initiatives, as well as provide us with examples of successful initiatives which may be emulated. Organizations have begun to realize that individual effort does not lead to lasting change, and so they have begun to turn to collective impact as a means of collaboration, which they believe will serve to change this problem. A goal such as this, however, requires organizations to alter the way in which they have previously done things. Case studies

have shown that partners must work together in order to focus on the following things: framing conversations within the community to discuss both problems and goals, bringing attention to important issues, creating solutions for these issues in which everyone may take part, and bringing more people into the process to take action (Stewart, 2013). Additionally, in order to sustain the partnerships themselves, organizations must create effective models of governance, promote community engagement, and formalize commitments and expectations. This will help to greatly alleviate one of the biggest struggles that collective impact initiatives often face, which is the ability of organizations with different goals, perspectives, and desires to effectively working together (Cohen & Price, 2015).

Other areas of interests that case studies have brought to light in the current literature are how to use data and how to raise funds effectively. Here are a few examples of initiatives using information in innovative ways in order to meet their own unique needs. When using data to for effective program planning, the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund works from existing public data systems, adding to those rather than beginning from scratch. The Baltimore City Opportunity Youth Collaborative used US Census data and requested data from the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services and the Baltimore City Department of Social Services, but they also supplemented this data with a survey of their own creation. This emphasizes the importance of drawing from a variety of resources to piece together a complete picture of the population an initiative seeks to serve, utilizing what is available and drawing from one's personal resources only to fill in the gaps. In order to successfully fund a cross-sector collaborative, it is necessary to seek cross-sector funding as well, bringing together funding from different

avenues and public sectors to support a common goal. Los Angeles's YouthSource Centers are funded by the Economic and Workforce Development Department, the Workforce Investment Board, and the Los Angeles United School District. They bring together funding sources interested in education and in employment, weaving these funding streams to support their agenda which includes the goals of each source (Allen, Miles, & Steinberg, 2014). In all areas, it is important to draw upon multiple sources, as collective impact's ability to succeed is predicated upon the assumption that cross-sector collaboration will occur on all planes.

Aside from teaching specific lessons as to how best go about participating in collective impact, case studies also offer proof of the model's ability to succeed. The literature has a great number of examples of collective impact's success, a few of which will be mentioned here. The United Way of Greater Toledo has seen a 1250% increase in low income families shopping at local farmers' markets, 170 urban gardens planted, free pediatric immunizations, and 33 schools offering vision and dental screening. Go for Health! based out of California gotten results such as city ordinances being passed concerning restaurant standards and school policies involving nutrition and exercise. The United Way of Salt Lake has met many of its goals as well, with 36% more kids immunized, a 30% drop in juvenile crime, decreased deficits in low-income kindergartners' test scores, and 51% more households receiving assistance with taxes (Stewart, 2013). The Strive partnership, which focuses on education, has seen a 10% increase in graduation rates in Cincinnati, Ohio, and a 16% increase in graduating seniors enrolling in college in Covington, Kentucky. This "cradle to college" approach to fighting inequalities in education has proven successful in a variety of circumstances, and

in further support of the framework, the Promise Neighborhoods initiative, a federal effort supporting collective impact structures which combine K-12 education full networks of services, invested \$60 million in efforts in dozens of cities across the United States in 2012 (Cohen & Price, 2015). The track record of success that appears in the literature surrounding collective impact speaks to its validity as well as its power to truly create lasting social change.

Taking the Next Step

Current literature also points to a next step when looking at collective impact. Thus far, collective impact has largely been driven by cross-sector organizational collaboration. Now that collective impact initiatives have begun to grow increasingly prominent, it is also important to consider the implications of collective impact initiatives that seek to align current efforts of collaboration. Individual effort of initiatives can, in certain contexts, pose the same problems as individual efforts of organizations, such as overlap, inefficiency, and frustration for both the community and the organizations seeking to serve it. Collective impact, then, can also be successfully applied to the collaboration of current collective impact efforts. The key is to focus on outcomes, look at the big picture in a way that allows each initiative to see where their efforts overlap with those of others and where it would be more effective to work together than alone. When seeking to align current initiatives, often the biggest struggle is the backbone organization, as the question becomes whether a new entity ought to be formed or whether one of the current backbone organizations for the current initiatives is in a position to step up to the task of coordinating the new overarching initiative. This

decision must be made with care in order to ensure that all initiatives are on board with the new collaborative effort. The trouble to align, however, is well worth the effort, as can be seen with the Northern Kentucky Education Council, a collective impact initiative arising from the alignment of a number of existing efforts. Despite the fact that each individual initiative was making little trackable progress, once the alignment was made, several goals have been accomplished, including over 80 schools using an enhanced version of the Gallup Student Poll and a number of initiatives launched to prepare more high school students for college and career (Boyle & Irby, 2014).

The Role of the Community

To conclude this review of the literature surrounding collective impact, it is important to point out the primary gap, and opportunity for change, therein: the role of the community within the process. There is a large disparity within the research when looking at this aspect of collective impact, with evidence supporting both high and low community involvement within the process of forming initiatives. When looking at roundtable discussions with professionals who are familiar with collective impact, they emphasize the importance of the community. Norman Rice, the president and CEO of the Seattle Foundation, points out that “at the end of the day the community has to think that they own this issue, not the organization” (2012, p. 27). He went on to say that one of the biggest obstacles for collective impact is that initiatives rarely invest the necessary time and resources in teaching people how to effectively engage the community. Steve Savner (2012), the director of public policy at the Center for Community Change, contends that community members ought to be deeply and genuinely involved throughout the process,

helping to identify needs, develop solutions, and oversee, evaluate, and improve the program. In support of this claim, Paul Born (2015), the president and cofounder of the Tamarack Institute, says that community engagement is particularly relevant when seeking to put together a common agenda. In spite of the recognition of the importance of involving the community, however, it is often not done in the way that it should be. Research points out that one of the most pronounced differences between collective impact initiatives and community organizing initiatives is the level of engagement with residents. Community organizing seeks to build local leadership, whereas collective impact draws on organizational leadership (Christens & Inzeo, 2015). Richard Harwood, the founder and president of the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, simply says that “we want to put community in collective impact, but we don’t do it” (2015, p.50). Whatever the reason for this may be, the result is that the likelihood of success decreases and opportunities that would have arisen with community involvement are missed.

The question that needs to be answered, then, is what role the community itself plays in the process of collective impact, which seeks long-lasting change on its behalf. There have undeniably been various examples of collective impact’s success, but in those cases in which the community was not directly involved in the process, the question becomes whether these results are a permanent move in the right direction or the immediate result of combined organizational efforts. The role of the community needs to be further explored, especially in light of the fact that though it is not clearly defined in the model, there is widespread support of community involvement among professionals.

CHAPTER TWO

Method

Type of Study

For the purposes of studying Changed Communities as an example of collective impact in action, I elected to conduct a qualitative research study. The purpose of this study is to answer the question as to how collective impact seeks to engage community members, or recipients of service, within the processes of assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating the work of the initiative. Because Changed Communities is still in its early stages, there would not be adequate data to determine the answer to this question by quantitative measures. Through qualitative interviews, however, a variety of perspectives provide a deeper understanding of the issue in terms of the organization's intended goals and their actual progress. Additionally, they show the extent to which the organization, as well as the recipients of the organization's services, feel that success has been achieved. Interviews were decided upon in order to gain the most insight from the participants, as depth of individual perspective was important in answering the research question most effectively. This was particularly true in light of the fact that a purposive sample was utilized in the study.

Participants

My sample is one of convenience. For reasons of confidentiality, and in order to share the responses of the participants most fully, pseudonyms have been used in place of

their real names. Additionally, the name of the city and the name of the collective impact initiative within the study have been changed in order to protect the identities of those involved. I have, however, included a brief bio of the participants so that you might have a fuller understanding of the diversity of opinions that were shared through the study. In addition to diversity in terms of position surrounding the Changed Communities initiative, there is also diversity in terms of race and gender. There are two male participants and three female. Two of the interviewees were Caucasian, two were African American, and one was Hispanic.

Selection of interview participants was based upon seeking a range of perspectives of those involved with the Changed Communities initiative. Based upon my own study of the initiative, as well as a meeting with one of the initiative's founders, there were five people who were chosen for the sample. Daniel is the director of the backbone organization within the collective impact initiative, so his perspective is important for a baseline representation of Changed Communities itself. Robert is leader in local government, a member of the Changed Communities board and additionally helped in the formation of the initiative, so he will also have much to contribute concerning the organizational view of their intent and success concerning community member involvement. Angela is also a member of the board, but has a professional background in community engagement, which grants a different perspective that is important to gain. Regina is an intern with Changed Communities completing her Master of Social Work; she has grown up in the community, and her role within her internship has largely been serving with the Community Engagement Council. Ally works with the local Community Development Corporation and has been working with Changed

Communities to further involve recipients of services within the process of discussing and designing solutions, so her more objective perspective will compliment those stemming from within the initiative itself. These five interviewees were judged to be the best in creating a diverse sample that would provide both a breadth and depth of knowledge and insight. Perspectives ranging from organizational leadership to those working within the planning process to those working specifically to engage the community will provide a well-rounded array of information from which conclusions may be drawn. Each, in their own way, is specifically able to speak into the issue of collective impact's ability to effectively engage the community.

Procedure

An interview is to be set up with each of the participants, with each signing an informed consent form before beginning the interview. The interviews will consist of six questions which get to the heart of the research question concerning community involvement within the process of collective impact. The interview guide is designed for a semi-structured interview, which provides the specific set of questions to be asked and answered, but simultaneously allows the interviewer the freedom to explore certain aspects of the interviewees' answers. This freedom is important, as the interview questions are designed to be open-ended, allowing for a wide variety of response, which may require clarification, further explanation, or follow-up.

The interviews were then transcribed, coded for themes, and analyzed. Themes were determined by drawing on similar areas of discussion within the interviewees' answers and finding the important connections between answers and between interviews.

They were analyzed to discover areas of overlap between interviews and areas of individuality, as well as similarity or disparity between themes. Themes were examined individually as well as in reference to the part they play within the whole, seeing whether the interviewees' differences in position and background affected the similarity or difference between themes within their individual interviews.

Figure 1

Interview Guide
1. What conditions in Waco do you believe led to the belief that a collective impact initiative was the necessary step for community change?
2. Who was and is important to involve in order for this community change to be successful and continue to succeed?
3. Many would say that collective impact's focus on organizational leadership makes it a grasstops effort as opposed to one which is grassroots. How would you respond?
4. What role do community members play within collective impact?
5. How does collective impact seek to involve community members within the process? Has this been successful?
6. In looking back, what do you wish had been included in establishing this collective impact process that wasn't? What, if anything, would you change?
7. Is there anything else that you think I should know which we haven't already discussed?

CHAPTER THREE

Results

Once the five interviews were conducted and transcribed, a coding process was utilized to determine the key themes that emerged from the transcripts. From this process, 10 primary themes, or central ideas, were identified and developed, seeking to understand the way in which the themes interact with one another and contribute to an overall understanding of collective impact, which we will define, based upon the current literature, as a method of collaboration which operates according to the tenets of continuous communication, shared metrics, mutually reinforcing activities, a backbone organization, and a common agenda.

The Formation of a Collective Impact Initiative

There are several factors that are important in the formation of a collective impact initiative, several of which came across quite clearly through the interviews. Three of the central ideas that were identified contribute greatly to one's understanding of what is required to successfully begin such an initiative. The nature of the community in which the initiative seeks to create change, the spirit of collaboration which already exists, and the complexity of the issues which are to be resolved are all critical to collective impact's success.

Community

Community is something about which four of the five interviewees spoke. Several facets of the community make it ideal for collective impact to achieve its intended results: the community's size, willingness to work together, and existing strengths and resources. The community's size is worthy of note because it is geographically small, but within that geographically small size are some social problems far greater than its size would suggest. This type of containment allows for a collaborative effort such as a collective impact initiative to have a greater opportunity to make a difference, as it minimizes the complications brought on by having to manage a larger area. Further, as Regina pointed out, "Our city was the perfect model for [collective impact] because it's big enough that there's a lot of moving pieces that aren't effective when they aren't communicating, but it's also small enough that you can get all the major players together and feel the movement going on in each of the different realms." She sums up the benefit of the community's size perfectly, pointing out that it is big enough that the silo methods of social improvement currently being used are not effective, but that it is small enough that a collaborative effort can make a city-wide impact if approached in the right way.

Something which three of the interviewees mentioned additionally is the overall friendliness of the city's population, which leads to a tremendous willingness of professionals and nonprofessionals alike to work together—something which may not be true of other communities. Some citizens are willing to take shared responsibility of their community and approach new ideas with a sense of togetherness, which places collective impact within the natural realm of possibilities for the community. In the words of Daniel, "There's just an environment here of people being willing to talk to each other

and work together... I think that's simple but it is also incredibly important. You don't have that elsewhere." The community's "friendliness," as one of the interviewees put it, is something which would be easy to take for granted. But for the interviewees, it was something that was not only worthy of mention, but something which they argued had the ability to push the initiative closer to either success or failure.

In regards to community, what also must be mentioned is the resources and assets which already existed within the community upon which the initiative could potentially draw. It was mentioned by two of the interviewees that the county has over 300 registered nonprofits and 365 churches, a fact which, given the high rates of poverty, is particularly astounding. Angela additionally mentioned the community having two major hospitals and three institutions of higher education, concluding that "when we're good, we're good, and when we're bad, we're bad, and someone just needs to find some middle ground." The city so many resources, organizational and otherwise, but has thus far been ineffective in utilizing those resources to meet the needs of those within the community. A collective impact initiative which would seek to align the efforts of existing organizations and programs was a clear fit for a community in which so many organizations were attempting to do good work but were failing to make a quantifiable difference.

Collaboration

When discussing the development of Changed Communities, the collaboration which already existed within the community was something each of the interviewees brought up as something of critical importance to the initiative's formation. It is

interesting because one of the issues which collective impact seeks to resolve is a lack of communication, and yet in order for collective impact to be most effective, according to the interviewees, there needs to be collaboration already in existence. These two facts seem contradictory, yet in fact they are not. In this community, there were already excellent collaborations in place, but they were in respect to particular issues, rather than seeking to understand the ways in which these issues intersected.

Before the formation of Changed Communities, there was already collaboration taking place. The Education Alliance, for example, was mentioned by two of the interviewees as being a leader in the community in regards to collaboration. Their work in the area of education was tremendous, and the groundwork they laid was highly utilized in beginning the collective impact initiative. Another example provided by Ally was the Housing Coalition, involving Habitat for Humanity, Community Development Corporation, and Neighborworks, which all worked to improve their services and know better how to refer clients to one another. Aside from these two, the Homelessness Coalition, the Poverty Solutions Group, and the Health Committee were also brought forward as examples of collaboration around particular issues in the community.

Despite this collaboration, however, the interviewees still felt that one of the problems in the community was that people were not talking enough to one another. Each of the collaborations that they mentioned were issue-specific. And while this was important, and certainly a move in the right direction, measurable impact was still missing. Collective impact, then, was the next logical step to begin helping these collaborations to begin collaborating with one another. There are important pieces to the

puzzle which collective impact provides, such as shared measurements and mutually reinforcing activities, without which makes one's chances for success far less likely.

The main reason that collective impact grew out of the collaboration that already existed is the fact that people began to fully realize the interconnected nature of the issues on which they had been working for so many years. Those working on the health committee began to realize the extent to which health was impacted by a family's financial security, and those working on the Poverty Solutions Group realized how dependent a family's financial security was upon their level of education, and those within the Education Alliance realized how connected students' ability to learn was to their overall health. These three issues were not social problems that could be fixed individually, but rather required a greater collaborative effort, and it was collective impact that seemed to fit this newly realized need.

Issue Complexity

Though it seems counterintuitive, it is important that the issues which are to be solved are complex enough that collective impact is warranted. Collective impact was designed for use in relation to issues which were impossible for any single organization or entity to solve. Its methods of collaboration are effective in dealing with pervasive and complex social issues, so it is worthy of note that the condition of the community must necessarily be taken into account. Each of the interviewees supported this notion, mentioning in some respect that the issues within the community called for such a method as collective impact because of their magnitude and interconnected nature. The high degree of poverty within the community was something mentioned by several of the

participants, and not only the fact that the poverty rate was high, but that it was growing. The magnitude of the rates of poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity, to name only a few, made the community prime for an approach such as collective impact.

Further, the interconnected nature of the primary issues which were identified “added a layer of complexity and complication... We couldn’t make headway in one area without recognizing the interdependence of the others as well,” according to Robert. In the case of Changed Communities, not only has one complex issue been identified, but three, all of which are intricately connected to one another. And the three core issues of health, education, and financial security are those that have been identified by the collective impact initiative as requiring action to be taken. As Ally points out, “There’s a lot of issues that Changed Communities can’t address because there’s too many.” Collective impact is ideal for such situations in that it allows those within the initiative to focus on a few core issues, which in turn will affect the countless other issues which plague the community as well.

Last, collective impact allows those within the initiative to take a step back and consider the bigger picture, taking the full context into account, rather than isolating the issue being addressed. In response to what could have been different, Angela replied, “I wish slavery hadn’t happened. I wish indigenous people could have had their own land. When I look back and think about what we could have done differently, I can’t answer that because it just keeps going all the way back.” Though these issues may seem unrelated to community change being sought, the fact of the matter is that they are not. Collective impact, in its bigger picture approach, allows a historical and cultural context to enter into the equation, acknowledging the complexities that are otherwise often lost.

In summary, there are three central ideas that are worthy of note when looking at the formation of collective impact initiatives. The first is the community in which the initiative is to take place, particularly in regards to its size, willingness to work together, and existing resources. The second is the existing spirit of collaboration, looking to whether there have already been more isolated collaborative efforts put into action and to whether there has been a natural ideological shift or realization as to the need for something greater. And finally, the complexity of the issues which are in need of resolution contributes to whether collective impact is the next logical step. Collective impact was designed to handle complexity, and unless the issue warrants this type of approach, an initiative is likely going to be overkill. An initiative's likelihood of success is greatly improved with the existence of these three factors.

The Management of a Collective Impact Initiative

While the formation of the initiative is important, it is also important to understand how to effectively manage the initiative in a way that holds true to its original intent yet also meets its goals. There were two central ideas which related to the management of a collective impact initiative, each of which is essential to its continued success. The two themes found within the interviewees' responses were the need for effective organizational leadership and the fulfillment of the role of the backbone organization. Though these do not provide an exhaustive list of what is required, they certainly shed light on what values must be held to most tightly when managing an initiative such as Changed Communities.

Organizational Leadership

Each of the participants noted the importance of organizational leadership, either in regards to local government, businesses, or nonprofits. When utilizing collective impact, it is important to have people working on the issues that can actually effect change within the community. Several interviewees noted the necessity of having those who were able to make changes at the decision-making level, which typically requires having organizational leaders involved. And as Ally pointed out, it is important to have organizational leaders from different sectors as well. In order to make balanced decisions with the greatest chance of success, there must be input from not only the nonprofits, but also the financial sector. As Daniel put it, “Collective impact brings together people who can decide to do things differently to work together more effectively to get better results.” It is important to collective impact’s success that those involved are able to contribute to its outcomes, which requires that they have some sort of positional authority to enact the decisions that are made by the group within their own sphere of influence. Otherwise, there is no way for the initiative to get the ball rolling on the issues that they want to be impacting.

Organizational leadership is also important because the organizations which these individuals lead are able to provide the support and resources necessary to carry through the change which the initiative is seeking. It is these organizations which are able to provide administrative assistance, expertise, funding, connections with other organizations, and more. One of the ways to help to ensure success of a collective impact initiative is to gain organizational buy-in early. Changed Communities, for example, has had tremendous help not only from local organizations, but from entities such as the

National Resource Network, who have aided in providing a greater understanding of the government's role within the process, and the Episcopal Health Foundation, which has focused its efforts in assisting with community engagement. Community engagement, though difficult to define due to its complexity, is the process of building relationships with members of the community in order to grant the opportunity for a collective vision to be created with the input of all who are to be affected by that vision.

One last important note in regards to organizational leadership is that it must be involved in the community and have its best interests at heart. If the community feels that these organizational leaders are pushing through an agenda of their own instead of seeking to make a positive difference, then forward progress will be minimal at best. Angela pointed out that “we gave care that these individuals truly had the community's forward movement in mind and were able to hear the issues of the community because good work had already been done.” She asserts that the organizational leadership involved within the initiative must be that which has a proven track record within the community for doing what is right and good. Though the organizational leaders are required for their decision-making and action-taking ability, the leaders which one would desire to be involved within the process are those which would not make a decision or take an action unless it is one which they have heard the community's thoughts regarding and they are certain that is one with which the community is in agreement.

Role of the Backbone Organization

In managing a collective impact initiative, it is vital that the backbone organization fulfill its many responsibilities effectively. Without the support that the

backbone provides, the initiative would soon be unable to function, as it serves a variety of needed roles: goal-setting, assessment, communication, education, and engagement. Each of these is uniquely necessary to collective impact's success, so the backbone organization's ability to fulfill these is essential.

Changed Communities, which is the backbone organization of the community's collective impact initiative, was formed to "collectively begin to try to move people to shared goals and common metrics" according to Angela. In this way, they would be able to oversee goal-setting and assessment to ensure that the community collectively moves in the right direction. The backbone organization also serves as an external motivator to help organizations stay on track in regards to the goals that the collective impact initiative has decided upon and the metrics which have been established to measure progress toward these goals. Sharing goals and metrics is important in that it affects the way that services are provided to the community in need. When everyone is on the same page, these services can be provided more effectively, expediently, and intentionally. The backbone organization is also able to take the time to ensure that the goals and metrics which the community sets are grounded in data and research, something which is thoroughly time-consuming that the organizations themselves may or may not have the time or resources to do themselves.

Another important role of the backbone organization is communication, both between the various organizations and entities within the initiative as well as between the initiative and the community. In the words of Daniel, "It's our job to talk to these folks and these folks and these folks and let each group know what the other groups are saying to inform where we go as a community." It is important for those involved to know what

the other members of the initiative are doing, so that the broader scope of the work being done can be kept in mind. It is also necessary to communicate with the community, however, so that the organizational leaders can ensure that the actions that they are taking are aligned with the community's needs and expectations. This level of communication requires an organization whose purpose is to coordinate activities and ensure that all participants are working toward the goals that had been decided upon. Without the work of an external organization, the responsibility of such continuous communication would detract from the participating organizations' ability to serve the community.

Furthermore, the backbone organization needs to educate the public about collective impact and the way in which it seeks community change. The importance of this was illustrated in Robert's assertion that the key to successful collaboration is "Groundhog Day. You've got to repeat the message of the collective impact mantra daily, and you've got to be really focused on how you inculcate that." Collective impact is not something which produces immediate results, it is hard to generate immediate excitement and understanding about what it is seeking to do. Changed Communities does not produce new programs or services; it is often difficult for people to understand the work that it is doing, being that it is hard to attribute tangible results to its existence, especially at first. This, then, is why education and communication are so important. The backbone organization must seek to educate the community as to how collective impact works, generating greater understanding of the way in which slow but lasting change is being sought.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, the backbone organization is responsible for engaging the community on the issues identified by the initiative, which in the case of

Changed Communities, are health, education, and financial security. Changed Communities created the Community Engagement Council in order to engage the community on these issues, a fact which was mentioned by each of the interviewees. The council holds events in different parts of the community, whether that be neighborhood block parties, conversations with congregations, etc., during which they speak with members of the community about the work of the initiative and whether they think that it is making a difference. In conjunction with the responsibility of communication that was discussed earlier, the backbone organization is responsible for taking the information gained through community engagement and giving it back to the decision-makers to inform the way in which they approach the issues they are attempting to impact. To take community engagement a step further, it is important for the backbone organization not only to engage the community initially but to discover their thoughts about the work of the initiative, and to then follow up later to find whether those opinions have either improved or deteriorated as the collective impact initiative has progressed in its efforts.

Managing a collective impact initiative is something which requires a great deal of intentional effort. And as identified by the five participants in the qualitative study, there are two themes which are central to successfully doing so. Organizational leadership must be involved in the initiative in order to have the influence and authority to make decisions and effect change and also have the resources and experience to support the initiative's efforts. The leadership in place, however, must be engaged with the community and engender confidence that they have the community's best interests in mind. The backbone organization must also fulfill its roles and responsibilities, including goal-setting, assessment, communication, education, and engagement. Only with these

two things effectively in place can it be ensured that a collective impact initiative will be successfully managed.

The Continued Success of a Collective Impact Initiative

Once a collective impact initiative has been successfully developed and is being successfully managed and implemented, there are still things that must be kept in mind moving forward in order to ensure its continued success. Two of the themes identified within the five interviews spoke to this: trust and problem-solving ability. Without these in place, the initiative may have been able to experience initial success, but it will be short-lived. Each of these is integral to the continuation of that initial success and the assurance of the initiative's longevity.

Trust

It is possible to include all the components above in the formation and management of a collective impact initiative, but without trust, there is little likelihood that it will last. Trust, however, can only be accomplished through relationships. Relationships improve one's ability to engage the community, to enter into conversation with community members and gain honest feedback, and promote cooperation. In order for collective impact to succeed, people must be patient, as it is certainly not a quick fix. Patience, however, only derives from the ability to trust those who are moving the process forward, which requires authentic leadership and an intentional effort for all voices to be heard. People are more likely to trust those who listen to them. The key to success is knowing that "we're in this together and just have to figure out how to do this

better together,” as stated by Angela. The decision makers and community members alike must be on the same page, trusting that one another is seeking to achieve the same goals.

Relationships, however, are developed over time, and consequently trust is not built in a matter of days. In the words of Daniel, “My impulse is to say that I wish we had moved more quickly or had engaged more people more quickly, but I don’t know if that was possible. The more people you try to engage, the less you build relationships and trust.” The work of collective impact is slow by its nature, and it is important not to value forward motion over outward motion. Building trust within the community through taking the time to enter into relationship with those within the community which is being affected by the decisions being made is a worthwhile endeavor, even it seems unnecessarily time-consuming to some. That, in fact, is often one of the most difficult parts of a model such as collective impact. People want to see immediate results, but those results will not be long-lasting without first taking the painstaking time to build relationships and trust within the community.

Though still an excruciatingly slow process at times, one way to build trust effectively, as explained by Daniel, is to utilize social networks. In his words, “The point is to start with a handful of people and then use their social networks so that they can turn around to the people they know and trust in their relationships and tell them what’s going on and what’s happening and ask them what they think and so forth.” In this way, the collective impact initiative is able to engender trust within the community through the relationships which already exist.

Problem-Solving Ability

When undertaking any endeavor, it is important to be able to effectively solve the problems that arise, and particularly with something with as many intricacies and complexities as a collective impact initiative, this ability becomes especially important. Each of the five participants identified problem-solving as a crucial component to Changed Communities' success, though each of them provided various examples as to how this has been evident throughout the process. Robert noted that the business community has been particularly difficult to bring into the collective impact process, so Changed Communities has had to be intentional in finding better ways to communicate the return on investment which collective impact can provide to the business community. In communicating in that way, their involvement is more effectively secured. Regina reflected upon the way in which they approached community engagement at the beginning of the process. At first, when they were engaging the community, leading questions were asked and the conversation was more directed, but as they continued, they learned from the mistakes that were made and the problems that occurred as a result, such as more limited communication between community members and the initiative. In response, they worked to ask more open-ended questions and allow the community lead the discussion in the direction that they felt was important. Ally shared that one of the ways in which Changed Communities has responded to the problems that have arisen in regards to community engagement is that they have begun considering creating a position within the backbone organization whose sole job would be engaging the community in regards to the work of the initiative. Whether or not that position is created in the near future, the fact that that conversation has arisen at all points to the level at which the

initiative seeks to problem-solve. An example shared by Daniel was an instance in which the community engagement council lost a member which represented the Hispanic community, without whom that sector of the community had no representation on the council. Though it took them some time to find a replacement, they learned from the problem and began to utilize social networks to find more diverse representatives, the same process which was mentioned in regards to trust-building. Lastly, Angela spoke of when Changed Communities released their board picture, which was comprised entirely of upper-class white men, aside from one upper-class white woman. Though the board was comprised of people who had the ability to make decisions and carry them out within the community, the message that was sent to the community was one which resonated in a highly negative way among the communities of color. As Changed Communities realized the backlash that was occurring, they responded by taking the picture down and intentionally selecting other board members who would be able to represent the community of color on the board level. With each example, the collective impact initiative had to adapt to the situation, solving any problem that became a hindrance to its progress.

Additionally, beyond simply the ability to solve problems as they arise, it is important to be able to learn from the mistakes that are made and the problems that are experienced. If those involved do not learn from the problems that occur, then they are purposeless. If on the other hand, however, lessons are learned from the problems and improvements are implemented as a result, then those problems begin to serve a purpose within the larger narrative of the initiative. This next-level problem-solving is one of the factors which sets apart successful initiatives from those which are unable to gain ground.

Collective impact is a process which requires adaptability and problem-solving, as well as the ability to learn along the way.

The initial success of a collective impact initiative is largely tied up in its development and maintenance, but its continued success is reliant upon the initiative's ability to build trust and solve problems. These factors are integral to the continuation of an initiative. Without trust, the patience and perseverance required to push collective impact forward are lost, and without problem-solving ability, collective impact will crumble under its own complexity and the problems that inevitably ensue as a result. With each of these attributes in place, however, the chances of the initiative's success greatly improve.

The Often Overlooked Aspects of a Collective Impact Initiative

It would seem at first glance that the various aspects of a successful collective impact initiative have been exhausted, being that its development, maintenance, and continued success have already been discussed. And unfortunately, many who have undertaken such initiatives, and even experts within the field of collective impact, would agree. What has been found within these interviews, however, is that there are some pieces of the puzzle present within the example of Changed Communities which warrant attention as collective impact continues to gain popularity as a means of effecting community change. Three themes found within the responses of the participants were themes which are largely missing within the current body of research on collective impact, yet diversity, grassroots leadership, and community engagement, are quite

arguably of equal importance to those aspects of collective impact which have already been discussed.

Diversity

There must be an intentional promotion of diversity within the collective impact initiative in order to ensure that all groups in a community are being adequately represented within the process. Groups naturally tend toward homogeneity, so it is not enough to say that all groups have the same opportunity to be involved; instead, it is necessary to be intentional in ensuring that there is diverse representation in all respects, particularly in regards to race, but also in regards to area of town, field of expertise, etc.

Angela said it best when she pointed out that “we’re still missing pieces, and the pieces that we’re missing, because of the high needs in our community, are black and brown... People may think that race has nothing to do with Changed Communities, but there are underlying pieces that make or break how we move forward on these issues, and race is one of them.” Statistically, those of color are disproportionately represented in regards to those in poverty, those struggling with education, and those of poor health, which are the three areas of focus for Changed Communities. Being that this community is no exception to these statistics, it is important then to consider the opportunity for diverse representation among those who have decision-making authority. It is not enough to pull in organizational leaders, who more often than not are white upper or middle class. While these leaders are important, it is also important to balance this perspective with the perspective of those who experience these issues in a way that those who do not share the common bond of minority status typically are unable to understand. In Daniel’s

words, the organizational leaders are typically “a small handful of people, and often a small handful of mostly white affluent people, which is not reflective of the whole community.” For this reason, the moves which Changed Communities made to increase the diversity of its board were of immense importance in reflecting the community more holistically, and in turn creating a greater level of trust and engagement. Further, he asserts that one of the changes that still needs to be made within the backbone organization itself is to increase the racial diversity of its staff. In some examples of attempted collective impact initiatives, there have been issues within the communities of the initiatives being viewed as a system of racism and oppression rather than a system of positive change. Because of this, it is all the more important that racial diversity is intentionally valued within collective impact, being that otherwise it can fall into the trap of contributing to the systems that it originally sought to change.

Racial diversity is perhaps the most important means by which the need for diversity asserts itself, but it is also important within collective impact to promote the experiential diversity of those involved with the initiative. Within each area of focus, there needs to be diverse representatives speaking into the issues involved in order to get a more well-rounded perspective. An example given by Ally was Changed Communities’ focus on health and the need to not only involve healthcare providers, but also nurse practitioners and clients and a wide range of people who work in the healthcare industry, such medical professionals, health insurance providers, preventive care workers, etc. More broadly, it is important that a collective impact initiative experience cross-sector involvement, as the differing perspectives of nonprofit organizations and business and

educational institutions and healthcare facilities and more will only serve to strengthen the initiative's overall approach.

Yet one more area in which diversity is important is in the area of community engagement, through which feedback is received. This community engagement piece, in order to be truly effective, requires a diversity in terms of geographic location within the community, race, socioeconomic status, position or occupation, age, and more. Without a diversity of opinion, the feedback is one-sided and not truly representative of what the community at large thinks of the work being done. The ability to see the differences in opinion between areas, age groups, racial groups, etc. is important in being able to consider the alteration of the initiative's approach or the change in means of communication to a particular group.

Grassroots Leadership

Collective impact was originally designed with an emphasis on organizational leadership, the ideology being that it was necessary to bring people together to make decisions at a community level who had the authority to bring those decisions into reality. While there is truth in this, as was seen when discussing the theme of organizational leadership, another theme often gets overlooked because of it. Grassroots leadership is of equal importance, its value simply manifests itself differently. Grassroots leadership is comprised of members of the community whose authority is derived from relationships rather than position, who are seeking to make a positive difference in the community in which they live. Ally asserts that grassroots leaders "are the ones who are the experts and will know what should be informing our policy and strategy. To many, that seems

backwards because we want to use the best research and evidence-based practice... but if we think about the grassroots people as experts and let them show us that their lives are evidence-based, then we'll get further." Often, those organizational leaders believe that they know what is best for the community, even though it is the grassroots leaders who are a part of the community who are able to speak from firsthand experience. This is the first point of importance in relation to grassroots leadership: the experience they have to offer. Decision-making ability is important, but if this is not coupled with the experience of those who are a part of the community that the initiative seeks to serve, that ability is unable to be fully utilized. As Regina pointed out, community members have tremendous wisdom to share if they are asked to do so, and everyone would like to have that opportunity, as they all would like to have a positive impact in their community and have a voice in the goings-on surrounding attempts for improvement.

The experience that grassroots leaders have to offer can be spoken into the initiative indirectly, but it also can be utilized in terms of a formalized position granted to such leaders. Three of the interviewees spoke of the ways in which Changed Communities has sought to involve grassroots leaders within its process, even though that is not the typical format of collective impact initiatives elsewhere. One of the most important ways that this was done within Changed Communities was the formation of the Community Engagement Council, which was comprised of grassroots leaders whose job was to engage the communities, specifically in regards to health, education, and financial security, and to then report the opinions, values, and suggestions of the community to the various decision-making committees that comprise Changed Communities. In this way, the connections of these leaders to the community was utilized in order to facilitate

discussion and discover the best way to proceed in terms of strategy for community change. While this was good, however, simply utilizing their connections in order to gain the views of the broader community wasn't taking full advantage of what grassroots leaders had to offer. Over time, grassroots leaders have been placed within decision-making committees and some have even been placed on the board of Changed Communities, so that their experience and perspective can have the influence that it deserves. Without the input of such leaders, it is far too easy for the organizational leaders to take the initiative in a direction that is counterproductive, unneeded or unwanted by the community, or misaligned with the values of the community.

Collective impact initiatives must be understanding of the fact that the agenda of the community itself may at times be different than the agenda of the initiative. Rather than resisting this difference, the initiative must be willing to support the community in its agenda and find the ways in which it overlaps with that of the initiative, as it is through this common ground that trust will be built. As stated by Daniel, "If you can connect the grassroots movement with folks who are in a position of authority... that's your best option." The example he gave to illustrate this point was the issue of payday lending within the community. Predatory lending was not something which was on Changed Communities' radar as an issue of primary interest, but the community recognized it as being harmful, so action was taken to raise awareness and advocate policy change from the grassroots level. When this grassroots effort was partnered with support from city government, change ensued. It required the support of organizational leadership, but nothing would likely have been done about the issue of predatory lending had grassroots leadership not taken action first. Within collective impact, it is the

grassroots leadership which must have a prominent voice in regards to what is important to the community and what ought to be the focus and action of the initiative. Without their input, credibility is lost, as the faith which the community has in these leaders is not then transferred to the initiative's vision.

Community Engagement

Though defined earlier in the chapter, it is necessary to ensure for clarity's sake what is meant by community engagement in this context. Community engagement, though difficult to define due to its complexity, is the process of building relationships with members of the community in order to grant the opportunity for a collective vision to be created with the input of all who are to be affected by that vision. This is a topic which has arisen at times throughout the discussion of the other nine themes that have been covered thus far, but it is still important to look at it as a topic worthy of note unto itself. The fact that many of the other themes could not be discussed without mention of community engagement simply goes to show that this theme is of particular importance in relation to collective impact. Many of the important aspects of collective impact which have been discussed thus far are of significantly less import if community engagement is not valued alongside it. It is essential to build trust within the community, but if the community is not being effectively engaged, then that trust is not being utilized in the way that it ought to be. It is necessary to involve grassroots leadership within the process, but if the community from which those leaders come is not also involved, then the perspective from which the initiative is working is still limited, and further, those leaders become alienated over time. Intentional promotion of diversity is needed, but if diverse

representation does not extend to the way in which the voices of all groups within the community are heard, then the initiative fails to be diverse in its strategy and implementation. These are just a few examples, but the fact remains that community engagement is an essential component, which in many ways brings all of the other aspects of collective impact which have been mentioned together.

Though some of the issues have been brought up in connection with other key themes, it is necessary to bring them up once more in connection with community engagement. Effective engagement involves educating the community about the work of collective impact. Community members must understand the work being done in order for them to support and contribute to the initiative. Community engagement is time-consuming, as it involves relationships. To truly ascertain the views of the broader community about the issues that affect them, there must be a relationship in which honesty, authenticity, and a desire to impact change are valued. While these things may be possible outside the scope of a relationship, they certainly exist more readily within the context of a trusting relationship, whether that be between organizations or individuals.

First, community engagement is essential in ensuring that the measurements, goals, and strategies for obtaining those goals are aligned with the community's values, practical, etc. As pointed out by Robert, community members must contribute to the conversation as to what should constitute the initiative's measurements of success, being that those measurements must reflect the changes taking place within the community in which these members live. To further this point, Regina voices a similar thought, saying that "the more I've become involved, the more I've realized that the most important

players are community members... the fact is that we can dream up all the strategies we want, but if the community doesn't think it will work then it won't work." The voices of those whose lives the decision-makers are trying to affect must be of utmost importance in determining what the initiatives goals are, how to measure success in relation to these goals, and how to achieve these goals. Community engagement steers the direction of the initiative when utilized properly, as long-term success is contingent upon the community becoming a part of what is happening, an event which is far less likely if they have not been engaged from the beginning of the process.

It is easy to say that community engagement is necessary, but it is far more difficult to come to an understanding as to how to go about doing it. The question that must be asked, as posed by Daniel, is "how do you put community members in a position where they can really best articulate what, from a grassroots level, is going to work and be effective?" This is the question which he has sought to answer as the Director of Changed Communities, and it is the question which has led to a variety of approaches in seeking to successfully engage the community which the initiative is seeking to impact. Changed Communities has worked to have community meetings in which intentional space is created for community members to voice their thoughts on matters of importance within the work being done by the initiative. These events are hosted by either the members of the Community Engagement Council, who are grassroots leaders with ties to the community, or by those within the backbone organization Changed Communities. Each of these is important, as the presence of grassroots leaders supporting the initiative is important in engaging the community, but the presence of those representing the initiative itself is also important. Both pieces are required to fully engage the community

in a way that promotes their confidence in what the initiative strives to do and that validates their voice and gives them reason to voice their opinions. Further, it is necessary that the community members know that their input will not only be heard, but utilized. If they feel that the meetings held to gain their input are no more than a show of interest, then there is no reason for them to participate from their perspective. Unless they feel that their participation is of worth, it will not be gained. The community must be engaged in a genuine way if it is expected that they genuinely engage in return. It must move beyond gaining the community's feedback to allowing them to speak into the process of decision-making and strategizing. This could be an informal process such as the meetings discussed above or even a formalized process such as intentionally setting aside a certain number of positions on committees and the board for community members to fill.

Finally, what is important to consider in conjunction with community engagement is that enough is never enough. Though Changed Communities has been groundbreaking within the field of collective impact by emphasizing community engagement in the way that they have, the interviewees readily admit that there is still a long way to go. Angela states that there is much in which Changed Communities ought to take pride, but there is still work to do as long as there are still people within the community who have not been engaged. The work of community engagement is not simply about ensuring that a diverse sampling of opinions has been gathered; it is about seeking to engage each and every member of the community being served in order to ensure that no voice has not been heard. The more community members who are engaged within the process, the easier it is to begin working toward the initiative's identified goals because more people are focusing on the same goals, willing to work together to support a process in which they

took part. Community engagement, then, may not be seen as a part of the development, maintenance, or continued success of the initiative. It is an integral part to collective impact innately and must be utilized at all phases of the initiative in order for it to be successful; it must become part of the initiative's DNA.

It is clear from the responses of all five interviewees that there are aspects of collective impact that those seeking to utilize it too often overlook. It may be because these things are countercultural or they are difficult or time-consuming, but whatever the reason, the fact remains that they are undervalued in the world of collective impact and community change. Diversity, grassroots leadership, and community engagement, however, are of inestimable value in relation to collective impact, as it is these three things which often contain the key to success within them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the five in-depth interviews which were conducted, once analyzed, yielded 10 primary themes from which conclusions may be drawn. Across the five interviews, it was found that community, collaboration, and issue complexity were essential to the formation of a collective impact initiative. Effective maintenance of the initiative necessitated organizational leadership and a backbone organization. Important to the initiative's continued success were trust and problem-solving ability. Last, the often overlooked aspects of collective impact were diversity, grassroots leadership, and community engagement. Each of these 10 aspects of collective impact were found to be of immense importance from the data collected from the interviewees' responses. In the

next chapter, these results will be further elaborated upon in terms of what impacts they hold for the future of collective impact.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

Thus far, I have contextualized the issue of collective impact within the current body of research, described the type of study that was conducted, and put forth the results of that study. In this last and final chapter, I will discuss the findings of this particular study and what they have to offer to the collective impact literature. The previous chapter objectively presented the information which was collected from the qualitative study. In the present chapter I will seek to apply that information. There are areas of consideration to which professionals ought to pay heed, in order that the current trajectory of collective impact as a popular vehicle of community change may remain a positive one.

Ultimately, this study paid particular attention to the issue of community engagement as it relates to collective impact, so the findings are most applicable to the importance of buy-in and how to gain it. Buy-in, in this case, is the support and involvement of individuals or groups who are participants within the process of collective impact. The literature surrounding collective impact has largely neglected this component of the process, so the information found from the interviews is especially valuable. There are three main areas of buy-in which will be discussed within this chapter: the buy-in of organizational leaders already participating in the work which the initiative seeks to further, the buy-in of the business community, and the buy-in of the community being served.

Buy-in of Organizational Leadership

This is the most widely discussed aspect of collective impact. Without the cooperation of organizational leadership, a collective initiative would never come to fruition. The resources, influence, and decision-making capability that organizational leaders have to offer are all important, as is their experience working in the areas which the initiative hopes to impact. Understandably, this is the focus during the formation of a collective impact initiative, as can be seen even in the example of Changed Communities. The issue is not with the fact that organizational buy-in is a focus; the issue is that it often remains the sole focus throughout the collective impact process, thus neglecting the other areas of buy-in which are necessary for continued success.

There are two implications which can be drawn from the five interviews. The first is that while the support and involvement of organizational leaders is important, there is a caveat in regards to the type of organizational leaders which ought to be part of the initiative's work. The second is that organizational buy-in must not be the focus to the exclusion of other important groups. Each of these is critical for a different reason, and yet, as can be seen from the current literature, neither of these are often considered when an initiative is created.

As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, organizational leadership is essential to the success of a collective impact initiative, particularly when considering its management. Because organizational buy-in is such a basic necessity, gaining the support and involvement of organizations with influence and resources of knowledge, manpower, budget, etc. from the beginning of the process is vital to the initiative's ability to succeed. What must be understood, however, is that these issues of influence and resources are not

the most important aspect of gaining organizational buy-in. The character of the leaders involved, as well as the character of their organization, is of even greater importance. The leaders involved with the initiative must be ones whom the community trusts, who have earned the right, in the eyes of the community, to speak into the processes which will be creating positive change. This requires that a leader is involved with the community which the initiative is seeking to impact, have relationships with members of that community, have a working knowledge of the identified issues at play, and is a leader within an organization for which the same can be said. The names attached to the initiative are important in as far as the message that it sends. If names of people and organizations are recognized as ones which have been seeking to positively impact the community for some time, then there is an instant sense of trust and legitimacy which often results in a desire to see the initiative succeed. On the other hand, if there are names connected to the initiative which the community feels are self-serving or ineffective, there will be far less support for what the initiative is trying to accomplish. It is not enough to simply gain the involvement of organizations with influence and resources. There may be cases in which organizational leaders who have tremendous influence and resources may be the wrong choice. Though they have the power to move the initiative forward, if the community does not trust them, that solo momentum will quickly stagnate and come to an end.

This was well-illustrated in the example provided by Angela of the issue Changed Communities had with the release of the photo of their board of directors. The message which was sent was not what they had intended. Though those involved were not ones which the community identified negatively, they were also not ones whom the

community recognized. Because of this, there was less support than Changed Communities had hoped for until they realized that they needed to diversify their board and involve others whom the community could identify with more closely and recognize as individuals who were part of organizations which would ensure their best interests were kept in mind. This is a story of an initiative which successfully realized their mistake and were able to rectify their original message. Such success, however, is more the exception than the expectation, which is why it is so important for initiatives to begin to consider the types of organizational leaders which they involve from the beginning of the process, rather than as an afterthought as a result of backlash.

Second, it must be realized that while the buy-in of organizational leaders is important, it is not more important than the buy-in of other groups, and must therefore be put in proper perspective. Though this may seem obvious at face value, it is a fact which it would seem is often not taken into account in practice. It is certain, both from the literature as well as from the study, that organizational leadership is immensely important. The decision-making ability which organizational leadership possesses is necessary to make the changes that are required to positively affect the community as the initiative was created to do. This decision-making, however, must not take place within the vacuum of solely the experiences and perspectives of those making the decisions. When an initiative relies solely on the buy-in of those who are providing the resources and making the decisions, they are, whether or not they realize it, working toward top-down change, which has little chance of long-lasting impact within the communities which these initiatives are seeking to serve. The importance of organizational buy-in is best understood within the context of grassroots level community buy-in, which serves to

inform the way in which organizational leadership approaches the issues at hand. When the community is involved and supports the initiative, its collective voice guides the action being taken, which empowers the community to take part in determining their own outcome as well as sets in motion more effective strategies by the initiative, as they have been influenced by multiple perspectives.

Organizational leadership is necessary, but their purpose is best served alongside the input of the community itself, through the aspirations of the community's members. Collective impact focuses on cross-sector collaboration, but this often is manifested in as far as the initiative involves organizations which have different emphases and expertise. Another, and arguably a more important, form of cross-sector collaboration is when an initiative intentionally opens the door to different types of involvement altogether—organizational and individual, community influencers and community members, those who have benefitted from and those who have been taken advantage of by the system currently in place, and more. The input, involvement, and support of organizational leaders is only one piece of what is required to create, maintain, and propel a successful collective impact initiative. Without this piece, the initiative would have little chance of success, but with this piece by itself, those chances are no better.

Buy-in of the Business Community

At first, the business community may seem to be merely a subset of the concept of organizational leadership. In a broad sense, that may be true, but in practice, there is often a distinction made between the two. Within the context of collective impact initiatives, organizational leadership is typically comprised of those within the world of nonprofit

organizations which have already been working on the issues which the initiative is planning to resolve. This typically includes local government, educational institutions, health organizations, and other types of service-oriented nonprofits, but rarely does the need for organizational leadership seek to include the for-profit organizations within a community. This, however, is a grave oversight on the part of those forming the initiative, as there is much which the business community has to offer.

Throughout the interviews, it repeatedly came up that there is great value in different perspectives being utilized within the processes and strategies of collective impact. Specifically, several of the interviewees mentioned the value of having involvement of both the nonprofit and financial sectors. Though these two entities are sometimes at odds with each other philosophically, it is the duty of the collective initiative to bridge the gap between the two if the community, as a whole, is to experience transformation. Though they may differ philosophically, through collective impact they can actually learn the ways in which they benefit one another and take advantage of those things. Often times, the goals of nonprofits inadvertently serve also as a benefit to businesses, but this is rarely recognized because the language that each uses is so different. This is where the backbone organization must step in and work to fulfill its duty of continuous communication, being the mediator between two sectors which rarely work with one another.

Ignoring the business sector is certainly the easier option, but it is one which yields more limited results than the alternative, which is to seek their full involvement. It is the business community which provides job; it is the business community which both affects and is affected by the economy and citizens' financial wellbeing; and it is the

business community which has the greatest amount of resources, particularly in regards to funding and materials. These are all integral to the nature of a collective impact initiative, and their participation is therefore not only beneficial, but in many ways, it is essential. Whether the goal of the initiative is related to educational outcomes, improved financial wellbeing (both of which are goals of Changed Communities), the chances are that it will be related to jobs. Gaining the buy-in of the business community allows potential cooperation that encourages programs and strategies for the development of more jobs for those in need. It is only logical that the business community be involved in such strategies, as their perspective is most vital to the process, being that they are the community in which jobs are to be found. Additionally, there is incentive for the business community to offer its support; the case simply must be made in a way so that it understands the impact of what is trying to be accomplished. The business community operates in dollars and cents, whereas the nonprofit community typically operates in human life and other intangibles. Collective impact initiatives must articulate to the business community the return on investment which their support would bring. If this is done, their involvement and support will increase, as there is a particular motivation behind their actions as opposed to general good will, which can only provide a certain level of motivation. The business community, being for profit as it is, also has the greatest amount of funds and resources to offer the initiative. This is why the previous point is so important, as the articulation of the benefits which the initiative has to offer the business community is critical to the amount of funds and resources which the business community will then offer. While charitable organizations may garner some level of support, businesses are willing to invest far more than they are willing to give.

The business community has not only a great deal of money, but it also has different types of expertise, access to raw materials and goods, access to employees, economic influence, and more. They have a great deal to offer a collective impact initiative if their buy-in is received.

There is a difference between the buy-in of organizational leadership and that of the business community, however. One of the main points as to organizational buy-in was to ensure that the right type of organizational leaders are involved. In regards to the business community, on the other hand, this can be approached in a different way. Rather than focusing only on businesses which are trusted or involved in the community, there are other opportunities available. While it is important to gain the buy-in of trusted local businesses, there is also significant impact in including businesses which are less known or less trusted, upon the condition that they make certain adjustments if necessary, with the understanding that their involvement will increase their profile and consumer base. There is ability to trade influence when working with the business community, as partnerships are transactional in nature, the goal being mutual benefit.

Without the buy-in of businesses, certain goals are far harder to achieve, particularly those involving financial security. Additionally, the initiative loses a large pool of resources—financial, material, intellectual, experiential, and influential—from which it could have drawn. Though the approach which the initiative takes must be different in seeking to gain the buy-in of the business community from when it sought that of the organizational leadership, it does not make that of the business community less important. It simply serve a different purpose within the initiative. In the literature, as in the study, the business community is often overlooked, but as collective impact moves

forward, this must change. The way which the nonprofit and business worlds communicate with each other must change, and initiatives must begin to recognize the value which the business community's support and involvement adds to the work being done.

Buy-in of the Community Being Served

The primary implications which were taken from the study conducted were concerning who it is important for a collective impact initiative to involve. Thus far, we have discussed organizational leadership, which is the most obvious group which an initiative must involve and the one to which the greater portion of the current research has paid attention. The business community has also been discussed as well, and while it is overlooked in many circumstances, its importance is nonetheless recognized in the collective impact literature as well as in the study conducted. What must now be considered is something which has for too long been a gap in both the literature on the subject as well as in professionals' perspectives concerning what is important. The community being served plays a large part in determining what the goals of the initiative are, and is, in fact, the reason for the initiative's formation. It is interesting then, that often the community plays little other part in the process aside from its existence. What was found through the study, however, is the necessity of the community's buy-in. Without the support and involvement of the community being served, lasting change will rarely be achieved. If the community is not involved within the processes of strategizing, decision-making, visioning, and more, then there is little hope of a long-term positive impact.

The buy-in of the community being served is essential at all stages of the collective impact's formation and implementation. Its input is invaluable from even the beginning stages of seeking to form the initiative, as its perspective is needed to most effectively create a movement which meets the particular needs for change within that community. Those living within the community which the initiative seeks to positively impact have the ability to speak specifically as to what strategies could be employed that effectively penetrate, permeate, and propel the community in the desired direction. Gaining buy-in is not something which can be begun too soon; even before the initiative is formed, allowing, and even encouraging, community input and involvement in the processes surrounding the initiative's formation will positively benefit the outcomes. The sooner the community takes part in the initiative, the greater the sense of ownership it will feel, which in turn engenders trust, engagement, and motivation to impact change.

While it is beneficial to gain the buy-in of the community being served from the beginning, even in the midst of the collective impact initiative's formation, it is important to realize its value throughout the process as well. The community must be engaged in the forming, implementing, and evaluating of strategies utilized by the initiative. Its support of the initiative through its formation allows the community to speak into the broader vision, to become involved at the ground level and to take a greater sense of ownership and responsibility over the work that will be done. Their involvement in forming the strategies that come out of the initiative allows the community to take part in seeking to solve specific issues which it believes are important. The community's perspective as those who live daily in the midst of these social justice issues allows the members to provide unique insight—insight which informs the areas within each issue

which are most able to be positively affected, thus affecting the whole. The knowledge and experience of the community members being served is essential to the initiative's ability being able to gain a full understanding of the solutions required for the positive impact to be sustained.

Implementation of these strategies is also an area in which community support is beneficial. The strategies themselves ought to be informed by the ways in which the community thinks it would best be served, but the community's involvement ought not to end there. Community members ought to be involved with the implementation of the strategies decided upon by the collective impact initiative. This will greatly impact the confidence and trust which the community has about the strategies being carried out, and as has been discussed at length, trust is critical to the success of the initiative. Without community buy-in at this level, even if the strategies themselves were informed by the opinions and perspectives of the community, if there is no community support surrounding the implementation of these strategies, the community members will likely not adopt the strategies as their own. If members of the community are involved in the process however, the likelihood of this adoption increases dramatically.

Beyond formation and implementation of strategy, the community ought also to be involved in the evaluation of the strategies which the initiative utilizes. The initiative needs to value the feedback which the community has to offer as to how the strategies are working. If evaluation is not a step which is emphasized, the initiative's ability to grow and improve is stifled. Members of the community being served—those who are at the receiving end of the intended positive effects of the strategies put in place—are in the best position to provide the necessary information to determine whether the work of the

collective impact is making a tangible difference in the lives of those it is seeking to serve.

Ultimately, a collective impact initiative cannot seek to positively impact a community which is marginalized if the initiative perpetuates the community's marginalization by failing to include community members in the work that they do. It is hypocritical to desire community transformation and yet not allow the personal transformation of community members through their involvement in the process. In order for collective impact to stay true to its intent—positively impacting communities through collaboration—then it is necessary that those being served are not only allowed to collaborate, but also that their collaboration becomes a priority. It not only is important philosophically, but it has countless practical benefits, many of which have been explained in the points made above. Though the intersection of collective impact and community engagement is something which has been only minimally explored within current literature, this exploration is the next major step which collective impact must take in order to continue its trajectory as a force of positive community change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has, through review of the current literature and particularly through qualitative study, investigated the intersection of collective impact and community engagement. The first chapter took a close look at collective impact, discussing the preconditions and conditions which are necessary for its formation and existence, as well as various characteristics which are necessary for its success. Case studies were examined and the trends related to collective impact's growth and progress

were discussed. Finally, the chapter put forth the gap in the research which was to be found, recognizing that it is often equally important to know what the gaps are as it is to know that information which has already been filled in. The gap was the place of community engagement within collective impact, and through the identification of this gap, the importance of the study was also identified.

Next, the method of the study was described. A qualitative study was conducted, comprised of five in-depth interviews with community leaders involved with Changed Communities, the collective impact initiative which was studied. The interview guide was provided, so that the reader would be clear as to the type of content which was to be gleaned from the interviews. In this, the process by which the results would be gathered was explained as well, describing the transcribing and coding which took place in order to arrive at conclusions.

Once the method of the study was understood, the third chapter described the results of that study. Here, the 10 themes which emerged from the 5 interviews were identified and described. These themes revealed the importance of various aspects of collective impact, some of which aligned closely with the current literature, while others differed considerably. Each theme was detailed, using information from the various interviews in which it arose to fully depict its relevance and importance. First, the themes of community, collaboration, and issue complexity were discussed in relation to the formation of a collective impact initiative. Next, the management of the initiative was informed by the necessity of the themes of organizational leadership and the role of the backbone organization. The next two themes, trust and problem-solving ability, were examined within the context of the initiative's continued success. Lastly, the often

overlooked aspects of collective impact were described as the themes of diversity, grassroots leadership, and community engagement. Each of these 10 themes was described as uniquely important and of individual necessity to the overall initiative, as found within the interviews which were conducted.

The final chapter laid out one broad area to which professionals must pay particular attention when seeking to use collective impact as a means of community: buy-in, or the support and involvement of a particular group. This was separated into three major areas of buy-in which must be reimaged in certain ways in order for collective impact to be most effective. The buy-in of organizational leadership, the business community, and the community being served are all important for different reasons, but initiatives must take each into consideration and take the required steps to ensure the buy-in of each. The benefit that each provides is immense, and the opportunity lost by not taking the necessary steps to gain that buy-in is one which initiatives cannot afford if they desire their best chance at successfully transforming the community in which they work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, L., Miles, M., & Steinberg, A. (2014, Fall). Achieving collective impact for opportunity youth. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(4), S20–S22.
- Christens, B. D., & Inzeo, P. T. (2015). Widening the view: Situating collective impact among frameworks for community-led change. *Community Development*, 46(4), 420 – 435. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2015.1061680>
- Cohen, J., & Price, H. (2015). Driving youth outcomes through collective impact. *Kennedy School Review*, 15, 28.
- Easterling, D. (2013). Getting to collective impact: How funders can contribute over the life course of the work. *The Foundation Review*, 5(2), 67. <http://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1157>
- Edmondson, J., & Hecht, B. (2014, Fall). Defining quality collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(4), S6–S7.
- Ferber, T., & White, E. (2014, Fall). Making public policy collective impact friendly. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(4), S22–S23.
- Flood, J., Minkler, M., Hennessey, L., Estrada, J., & Falbe, J. (2015). The collective impact model and its potential for health promotion: Overview and case study of a healthy Retail initiative in San Francisco. *Health Education & Behavior*. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1090198115577372>
- Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2012). Channeling change: Making collective impact work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 20, 1–8.
- Irby, M., & Boyle, P. (2014, Fall). Aligning collective impact initiatives. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(4), S15–S16.
- Kania, J., Hanleybrown, F., & Juster, J. S. (2014, Fall). Essential mindset shifts for collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(4), S2–S5.
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36 – 41.
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2013). Embracing emergence: How collective impact addresses complexity. *Blog Entry, January, 21*. Retrieved from http://awsassets.wwf.org.au/downloads/mc_embracing_emergence_5jun14.pdf

- Parkhurst, M., & Preskill, H. (2014, Fall). Learning in action: Evaluating collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(4), S17–S19.
- Roundtable on collective impact. (2012, October). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 10(4), 25.
- Roundtable on community engagement and collective impact. (2015). *National Civic Review*, 104(1), 47 – 51. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ncr.21223>
- Ryan, M. J. (2014, Fall). Power dynamics in collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(4), S10–S11.
- Stewart, S. D. (2013). United Way, healthy communities, and collective impact. *National Civic Review*, 102(4), 75 – 78. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ncr.21162>
- Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., & Martin, E. (2012). Understanding the value of backbone organizations in collective impact: Part 2. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved from http://www.leveragingourstrengths.ca/reading/Health_BackboneOrgsCollectiveImpact.pdf
- Weaver, L. (2014). The promise and peril of collective impact. *Communities*, 26, 1.