

Impact Models: Comprehensive Community Initiatives

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CENTER *for* PROMISE



East Durham is strengthening its capacity to ensure that all its young people graduate from high school, prepared for college or a career.

Throughout much of the mid-20th century, East Durham, NC, was home to a thriving African-American middle-class community. Bolstered by cotton mills and the tobacco industry, East Durham residents built a neighborhood of small businesses and beautiful Victorian houses along tree-lined streets. Today, however, a visit to the hub of the district paints a different picture. The once landmark Fidelity Bank building at the corner of Angier and Driver is covered with a plywood sign advertising a storefront church. The stately Victorians are abandoned, condemned, and overrun with rot and weeds. Poverty, crime, teen pregnancy, and unemployment are part of many residents' daily lives, and rates of academic success are among the lowest in the state.

The East Durham Children's Initiative (EDCI) aims to change all that. A partnership among local government, non-profit, faith, and school organizations, EDCI is focusing on the community's most promising resource – its children. Since 2008, EDCI has increased access to early childhood educational opportunities, strengthened local elementary and secondary schools, helped establish high quality enrichment activities in place, and worked to make sure that local children, youth, and their families are being connected to the supports and experiences that will enable them all to thrive.

The work in East Durham is not done - it's really just getting started – but they are making great strides for their young people, providing valuable lessons for the thousands of other communities that aspire to support their young people to the fullest.

These communities, and hundreds of others throughout the country, have identified that they do not currently have the capacity necessary to ensure the success of their children and youth. They have launched comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) to create structures and process that build the human capital, institutional resources, and social capital to effectively support the needs and strengths of their young people.

The nature of CCIs is that they are based in particular communities, under certain conditions, tailored to support a given community's unique strengths and needs. However, CCIs want to learn from each other, but they often have trouble relating to the unique circumstances present in any given community. Thus, this brief presents a conceptual framework for understanding the organizational and operational structures and processes of CCIs. Rather than promoting replication of any particular model, this framework enables CCIs to learn from each other's work.

This framework includes components synthesized across CCIs in order to provide a common language for all communities. We call this array of components an **Impact Model**.

An **Impact Model** describes the structures and organizational processes that CCI design and implement to create or strengthen the capacity of a community to address the collective problem(s) of a community's young people or to sustain its young people's well-being. In the following sections, we provide an introduction to the organizational structures and processes that are part of **Impact Models**.



STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

Structures of CCI are the relatively static roles of stakeholders and the relationships among the stakeholders. These components can include:

- Governance structure and decision-making protocols;
- Type of leader(s);
- Roles and responsibilities of collaboration members and partners;
- Organizational capacity and staffing; and
- Funding.

Processes are the actions a CCI takes to develop strategies and tactics and refine its structures. These components can include:

- Defining the needs of the community;
- Developing shared goals, outcomes, accountability, and a vision;
- Developing clear and meaningful theories of change;
- Creating oversight for implementing and monitoring programmatic strategies; and
- Developing a communications and outreach process.

There are important nuances within each of the structures and processes that can vary by community. These variations can mean that a given component could be "right" for one community under certain conditions, but completely "wrong" for another community. In short, context matters. Structures and processes vary in their salience and applicability given the characteristics of any given community.

STRUCTURES

GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

How a CCI manages itself and makes strategic and functional decisions.

Although the word “collaboration” often conjures up images of various constituents sitting around a table with equal voice and decision-making power, the reality is that collaborative efforts have vastly different governance structures and decision-making protocols. Here are three common governance and decision-making structures found in communities:

Consensus-Building Approach. Some communities engage a broad constituency within the governance structure and decision-making is shared among those organizations. The New Orleans Kids Partnership (NOKP, New Orleans, LA), has a leadership council comprised of all member agencies of the collaboration, which are primarily educational, social service, mental health, and enrichment service providers. Each member has an equal vote for NOKP decisions, with final decisions determined by consensus. Members of the council are organized into advisory and content-specific subcommittees that provide

strategic direction and guidance and work to achieve the goals of the partnership. This is an ambitious structure since there needs to be a high level of trust and openness among the collaborative members in order for a diffusion of decision-making to be successful. The central leader is essential to coordinate such an effort.

Intermediary Approach. Other communities have a lead organization, with a traditional Board of Directors or Board of Trustees, to drive the strategy and to bring in partners based on the collaboration’s strategy and goals. EDCI and Higher Ground (Boston, MA) are independent 501(c)3s, with an executive director empowered to make strategic and programmatic decisions, and a Board of Directors that is responsible for decision-making, strategy development, and convening of community partners. Advisory councils and subcommittees representing various constituencies including service providers, residents, parents, and youth provide counsel to the Board. When the decision-making is consolidated within a board of directors, the board should be aware of the stakeholders being engaged in the community efforts so that the effort adequately supports them.

Centralized Approach. An alternative structure is having one organization or individual take the lead and possess most of the decision-making responsibilities. In many communities, mayors and other policymakers have been seen to be important conveners, allies, brokers, advocates, or even leads of collaborative efforts. SomerPromise, in Somerville, MA was created by the city’s mayor and operates as an initiative managed by the city. This collaborative effort has a multi-sector Advisory Council and a community provider network which provide strategic and programmatic guidance. However, the mayor, and, to a lesser extent, the superintendent of schools, serve as the primary decision makers. While there is no definitive approach to the role that political figures play in community collaborations, it is evident

DISCUSSION

- What is the governance structure for your CCI?
- What approach do you take to decision-making?
- How does this structure work for your CCI?



that clarity and transparency about their decision-making role is paramount to their effectiveness. The Parramore Kids Zone (PKZ), in Orlando, FL, was created by Orlando's mayor to combat the effects of poverty and violence on the lives of young people in that city. With his office seen as a crucial neutral convener, PKZ has successfully brought together the Parramore neighborhood community to dramatically reduce the rates of violence and crime, and increase the academic proficiency of their young people.

These are only three examples of governance and decision-making structures that community collaborations have used. One structure is not necessarily "better" or "worse" than another; rather what appears to be most important is that communities develop a structure that is most appropriate for their community and that the structure is agreed upon and supported by all members.

LEADERSHIP

The individual(s) empowered to lead, convene, and guide a CCI

A CCI, whether a collaboration among various partners or an individual, multi-service organization, needs a leader(s) to guide and coordinate the initiative. CCIs need people who can convene, provide direction, make day-to-day decisions about operations, and facilitate higher-level decisions about strategy.^{i, ii, iii, iv} A leader is often the "face" of the effort, who meets with key community informants, various constituencies, and funders.

DISCUSSION

- What skills does a leader need to have for your CCI?
- Who takes on the leadership role(s), and how are the roles different?

Geoffrey Canada, the founder and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone, is an example of a charismatic figure that brings people to the table, coupled with his ability to manage a large, complex organization. However, leadership in CCIs is not necessarily the responsibility of one individual.

EDCI has two important and different types of leaders. This CCI has a dynamic Executive Director who is as comfortable working directly with youth as he is in a boardroom with policymakers, funders, and other key stakeholders in the region. EDCI also has a Board Chair who is a retired businessman with a deep passion for his city. His unique and essential ability to foster participation among key stakeholders in the collaborative effort, court funders, and to convince decision-makers that EDCI is moving in the right direction complements the Executive Director's talents. Together, they have developed a shared leadership approach that has influenced how the collaboration envisions the role of leaders in East Durham, realizing that it will take a community effort to be successful.

In the end, a CCI needs one or more people who have dedicated time to lead, convene, and guide the effort. A CCI should not be intimidated by finding the one person who can fill all roles, but instead assess what skills and functions their leadership needs and find the person or people to fill those skills and functions.

ROLES + RESPONSIBILITIES FOR COLLABORATION MEMBERS/PARTNERS

The expectations for which collaboration members are held accountable for their involvement with the CCI.

The roles and responsibilities for collaboration members and partners vary in many ways.^{v,vi} Some assign particular tasks to individuals in the collaborative, while others create working groups around specific content areas. In some communities, formal leadership roles are created for partners whereas in others, participation is tied to various funding streams. One particularly compelling example is found in Alignment Nashville, a citywide, cross-sector collaboration in Nashville, TN. Alignment Nashville issues an Invitation to Participate (ITP) when a new initiative is proposed. The ITP lists the resources that are needed to carry out the initiative, and organizations that have those resources apply to take part in the initiative. In communities with stable memberships, formal memoranda of understanding or agreements are developed to establish the expectations for members. In addition to setting expectations, these agreements often hold members accountable for fulfilling specific responsibilities.

DISCUSSION

- What are the various roles and responsibilities for different types of stakeholders in your CCI?
- How do you engage members of the community?

Every partner organization within a collaborative does not need to have the same level of engagement, but expectations should be clear and transparent. For example, NOKP requires partner organizations to sign member agreements in which they agree to devote considerable staff time and in-kind resources to the collaboration. However, partner organizations can choose how they wish to engage with NOKP. Organizations that want to be aligned with the collaboration and have an intensive relationship can become “allies.” If an organization wants to establish a short-term relationship with the collaboration, but not be a member, they can become “collaborators.” Each role has a different level of engagement and responsibility and because these distinctions are clear, they can be held accountable to their intended engagement level.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND STAFFING

The “backbone” organization with staff who possess the knowledge, skills, and human capital that a CCI needs in order to run the day-to-day operations of the initiative.

To coordinate activities, collaboratives need some form of a “backbone” organization, with staff that possess the interpersonal, organizational, and content knowledge and skills to ensure success of the collaboration.^{vii, viii} The backbone might be an existing 501(c)3 or governmental agency that takes ownership for coordinating and convening the collaboration. Sometimes, an independent organization is created specifically for the collaborative effort.

“Internal alignment” is a crucial competency for a backbone organization.^{ix} Internal alignment refers to the balance of overseeing each component of a collaboration’s work, while simultaneously ensuring that each component reinforces the others in order to achieve a collective goal. This is a difficult management dance, and requires that staff provide both support and autonomy to individual programs and/or departments within the collaborative.^{xi}

Creating management and staff capacity varies across communities. For example, NOKP has only one full time staff person, who serves as executive director, and intermittent half-time staff who provide administrative support. Thus, their operating model is dependent upon significant staff support and in-kind resources contributed to the collaboration by member organizations. In contrast, EDCI has both a full time administrative and managerial team, as well as program staff who have been hired to work directly with families and community members.

DISCUSSION

- How is the organizational capacity distributed among your backbone organization and other stakeholders?
- Is your capacity sufficient for accomplishing your goals?

DISCUSSION

- How is your work funded?
- How much of your funding is unrestricted?
- How sustainable is your funding?

FUNDING STRUCTURES

The strategies in place to achieve sustainable funding for the initiative.

Varied, sustainable funding is considered essential to any collaborative.^{xii, xiii} Communities tend to include one or more of the following funding components:

- A main, private sector funder (individual or corporation);
- A government-driven funding stream (federal, state, or municipal funding);
- Grant-driven funding from either large and small private foundations or corporate giving;
- Members providing funding to the collaboration through in-kind donations or membership contributions;

Two important elements of funding sustainability to consider are (1) the timeline associated with funding streams and (2) the restrictions associated with certain awarded funds. In some cases, collaborations launch their work with the support of a single funder with an understanding that the collaboration will have to become financially independent after a predetermined amount of time. Some funders stipulate that grant awards should only be used on particular programs while precluding them using that funding on operational costs and capacity building efforts. This funding challenge for “overhead” is not unique to collaborative efforts, but presents challenges when trying to sustain a backbone organization and concurrently to support the efforts of multiple organizations engaged in the collaboration.

PROCESSES

DEFINING THE PROBLEM AND NEEDS

The methods for understanding the problems and potential solutions in a community.

A collaboration typically starts with a definition of the issue to be addressed in the community. High school graduation rates, youth violence, and drug and alcohol use are just a few examples of issues that communities might address, but collaborations take a range of approaches to arriving at their focus. At times, collaborations come together for the broad purpose of supporting young people and then develop timely initiatives based on pressing problems. Other collaborations collect information from a variety of sources, ranging from administrative data from schools, public health agencies, the Census Bureau, or crime reports to survey data from key constituencies. This information, along with observations and conversations in the community, are used to identify priority areas. Collaborations that are effective at defining their focal issue, thoughtfully examine an array of quantitative and qualitative data that represent the experiences and perspectives of members of the community who are impacted by its work.

DISCUSSION

- How did your CCI determine the problem it would address and its assets and needs?
- Who contributed to this process?

Collaborations can use this process as an opportunity to engage key stakeholders and refine the focus of the collaborative effort to focus on a specific problem and have an understanding of the problem etiology.

DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION, GOALS, OUTCOMES, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

How a community creates and gains buy-in on the collective vision and goals for the CCI.

Decision-makers and key stakeholders should engage in a deliberative process to agree on the grand vision for what the collaboration is supposed to accomplish, the primary goals that the collaboration is trying to meet, and the specific outcome measures to which the collaboration will hold everyone accountable.^{xiv, xv, xvi} This overarching framework helps to mobilize diverse stakeholders toward a collective purpose and to align potentially disparate self-interests.^{xvii}

The Strive initiative in Cincinnati and northern Kentucky is an example of more than 30 organizations that engaged in a planning process that resulted in such shared vision, goals, and accountability. As a result, this collaboration is using a dashboard of indicators to track their progress toward their defined goals. Similar, successful deliberative efforts can be seen in the 55,000 Degrees initiative in Louisville and the Boston Opportunity Agenda in Boston.

DISCUSSION

- What have you done to build consensus around the vision, goals, and outcomes for your CCI?
- Who was (and wasn't) involved in this process?
- How do you keep CCI stakeholders accountable to the vision and goals of the CCI?



DEVELOPING CLEAR AND MEANINGFUL THEORIES OF CHANGE

How a community decides on the roadmap it will use for its CCI.

Developing clear and meaningful Theories of Change (TOC) can help collaborations create a “roadmap” of “if-then” statements that articulate an understandable and achievable path from short-term goals to systemic change and transformational impact. The TOC also provides the framework for programmatic strategies and tactics so that the programs cohere around the collaboration’s stated, shared goals. A TOC that is aligned with a collaboration’s shared goal increases the likelihood that the collaboration will successfully improve the lives of the young people in the community.

Whether they are aware of it or not, all stakeholders in a collaboration operate using TOCs. Different stakeholders having disparate, and even competing TOCs, might unintentionally undermine the shared goals of the collaborative effort. That is to say the collaborative partners might be operating under different assumptions about how to achieve their agreed upon goals. For example, a mayor might espouse that, “If I make improving educational outcomes for kids my platform, we can put city resources behind the effort and centralize

activity toward this goal in a way that is more effective than leaving it to individual, private organizations.” On the other hand, a social worker in that same community might be operating on the theory, “If I knew where to refer this child to get transportation, he wouldn’t be so vulnerable to truancy and he would improve his academics outcomes.”

Just as collaborations create deliberate a process for developing the collaboration’s mission statement and accountability metrics, a collaboration should engage in a deliberate process to create a TOC. The TOC should comprise a comprehensive map of the early, intermediate, and long term changes necessary in a given community, including what is ultimately needed to reach their long-term goal.^{xviii}

An established TOC can be shared with others including staff, partner organizations, funders, and the public at large to demonstrate that the organization has a charted course for its work.^{xix} Developing a TOC promotes continual learning throughout the collaboration while helping individual stakeholders see how their individual TOCs fit into the bigger picture.^{xx,xxi} A TOC can also be a key driver in determining programmatic activities and organizational investments. For example, a TOC that is based on building the assets of youth would result in different activities than a TOC based on protecting youth from their community. Thus, developing a TOC should precede the choosing and implementation of programs.

DISCUSSION

- What is the theory of change for your CCCI?
- What was the process for creating the theory of change and with whom?
- Do you think everyone involved in your CCCI shares the same theory of change?



IDENTIFYING AND MONITORING THE PROGRAMMATIC STRATEGY

The process for deciding on (and overseeing) the tactics that a CCI will use to effect change in the community.

Once a collaboration has developed its Theory of Change, it can begin to devise the specific programmatic strategies for turning theory into action.^{xxi} Once the programs and/or strategies are decided the programs and strategies would then be implemented, either based on a specific curriculum or based on the intuition of the program providers. Thoughtful monitoring of the implementation of the collaboration's theory and strategy is one way to promote shared learning among stakeholders and to create a quality assurance system.^{xxiii}

EDCI provides examples of a collaboration implementing programs by a hybrid approach of building the capacity to run its own programs while cultivating partnerships with carefully chosen partners that provide vital direct services in the target area. For EDCI, partner organizations are typically allocated funding to create additional slots for program participants. Taking a different approach, SomerPromise sends out RFPs to community organizations to compete for the funding. This approach allows the collaboration to assess which organizations provide the best options for supporting children and their families.

DISCUSSION

- How did your CCI determine the problem it would address?
- How did your CCI determine the programs to implement in your community?
- In what ways is the CCI monitoring how well the programs are being implemented and whether programs are successful?

For NOKP, the partner organizations make their resources available to a selection of schools identified by the collaboration. School leaders then select which resources and services are appropriate for their students and NOKP subsidizes a certain number of slots for program participants.

Strategies to monitor progress can range from evaluating individual programs being implemented by collaborative partners to evaluating the cumulative impact on youth across partners. Collaborations should first consider where they are in their own evolution and the questions they are trying to answer through their monitoring strategy to guide their data collection and data analysis. For instance, a collaboration focused on a discrete geographical location within a city would want to consider data strategies that allow for monitoring data on a sub-city level, instead of trying to measure change at the city level. In order to track such indicators, members of the collaboration should build relationships with municipal agencies, schools, and nonprofit organizations who collect and maintain the data.

For example, Believe 2 Become (B2B) is a collaborative in Grand Rapids, MI focused on closing the achievement gap in four Grand Rapids neighborhoods. They worked with various community partners, funders, researchers, the Grand Rapids Public School system, and a group of technical data professionals to design and implement a data-sharing system that tracks the impact of B2B's collective efforts at the individual student level.^{xxiv} Making data, and data sharing, part of the common language across a variety of organizations, has allowed B2B to monitor and evaluate their practices, programs, and impact as it relates to their overarching goals and theory of change. And they are not alone. A similar system has been put into place in the Strive initiative in Cincinnati.



COMMUNICATION PROCESSES, OUTREACH, AND ENGAGEMENT

How a CCI disseminates information and engages all of its stakeholders.

Many collaboratives have an established process for disseminating information both internally and externally in order to garner support, buy-in, and a deeper understanding of their work. For example, in one collaboration, members described the decision-making processes as lacking transparency, fostering a climate of mistrust among the participating organizations. A subsequent restructuring process included implementing new communications processes to keep both collaborative members and the public informed about the collaboration's work, such as publicly announced collaboration meetings and continual e-updates from the director. Since restructuring and explicitly sharing these new processes, many collaborative members have praised the new transparency.

Dissemination of information externally is also necessary. A collaboration may have multiple external audiences: residents, parents, elected officials, front line providers, and youth. Each of these constituencies may require its own communication and outreach strategy.

DISCUSSION

- How would you describe the communication protocols for your CCI?
- How well do the collaboration members share information?

Collaborations use a myriad of methods to communicate with the public about their work, including mailing newsletters, flyering, hosting community meetings and open houses, door knocking, website development/ social media. Often, an outreach coordinator greatly helps in this process. Regular communication and transparency with constituents is helpful in establishing buy-in, and can contribute to engendering a collective vision within communities that is beneficial to the success of community collaboratives. In order to connect with residents most effectively, it is critical that collaborations understand the literacy, language, and technology needs and skills of their targeted constituency.

In addition to communicating with diverse stakeholders, it is important that collaborations shift from simply communicating to community members to engaging community members in the collaboration's work. Collaborations with the strongest community building efforts consider this aspect of their work to be central to their decision making.^{xxv} There are many strategies and tactics that collaborations can implement to begin the community building process. Although a variety of communications and deliberative strategies can be implemented with community members, collaborations could also consider building the leadership capacity of youth and other residents by providing leadership opportunities on the Board or within other governance structures. It is important that collaborations are intentional about the role and purpose of community building processes and resident engagement.

A community building process can ultimately change the nature of the relationship between a community and the leadership of a collaboration by ensuring that the voice of residents is always at the collaborative decision-making table.^{xxvi}

For example, as part of its launch in 2006, PKZ deployed a full time outreach team whose primary function was to build strong relationships with the neighborhood's youth and families in order to mobilize residents "to take back their community."^{xxvii} They began to do this work by executing a door-to-door and street-by-street campaign that would reach every resident in the zone. Leadership from PKZ credit this resident engagement process as paramount to their success at improving children's outcomes in their neighborhood.

VISUALIZING YOUR IMPACT MODEL

In this brief we introduced the components of an **Impact Model** by describing a sample of key structural and procedural components that can embody this model. These components were identified using existing research on collaboration, as well as our own work with collaborations nationwide. By outlining these various elements, we aim to help existing and emerging collaborative efforts to better design and articulate their own organizational structures and processes in a way that promotes continual improvement within communities.

A first step towards this design process is to visualize how your collaboration's structures and processes fit together. Using the guiding questions as a point of departure, we encourage you to develop a visual model that can serve as a tool for better understanding your **Impact Model**. It is important to underscore that the structures and processes discussed in this brief can vary by community to fit the context in which the collaboration operates. If a particular element seems to be more or less important than the others, feel free to emphasize or de-emphasize its role in your framework. Utilizing this illustration may help your collaboration keep the "big picture" in mind as you take on the important day-to-day work of creating positive impact on the lives of children, youth, and families in your community.



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