



Social Service Collaboration and Community Change

Literature Review for Toward Common Ground

Executive Summary

This summary presents key highlights from a larger literature review written to inform the following goals of *Toward Common Ground (TCG)*:

1. The development of a common language and framework, and a sustainable model to support planning and action in the social and health services sector.
2. An evaluation of TCG's impact for participating organizations and community collaborations.

Overview of collaboration and community change

Many individuals, organizations, and networks have turned to collaboration in order to enhance their effectiveness and better address complex social issues.

Collaboration can be distinguished from other forms of cooperation in that it involves a shared, collectively-defined vision and responsibility for achieving outcomes, and equal distribution of leadership among members who maintain their own identities and organizational independence outside of the collaboration (Chen, 2008; Hogan & Murphy, 2002; London, 2012; Thomson et al., 2007).

A **comprehensive community initiative (CCI)** is one form of collaboration that works comprehensively across geographical, social, and economic areas and across individual and systemic levels to build community and to address complex community issues (Auspos & Cabaj, 2014; Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar, 2010).

CCIs: (a) consider all stakeholders' perspectives and relationships in developing their activities; and (b) enhance the ability to create large-scale change by collaborating across organizations, systems, and areas of activity, including sharing resources, perspectives, and expertise (Auspos & Cabaj, 2014; Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2012; Huxham, 1996; Kania & Kramer, 2011).



Conditions that facilitate successful collaboration and collaborative impact

Several conditions have been identified as contributing to successful collaboration and community change. This section can help TCG develop successful collaboration between its partners and structures to facilitate its end goal of community impact. These conditions fall under six general categories: environment, membership, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources. Selected conditions are included below.

Environment

- History of collaboration in community
- Favorable and supportive political/social climate
- Support from high-level, visible leaders

Membership

- Mutual respect, trust, and equality among partners
- Involvement of wide range of participants with diverse perspectives
- Members see collaboration in their own self-interest
- Clearly defined and agreed upon roles and responsibilities

Process & structure

- All members understand and share a stake in process and structure
- Development of clear goals, policy guidelines, and roles of each member
- Regular opportunities for collective learning
- Adaptability to changing conditions
- Evaluation of the collaboration process

Communication

- Timely, open, and frequent communication processes
- Information sharing and integration
- Learning about the needs/perspectives of the partners



Purpose

- Concrete, attainable, and agreed upon goals/objectives
- Shared vision and plan for action/innovation
- Unique purpose from that of each partner organization
- Willingness to recognize and focus on higher level success

Resources

- Shared and adequate resources and training
- Evidence-based inputs and ideas
- Sufficient and consistent funding and staffing
- Leaders with strong organizational and interpersonal skills
- Skilled convener and support staff

Note. Information on the six categories above comes from the following references: Butterfield et al. (2004); Horwath and Morrison (2007); Kania, Hanleybrown, and Splansky Juster (2014); Kaur Jasuja et al. (2005); Keyton, Ford, and Smith (2008); London (2012); Mattessich and Monsey (1992); Sloper (2004); Svendsen and Laberge (2005); Varda, Shoup, and Miller (2012); Wei-Skillern and Silver (2013).

Barriers to successful development/maintenance of collaboration

Several barriers that hinder successful development and maintenance of collaboration have also been identified in the literature and include both internal and external conditions.

Internal Barriers

- Issues between partners
- Lack or loss of funding/resources
- Lack of expertise or information
- Lack of strong leadership
- Lack of a collective front, vision, or goals
- Frequent reorganization or staff turnover

External Barriers

- Issues with or resistance by outside organizations
- Conflict between the collaboration and outside organizations

Note: Information on internal and external barriers above comes from the following references: Butterfield et al. (2004); London (2012); Roberts and O'Connor (n.d.); Sloper (2004); Varda et al. (2012).





Challenges in the work of CCI

Similarly, there are many challenges inherent in the work of CCI that pertain mostly to defining and sustaining the work (Kubisch et al., 2010). Some of the most common include:

- Developing a common language
- Managing activities among several organizations with varying capacities/resources
- Working with organizations with varying philosophies, backgrounds, and expertise
- Finding ways to work together to produce internal alignment and reinforcing activities
- Sustaining the work and efforts of CCI

Outcomes of successful collaboration in CCI

Factors that facilitate the collaborative process can also contribute to successful outcomes for both the *process* of building collaboration and community change and for the target population.

Process Outcomes

Outcomes related to building collaboration and community change

Shorter-Term Outcomes

- Commitment to shared agenda and operating principles
- Improved communications
- Greater collective understanding of issues and how to solve them
- Increased knowledge transfer

Longer-Term Outcomes

- Improved relationships between community partners
- Increased community involvement in collaboration and decision-making
- Creation of public policy/laws/regulation
- Increased services



Population/Community Outcomes

Outcomes that collaborations attempt to achieve for their target population

Shorter-Term Outcomes

- Community improvement

Longer-Term Outcomes

- Outcomes improvements for service users
- Sustainable reform
- Stronger community
- Increased participatory democracy

Note. Information on process and population outcomes above comes from the following references: Butterfield et al. (2004); Chen (2008); Gray and Wood (1991); Hamel (1991); Meister (2006); Mowery, Oxley, and Silverman (1996); Rogers and Weber (2010); Varda et al. (2012).

Identifying and evaluating outcomes

Several useful tools and frameworks for understanding and assessing outcomes exist. The list of expected outcomes above can be used to generate appropriate indicators for measuring outcomes of CCIs. Four additional frameworks for articulating and assessing outcomes are presented below.

Theory of Change

- Outlines expected pathways between early and intermediate outcomes and longer-term results, including assumptions about the process of change and how outcomes will be brought about and documented (Anderson, n.d.).

Results-Based Accountability

- A framework that can be used to support and measure the impact of action taken to improve communities, as well as to improve and assess the performance of programs and services. Begins with wellbeing conditions (outcomes) and works towards developing strategies to achieve the outcomes and identifying indicators (Friedman, 2005; Results Leadership Group, 2010).



Health-Impact Assessment

- A combination of tools to evaluate a policy, program, or project as to its potential effects on the health of a population (World Health Organization, 1999). It is generally used as a decision tool to predict and then minimize negative health impacts and maximize positive health impacts (Mindell, Ison, & Joffe, 2003; Scott-Samuel, 2005; Winkler et al., 2013).

Health Equity Impact Assessment

- Similar to Health-Impact Assessment but attempts to mitigate health disparities among vulnerable or marginalized groups that result from barriers in access to health services and unintended impacts of a project (Canadian Public Health Association, n.d.; Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2012; Wellesley Institute, 2014).

Shifting organizations in order to prepare to build new partnerships

Given the importance of collaboration for community change, organizations must often shift their structure and work in order to build new partnerships. This shifting, however, comes with its own challenges. Change Management is one useful model for creating and managing change within the actual organization or CCI.

Change Management

- A structured process by which individuals or groups change from one state to a desired future state to reach some goal (Ryerson University Human Resources, 2011).

Creating and managing change at the community level

This section pertains to creating and managing change at the system or community level (i.e., the change that CCIs are attempting to make). Relevant areas of literature include planning strategies for community change, design thinking, appreciative inquiry, and pathways to system change.



Planning Strategies

Two effective planning strategies for CCIs in situations in which there is little understanding of cause-and-effect and in which the context is unpredictable (Auspos & Cabaj, 2014):

1. Emergent strategy

- Learning by doing because desired results may emerge through experimentation.
- Focuses more on rapid planning and implementation cycles.

2. Umbrella strategy

- Often used when there is a clear vision of desired results and how to accomplish them but in a complex environment with little control over outside actors.
- Focuses on aligning practitioners' activities under a "strategic umbrella".

Design Thinking

- An adaptive and circular process-related framework for creating effective solutions for social issues. Emphasizes intuition, optimism, systems thinking, and improvisation (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Design Thinking Blog, 2014).

Appreciative Inquiry

- A process of effecting system change that involves searching for and mobilizing positive potential. Focuses on strength, innovation, and untapped potential (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d.).

Pathways to Change

- Strategies for effecting community change that involve directing efforts towards larger scale variables and thus impacting the system that created the social problem in the first place (Westley, Antadze, Riddell, Robinson, & Geobey, 2014).



Models of community change

Five models of community change are particularly relevant to the work of TCG: Constellation Model, Collective Impact, Multi-Dimensional Model, Dimensions of Change Model, and Ecological Models. Each model variably includes its own set of features recommended for collaboration and collective change.

Constellation Model

Involves small, self-organizing teams (i.e., constellations) of partners who share leadership and collaborate on a particular task or issue (Surman, 2006; Surman & Surman, 2008).

Collective Impact

Involves commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Participating organizations are grouped into networks based on types of activities but share a common framework and vision (Kania & Kramer, 2011, 2013; Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer 2012).

Multi-Dimensional Model

A model intended for initiatives that seek to create change at multiple levels and in which the agenda is influenced by both local stakeholders/partners and higher levels (Duan-Barnet, Wangelin, & Lamm, 2012). Thus, it emphasizes the importance of both vertical and horizontal alignment of activities/resources.

Dimensions of Change Model

Includes five interconnected, iterative, and dynamic dimensions for developing and implementing change efforts: structure, parameters, intentions, approach, people (Dean-Coffey, Farkouh, & Reisch, 2012).

Social Ecological Models

A class of models that targets one or several reciprocal levels of environmental influence on behaviour, potentially through cross-sector collaboration (e.g., Brofenbrenner, 1977; McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988).