



MEASURE
PARTNERSHIPS
FOR **IMPACT**



Measure Partnerships for Impact:

Strengthening and Measuring the Internal Growth of Your Partnership to Accelerate Your Impact

Written by: Julie Pehar and Seema Taneja | www.measurepartnershipsforimpact.ca

This is a position paper, consisting of 3 distinct parts that examine the value of building, sustaining and measuring the strength and effectiveness of partnerships, resulting in accelerated social impact.

Part 1: Why measuring your collaborative consistently is an important process in attaining your impact goals

Part 2: Practical steps on how to measure your collaborative

Part 3: The value in using data about your partnership for your collaborative growth, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, and social impact results

Introduction

We are two practitioners in the field of collaborative work who, like many of you, want to make a positive contribution to the success of collaboratives that are trying to impact conditions of well-being in their communities.

This paper and subsequent tools, resources, and supports are the collection of what we have lived and breathed with large and small partnerships, conversation by conversation, meeting by meeting, email by email, training by training until we noticed an opportunity to address a missing piece of the puzzle. The missing piece is the willingness and ability for groups to reliably measure their internal strengths and challenges so they can focus on intentional strategies to accelerate the achievement of their impact goals. This gap was so apparent that we had to explore it, study it and share possible solutions. The potential to help groups avoid the many pitfalls of collaborative work and succeed at turning important population level curves was too pressing to ignore.

The following are some thoughts that can be used to enhance the approach to the collective impact process. Our experience informs our opinion that groups need to measure how well their partnership is working to inform them of strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged to reach their impact goals. Varying types of evaluation may be required as partnerships evolve over time as noted by Mark Cabaj¹

when he states, “with so many diverse players, so many different levels of work, and so many moving parts, it is very difficult to design a one-size-fits-all evaluation model for a Collective Impact effort. More often than not, Collective Impact efforts seem to require a score of discrete evaluation projects, each worthy of its own customized design.”

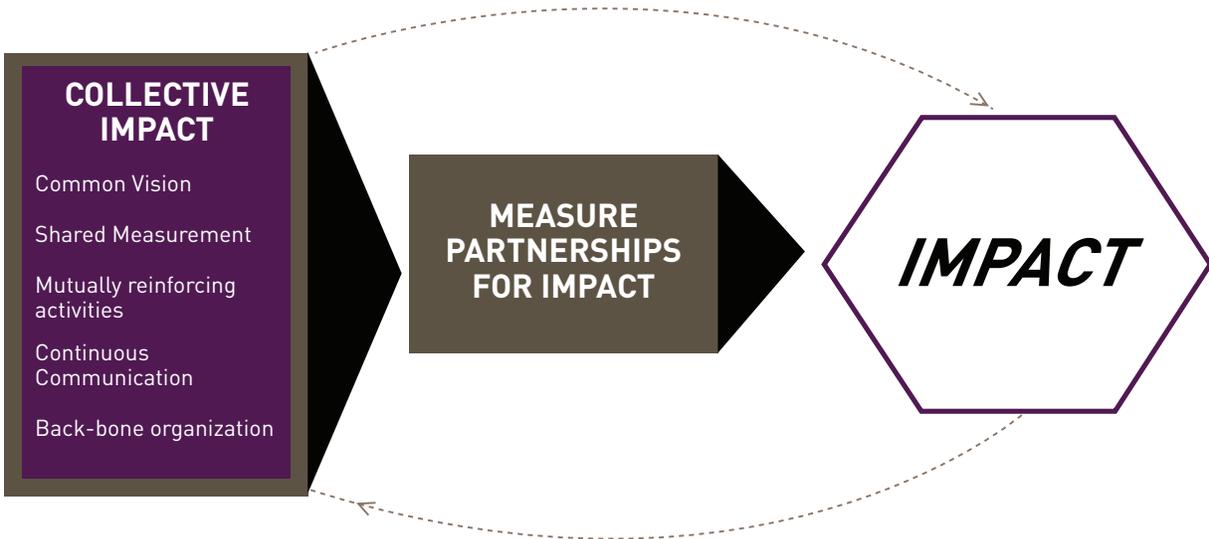
A sequence or combination of developmental, formative and summative evaluations will likely be required over time but presently, most groups are at a very preliminary stage of evaluation. In our experience, we see collaboratives that are newly forming, but also more mature and established, that have never measured any component of their partnership.

Shifting to measuring partnerships for impact takes time and external supports to develop intentional evaluation. Many groups have never attempted any partnership measurement and a simple and customized style of process measurement will suffice to get started. This paper focuses on partnerships, young and mature, that are new to the concept of measuring their own capacity and using the information to help make the partnership stronger.

“

The goal of measurement and evaluation is not to explore everything. Rather it is to provide CI partners with the information they need at a given point in time in order to understand their initiative’s effectiveness and make well- informed decisions about its strategy and activities.²

”



¹Cabaj, M., (2014). Evaluating Collective Impact: Five Simple Rules. *The Philanthropist, Vol 26*

²Preskill H., Parkhurst M., Splansky Juster J. (2014). Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact: Part One, *Collective Impact Forum, FSG*, pg. 11

The graphic above illustrates the relationship between the 5 collective impact components and the proven potential for social impact. In our experience, there is a lack of correlation between the strength of the collaborative to the social results identified. The success of the collaborative in turning curves – big or small, and seeing the change they want in their communities is tied to important characteristics of the collaborative as measured by choosing a variety of survey questions that reflect the uniqueness of each collaborative.



Measuring Partnerships should lead to insights and learning and should boost CI partners' ability to make informed judgments as the initiative is implemented.²



Part 1: Why measuring your collaborative consistently, is an important process in attaining your impact goals

In our experience working with collaboratives over the past decade, the understanding and use of measurement and evaluation has been continuously improving. Frameworks emerged such as Results-Based Accountability (2005) and Collective Impact (2011) that have given practitioners valuable insights on how to enhance the process of naming “ends” or impact goals and using data to achieve results. In fact, these frameworks are not mutually exclusive and are often used in complimentary ways. These frameworks were developed, in part, through an understanding and observation of successful components of existing collaborative work. Frameworks for working better together towards measurable change, such as RBA and CI, are a critical piece of the success puzzle BUT another important piece is measuring how well groups work together. For example, using RBA performance measures can illustrate how well the collaborative works together; however, the success of groups lies only partially with the frameworks but also on the people and the structures influencing those who are doing the work together.

The process of working well together as a partnership requires a patient, intentional, repeated and well-funded strategy in order to build the foundation for successful results.

A twofold evaluation will support the collaborative in understanding and improving its actions and future results;

**1. Measuring the impacts of the collaborative on affecting social change
(population level and performance/program level measures)**

2. Measuring the collaborative itself (measuring partnerships for impact)

²Preskill H., Parkhurst M., Splansky Juster J. (2014). Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact: Part One, *Collective Impact Forum, FSG*, pg. 11

Successful projects often attribute their success to partners, relationships and group efficiency yet most collaboratives do not evaluate and gauge the gaps in its partnerships that can tell them if they are set up for success. Data around population and performance/program indicators are one part of the story – the second part is the perceptions and experiences of partners, identifying whether people are engaged, believe in the group’s ability, are confident that decisions are transparent and inclusive, and that leadership can indeed lead. Intrinsically, we know that people make the difference. People are part of collaboratives because they feel that together they can make a larger, more sustainable impact than if they did it on their own. They also know that social issues are complex and that it is the role of many organizations together that will strengthen the social issue at hand.

As recognized by the Canadian Policy Research Network, the evaluation of collaboratives should focus on not only the outcomes (as supported by frameworks) but also the processes of the collaboration – an evaluation of both the impacts and a pulse on the partnerships is essential in understanding and improving the work and goals of the collaborative.

Moreover, we propose that the potential for groups to succeed at their impact goals is reliant on an intentional process to monitor and measure group capacity. People make the difference. People that come together can change the trajectory of their data – an engaged and informed partner can be the difference between making the change in communities or not. As Dan Duncan³ states, “organizations do not collaborate, people collaborate based on common purpose, relationships and trust.”

An intentional commitment to Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) practices are central to engaging, honoring, respecting and maximizing the assets of the people you are working with and working for. Recently John Kania and Mark Kramer⁴ stated, “efforts to achieve collective impact inevitably take place within a context of structural inequity that keeps people of different backgrounds and races from achieving equitable outcomes. If participants in collective impact initiatives are to make the lasting change they seek, they must pay explicit attention to policies, practices, and culture that are reinforcing patterns of inequity in the community.” For many, the emerging shifts towards using data to purposely separate and acknowledge differences among and between groups of people is increasingly providing a new lens with which to inform CI work. Still, too few have made a concerted effort to ask specific questions that measure how well their group defines and integrates DEI principles into its’ core work. We believe that measuring partnerships for impact is a mechanism to bridge that gap and can draw attention to elements of DEI that are essential for success.

³Duncan, D., (2015). *Relationships and Trust: The Second Core Component of Effective Collective Impact*, Retrieved from: <https://www.livingcities.org/blog/818-the-four-keycomponents-for-effective-collective-impact-part-i>

⁴Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2015). The Equity Imperative in Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

“
To do equity, we must also be equity⁵
”

The Relationship Between Measuring Your Partnership and Getting to Your Impact Goals

No group can assume that even if they fundamentally agree on a common vision and have a strong desire to succeed at their impact goals, that the group will be an effective vehicle for change. Factors such as; historical relationships, opposing approaches or philosophies, funding and political priorities, ego's, territoriality, a lack of trust, and constant staff turnover have all contributed to groups breaking down, losing momentum or failing altogether. There is tremendous value in getting an early pulse on measuring your partnership within the first 6-8 months of its creation. Early data can point to the successes and challenges that may require very intentional interventions to ensure group's become accustomed to the commitment of continuous learning and capacity building. Preliminary data, in a new collaborative, can shape the collaborative and its members to accelerate their path towards their impact goal. Furthermore, as many collaboratives do an assessment to show their level of readiness when applying for funding support, they have an opportunity to supplement and enhance data by conducting another assessment soon after.

The following are just a few reasons to consider measuring your partnership...

- Measuring gives the partnership/collaborative a basis for continuous learning and growth
- Measuring identifies strengths and opportunities within the partnership/collaborative for building member capacity and confidence in the actions and leadership of the collaborative
- Measuring gives you data about the partnership/collaborative that can be used to: a. seek specific funding b. understand member perceptions of the collaborative c. identify gaps and assets of the collaborative
- Measuring gives funders valuable information about the direction of the fundee and their growing capacity to accomplish their stated goals
- Measuring gives you more to your “story” when reaching out to broad stakeholders
- Measuring your partnership will help you succeed at your impact goal

More and more, we see that stronger groups have a much better chance at succeeding at their impact goals than weaker groups. The question remains, what are the variables that enable strong capacity in a group, how do groups build this capacity, how can we measure this capacity and leverage the information we get from measuring it?

⁵Schmitz P., (2015). Applying An Equity Mirror to Collective Impact. *Collective Impact Forum, FSG*

Part 2: Practical steps on how to measure your collaborative

How to do it?– the 6 practical steps on how to measure your collaborative

The ultimate purpose in measuring partnerships is to build a strong and functional foundation in the partnership/collaborative to help groups reach their impact goals. These practical steps are a guide to assist groups to begin to measure their partnership. The skills required include:

- creation of a paper or electronic measurement tool

- enhanced capacity to effectively analyze the meaning of scores/comments/results

- strategic analysis of how to integrate the learnings into the collaborative practice

In addition, groups may want to develop communication strategies and share the results and learnings. Some groups may have these skills internally within the partnership members and some groups may want to enlist the support of a third party specialist or consultant.

Our goal is to motivate you to see the need for measuring your collaborative. There are already some tools that measure partnerships – we have conducted a review and embedded some of the concepts and questions from others and created new questions and domains. The compiling of previous and new questions resulted in a tool that reflects the 5 Collective Impact domains plus the addition of a Stakeholder Engagement domain. You will notice that each domain has questions probing for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We intentionally weaved these questions into the domains instead of positioning DEI as a stand-alone domain – this is based on our philosophy that DEI should not be considered as an add-on but rather a critical component to all human service work. We encourage you to use all of these questions but customize your tool by adding on questions if necessary. For example, a youth-specific collaborative may want to add a few questions around youth leadership, youth engagement etc.

Step 1. **Create and Customize your measurement tool**

Your measurement tool is ideally a short electronic survey. We have developed a free, short, evidenced-based tool for your collaborative to use. There are 6 domains that highlight the important components of healthy collaboratives: Common Agenda, Shared Measurement, Continuous Communications, Mutually Reinforcing Activities, Backbone Organization, and Stakeholder Engagement.

Utilizing a process of continuous learning ensures that each piece of data is intentionally selected when constructing the partnership measurement. Questions, evaluation approaches, and partners will change over time as the collaborative matures and is in different stages of the collective impact work. We encourage a plan that can maintain what is working well and change what is not.

Even though the participants assessing the collaborative may vary, assessment to assessment, the information gained from regular assessments will illustrate the pulse of your collaborative. In addition, understanding and discussing limitations is all part of the learning and will help the group to build data literacy and a balanced approach to utilizing the data acquired.

Step 2. **Repeat your measurement regularly**

Bi-yearly measures provide groups with detailed information about their group. It gives groups the ability to revector if necessary and gives them prompt information around what strategies are working better than others. Administering bi-yearly assessments ensures that actions for improvement are timely as the time in between administrations is only 6 months. In fact, some groups informally, through a verbal check-in, evaluate on a meeting by meeting basis so they can be nimble with any changes that are occurring within the collaborative. In our experience, annual assessments are not sufficient to enable the process of continuous learning and are not as effective in generating momentum and motivation.

Step 3. **Triangulation**

It is important to remember that the funding and capacity of groups varies greatly and groups should be encouraged to employ multiple approaches to analyzing and measuring their internal capacity to the best of their ability. Some other ideas to measure partnerships for impact include and are not limited to: a guest speaker to raise awareness, regular agenda conversations, half or full day learning sessions, bi-annual or annual reflections, panel discussions, webinars or conference presentations.

Step 4. **Use it or lose it**

The data should have a ripple effect – meaning, that the data should not only show changes in the group’s internal processes but should also culminate in making the lives of the target population better. The measurement focuses on the status of the collaborative partners that support and serve the target population - the healthier and more efficient the collaborative, the more seamless and effective the activities of the collaborative will be to the target population. Also, being a partner in a collaborative that is committed to measuring its own capacity provides invaluable knowledge and experience that members take to the other collaboratives and networks they belong to. This ripple effect has the enormous potential to strengthen multiple groups in a community and will therefore advance social impact.

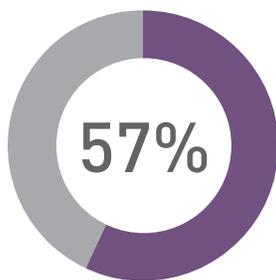
Step 5. Play it forward

It is essential that results from the measurement be brought back to the collaborative in the form of a springboard for discussion to develop strategies and learnings. The backbone leadership needs to be transparent and willing to lead challenging conversations around relationships, decision-making, time management, its common vision etc. Being intentional in how data is weaved into the work and agenda of the collaborative is what will give the data the integrity needed to be used as a catalyst to build the group's capacity and momentum. The information can help a collaborative plan, address, and proactively work on building the trust and confidence in the collaborative it needs to move forward with its indicators and results.

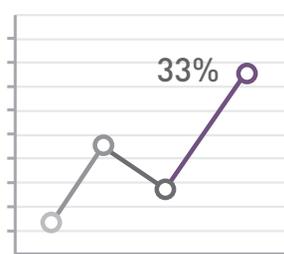
Each and every question in the assessment should be analyzed and formally reported on and discussed as part of a strategy session or agenda item. Groups can brainstorm explanations for each response and plan immediate and disciplined actions to ensure improvement.

Step 6. Do something smart with the data

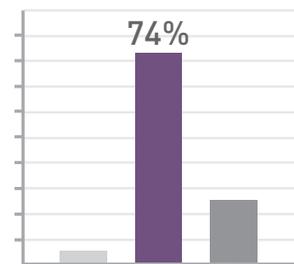
Effective reporting and communications is often best understood using graphics. Graphics can be cut and pasted into meeting agendas, board reports, power point presentations, newsletters, media/press releases, invitations, funding proposals etc. Have discussions about how and when to share results with the collaborative, additional stakeholders and funders and share your capacity building and continuous learning with others broadly.



57% of the partnership/collaborative report that they have developed a common agenda for a specific population including a target timeline and measures of change



33% of partners report that by belonging to the partnership/collaborative they commit to disaggregating data to reveal disparities across multiple variables to best understand how the issue affects all people



74% of partners report that by belonging to the partnership/collaborative they identify and implement new strategies or activities to address gaps or duplication

You can access the tool at: www.measurepartnershipsforimpact.ca

Continuous Learning is the use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches-including evaluation- to inform decision making about strategy. Strategic learning occurs when an organization or groups integrate data and evaluative thinking into their work and then adapt their strategies in response to what they learn.⁶

Part 3: The value in using data about your partnership for your collaborative growth, stakeholder engagement, sustainability and social impact results

Measuring Partnerships *shifts* us...

From using measurement to prove something to using measurement to improve things (moving from prove to improve)

- Historically, measurement and evaluation prove the success of a program/intervention's efficacy, growth and scalability. Increasingly however, measurement is being used to improve and not only prove. Failure is increasingly seen as an important learning tool as learning from mistakes is critical in creating a learning environment. Measuring partnerships can be used to improve the strength and efficacy of the partnership across multiple domains.

Measuring Partnerships *shifts* us...

To believing that group measurement has wide-reaching value

- Every partner organization is accountable for the time staff is spending at collaborative tables. Many collaboratives spend months or years networking, supporting and sharing valuable information about a sector or social cause. If/when a group is positioned to attempt collectively to enable positive impact on a social issue, there is tremendous value in engaging in a deliberate process to build and measure group capacity. As the groups capacity builds and the group can demonstrate measurable change and continuous learning, the groups' credibility increases and attracts broader partners and funding opportunities.

Measuring Partnerships *shifts* us...

To using an intentional process of analyzing and using data to make decisions, improvements, do things differently, and identify areas where external skills may be needed

- The potential for continuous learning using a partnership assessment is enormous when done skillfully, intentionally and in a timely manner. Without a dedicated plan to address strengths and weaknesses and re-measure the outcomes,

⁶Preskill H., Parkhurst M., Splansky Juster J. (2014). Guide to Evaluating *Collective Impact: Part One. Collective Impact Forum, FSG*, pg. 8

authentic improvement and capacity is limited. This ultimately weakens the collaborative ability to enable social impact. Assessment data can provide anonymous feedback and can be discussed in the group in an open and honest way. The group can brainstorm possible meaning behind the measurement data and can strategize a process to use the data to inform the necessary changes.

Measuring Partnerships *shifts* us...

To improving the accountability of the group

- An evaluation of the collaborative processes also promotes accountability of the backbone in ensuring resources are used appropriately, effectively, and efficiently. It also can shed light on the perceptions of partners around their accountability towards the collaboratives results.

Example A: the assessment may identify strong scores on the backbone leaderships' ability to support the administrative components of the work

82% of partners strongly agreed that the backbone leadership supports in the administrative components of the collaborative's work (meetings, minutes, agendas, TORs, in-kind resource, staff expertise etc.)

Discussion Point: On further group brainstorming and conversation the group agrees that the current internal processes are working well and discusses how to maintain the current level of administrative support and resources. This data piece may support continued importance and funding to this type of role in the collaborative backbone.

Example B: the assessment may identify weak scores on the partnerships ability to use evidence and experiential stories to better understand the issue and those affected by it.

44% of partners disagree that the partnership/collaborative is committed to using quantitative and qualitative stories to better understand the social issue and how different segments of the population are affected differently by the issue?

Discussion Point: On further group brainstorming and conversation, the group agrees that it needs to dedicate more time on understanding the social issue by looking at local data as well as gathering qualitative stories and examining how the issue is experienced by different groups of people. The group may consider a phase of work that includes research, information gathering and building capacity in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion principles.

Conclusion:

Through examining why and how to measure your partnership for impact as well as understanding, using and sharing the information to improve group efficacy and credibility, we hope that this series will be a catalyst for new conversations and learning. We applaud the hard work you do and we encourage you to become a champion for partnership measurement in your community. Most of all, we hope that measuring your partnership will enhance your collective ability to have the social impact you desire.



Julie Pehar holds a Masters Degree in Education from the University of Toronto in the discipline of Sociology and Equity and a Bachelor of Arts Degree from McMaster University in Sociology and Women's Studies. Julie is a business owner and consultant in the Greater Toronto Area working with many collaboratives and networks, municipal governments and United Ways using the Collective Impact and Results Based Accountability frameworks. Julie is an Innoweave

coach and a part-time (2015/16) professor in the faculty of Applied Health and Community Studies, Social Service Worker Program Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.



Seema Taneja holds a Masters Degree in Community Psychology from Wilfrid Laurier University. Seema has worked in and now consults with the not-for-profit sector in the areas of data, measurement, evaluation, and strategy. Seema is a recognized trainer in Results-Based Accountability (RBA) and has lead several processes to support communities and organizations develop effective results, indicators, and measures so to enhance much of the work they are already engaged in. Seema is also an Innoweave coach and has sup-

ported several organizations in understanding and leveraging elements of Collective Impact to strengthen and accelerate their work. Seema supports open data and data sharing and leads initiatives that accelerate this philosophy into integrative planning for communities.