



WHEN
COLLECTIVE IMPACT

A CROSS-SITE STUDY OF 25 COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVES **HAS AN IMPACT**



Acknowledgments | This study required an extraordinary amount of engagement from participants at all levels. We are especially appreciative of the hundreds of people who submitted their initiatives as possible participants in the study; those who participated in the early interviews; and those engaged in the data collection during site visits and deep-dive equity dialogues. Their generosity of time was incredible, as was their willingness to have their work explored in such depth and shared so widely. The study team strove to do justice to the data and stories of the initiatives, their accomplishments, and their lessons learned. Any inaccuracies or misrepresentations are the responsibility of the authors.

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ORS Impact helps foundation, nonprofits, and government agencies clarify, measure, and align around their social impact outcomes, stay accountable to success, and learn along the way. By making social change measurable, we help clients make meaningful social change possible. For more information, visit orsimpact.com.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, John Kania and Mark Kramer published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, laying out “collective impact” as an approach for solving social problems at scale. For some, the introduction of a defined framework for cross-sector collaboration provided a useful way to focus new and existing partnerships toward a common goal and, hopefully, greater impact.

It has not, however, been without controversy. Some critiques from the field include a sense that collective impact is just new packaging for old concepts (without fully crediting that work that preceded it); that it is inherently a top-down approach to community problems; that it is too simplistic for solving the complex social problems it seeks to address; and that it replicates unjust power dynamics. There is also criticism that the approach has not been assessed rigorously enough to warrant the amount of resources being directed toward it.

This study is intended to add to the body of knowledge related to collective impact, building a better understanding of when and where it has an impact. To solve the entrenched social problems that still plague too many people and communities, it is crucial to continue deepening the sector’s understanding of what can be understood about the results collective impact initiatives are achieving, the challenges they face, and the lessons they have learned.

In early 2017, the Collective Impact Forum, an initiative of FSG and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, hired ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute to address these questions. They sought a fieldwide study that could help answer a fundamental question:

To what extent and under what conditions does the collective impact approach contribute to systems and population changes?

Until now, there has not been a methodologically rigorous study that has looked across multiple collective impact initiatives to systematically explore the results they are achieving, the challenges they face, and the lessons they have learned. This study looked across 25 collective impact initiatives and then explored eight of those sites in more depth via site visits and deep analysis of the degree to which collective impact implementation and outcomes contributed to demonstrated population changes. The study also included three sites with whom additional data collection was conducted to better understand their equity work.

This study is not intended to be promotional for collective impact as an approach, FSG, the Aspen Institute, or for any of the Forum partners or the funders of this research. The partnership of Spark Policy Institute (Spark) and ORS Impact (ORS) as the Study Team brought both knowledge and experience with collective impact (Spark) and experience with other community change models (both), as well as a healthy skepticism and more “arm’s length” relationship to the approach (ORS). The study was designed and implemented with the goal of surfacing insights about when and how collective impact achieves impact in the hopes of building the field’s knowledge about how best to improve the lives of people and their environments.

This report lays out the key findings related to:

1. ***Understanding Contribution and Outcomes of Collective Impact:*** What did the study show about the degree to which collective impact initiatives contributed to population changes, early changes, and systems changes?
2. ***The Design and Implementation of Collective Impact:*** What did the study show about implementation of the five collective impact conditions? What did the study find related to key aspects of the collective impact principles of practice and external funding and supports, with a specific limited inquiry into equity processes and outcomes?
3. ***Implications from the Study Findings:*** How can funders, implementers, community participants, and evaluators use the insights from the study to strengthen their collective impact efforts?

Detailed information on the research study design follows to provide context for the findings.



RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN

This study focused on answering a set of five primary questions oriented around when and how collective impact approaches lead to systems and population change.¹ The study also explored how collective impact is being deployed and the context, challenges, and barriers experienced by collective impact initiatives. See Figure 1 for the full set of questions.

Figure 1 | Study Questions

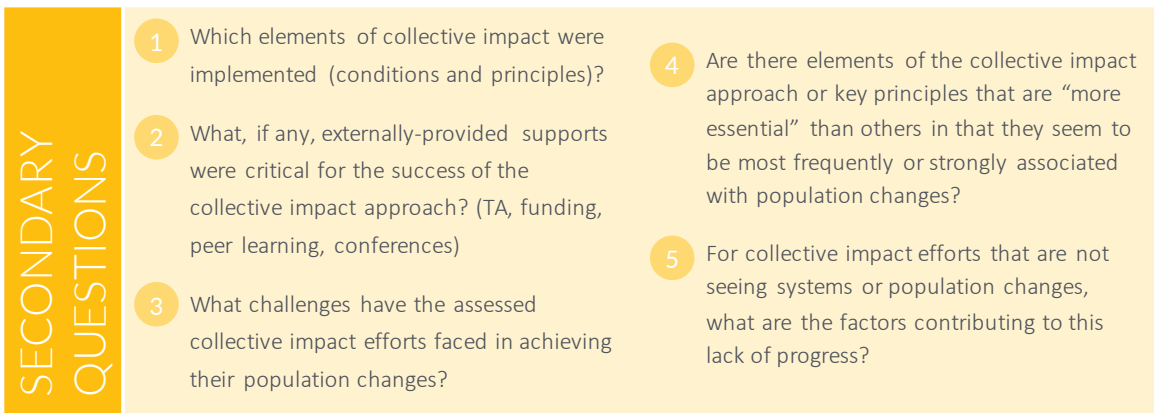
THE IMPACT OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

PRIMARY QUESTIONS

- 1 To what extent and under what conditions does the collective impact approach contribute to population level outcomes?
- 2 What systems changes have contributed to the population level outcomes being achieved?
- 3 What are the other positive or negative impacts, intended or unintended, on the community and system?
- 4 What evidence is there that the collective impact effort has contributed to these systems and population changes?
- 5 What evidence is there that the population changes would not have been achieved if the collective impact approach hadn't been used?

¹ A more detailed section on the Study Methods can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 1 | Study Questions – Continued



From the beginning of designing this study and during check-in points along the way, one of the ongoing challenges was defining what the study could achieve and what it would not attempt to achieve. There are many important questions being asked about collective impact; this study maintained a focus on specific questions, even though it meant other critical questions were left unanswered.

Specifically, *this study does not attempt to:*

Compare collective impact to other approaches to driving systems change to say when collective impact is the right approach. Instead, the study unpacks how collective impact played out in the settings where it has been used, including exploring where it worked most successfully and where it faced significant challenges. The Study Team did not attempt a comparison study with non-collective impact initiatives.

Prove the relationship between collective impact conditions and population change. The Study Team believes this study provides evidence about what it looks like when collective impact conditions have contributed to population change. However, given the wide variety of collective impact implementations in many different contexts, this study is not attempting to prove that one or more of the collective impact conditions WILL lead to population change, but rather describe when they have. The study results explore contribution within specific case examples; they do not seek to provide evidence of causation.

Prove the relationship between an equity approach and population change. Very similar to the previous limitation, the Study Team recognizes a deeper investigation specifically into the equity principle does not lead to having solid proof of when and how equity should be used to drive outcomes, but rather provides examples of when it has mattered and what it looked like in those settings.

Prove when the collective impact approach doesn't work. This study does have examples of initiatives who have not (or not yet) achieved population change. The study can discuss what they have experienced but is not attempting to say that these initiatives cannot achieve population change while using the collective impact approach.



STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The study initially solicited nominations from a variety of sources, including a fieldwide invitation to participate. Sites could be nominated or self-nominate through an online form that was advertised through an FSG blog post, via an email to the Collective Impact Forum email list, and in twitter postings inviting interested sites to apply. Some sites were added to the list of potential sites by Advisory Committee² members, and others were identified as promising sites for inclusion based on answers submitted to a recent survey through the Collective Impact Forum. Ultimately, over 200 submissions were received from all potential channels.

Study Team staff vetted the nominated initiatives via online sources. Viable initiatives had to be: located in the United States or Canada; have clear evidence of implementing at least two collective impact conditions; and have been in operation for more than three years. These latter two criteria were designed to have a sample of sites among whom it would be feasible to see impact from their work. This process narrowed the sample to 39 initiatives who went through a phone screening process to confirm information collected and ensure commitment to full participation in the study. Individual interviewees were provided a \$50 gift card as a token of thanks for their time and participation.

A sample of 28 sites was identified following final vetting by the Advisory Committee to address any conflicts of interest, ensure diversity of the sample, and limit how many initiatives came from any given “model” or program (e.g., StriveTogether sites) that might result in a sample biased toward that approach over others. Ultimately, 25 initiatives completed the full first phase study process as **study sites** (see Figure 2; see Appendix B for a list of study sites with locations and issues areas of focus).

From the 25 study sites, eight **site visit sites**³ were selected for additional data collection activities. Analysts used a Delphi ranking technique, where each study site was scored on a rubric⁴ of seven criteria designed to ensure all site visit sites would, at minimum, include: at least one verifiable and meaningful population change; implementation of all five conditions, most of which would be at a

² Advisory Committee integration into the study is discussed in further detail in the Study Oversight section and in Appendix A; a list of Advisory Committee members can be found in Appendix C.

³ Sites selected as site visit sites are identified in Appendix B

⁴ Rubrics are further discussed in the Study Methods section.

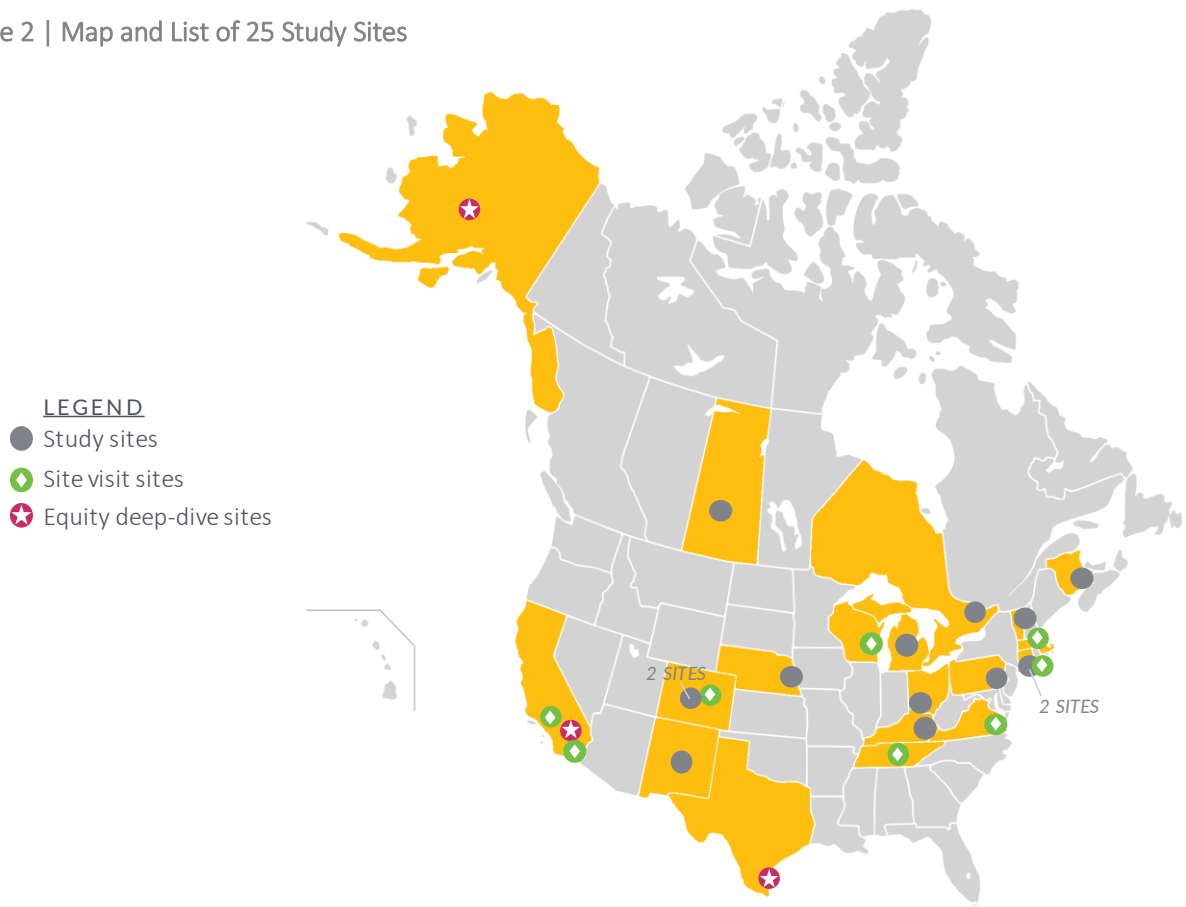
mature level; maturity of the systems changes (e.g., formalization, examples across multiple organizations); and the general plausibility of linkages between the collective impact initiative's work, the early changes, the systems changes, and the population changes. Sites received a \$2,000 stipend to help defray costs associated with site visit logistics and coordination. In addition, individual participants involved in data collection efforts received a \$50 gift card as a token of appreciation for their participation. Sites received a site-level write-up for their use as a benefit of their participation.

As the study went on, the steering committee expressed concern over the limited degree to which the eight site visit sites reflected a strong equity focus. Rather than dilute the original focus of the site visits, which sought to use a particular methodology to understand population-level impact given strong implementation of collection impact, the study scope was expanded to include three **equity deep-dive sites**.⁵ Those equity deep-dive sites were selected with the steering committee based on the criteria that the initiative had (1) an explicit equity focus; (2) involvement of those with lived experience; (3) strong implementation of collective impact; and (4) evidence of systems change. Equity deep dive sites received \$500 for participating and individuals who participated in data collection received a \$50 gift card for their participation.

In most cases, specific sites in the study are named to provide concrete examples that illustrate study findings. In some cases, site anonymity has been preserved if the information presented could be sensitive or viewed as detrimental.

⁵ Equity deep-dive sites are identified in Appendix B.

Figure 2 | Map and List of 25 Study Sites



STUDY SITES ●	
Colorado	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspen Community Foundation’s Cradle to Career Initiative South Platte Urban Waters Partnership
Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalition for New Britain’s Youth Open Doors Fairfield County
Kentucky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaping our Appalachian Region (SOAR)
Michigan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KConnect
Nebraska	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless
New Brunswick, Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living SJ
New Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission: Graduate
Ohio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green Umbrella
Ontario, Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative – Growing Up Great
Pennsylvania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project U-Turn
Saskatchewan, Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership
Vermont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vermont Farm to Plate
SITE VISIT SITES ◆	
California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative Home For Good
Colorado	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention
Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance
Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities That Care Coalition: Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment Nashville
Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabeth River Project
Wisconsin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative
DEEP DIVE EQUITY SITES ★	
Alaska	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anchorage Realizing Indigenous Student Excellence (ARISE)
California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promesa Boyle Heights
Texas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RGV Focus

STUDY METHODS

To answer the study questions, the study used a multi-phase process that deployed a mix of methodological approaches (see Appendix A for full detail), leveraging data from across the 25 study sites.

ANALYTICAL METHODS

Rubrics

To compare critical concepts across study sites, the study utilized a set of rubrics that included evaluative criteria, quality definitions for those criteria at particular levels of achievement, and a scoring strategy (Table 1). These rubrics allowed for study sites to be compared on common indicators and for judgment calls to be made about success of implementation of key concepts. The analytic value in the rubrics lie in the ability to balance site differences in types of population data, systemic changes, and implementation elements while avoiding exclusive reliance on qualitatively assessing the overall cases and comparing them. By having a clearly defined rubric, each study site was analyzed against the rubric and compared at that level, limiting risks of variable rigor and precision in the analysis.

Table 1 | Analytic Rubrics

RUBRIC	<i>This rubric assisted in identifying the extent to which each site has...</i>	Summary of indicators
COLLECTIVE IMPACT	... implemented the conditions of collective impact	Fidelity of implementation for the five collective impact model conditions
EQUITY	... acted in ways intended to increase equity and has seen an impact on equity due to those actions	Capacity to implement an equity approach Actions that are intended to increase equity Meaningful inclusion of the target population Outcomes that are intended to increase equity (systems changes) or have increased equity (population change)

RUBRIC	<i>This rubric assisted in identifying the extent to which each site has...</i>	Summary of indicators
SYSTEMS CHANGE	... acted in ways intended to drive systemic and cross-system level changes and has seen an impact on systems due to these actions	<p>Changes in how institutions in the public, non-profit, and private sector behave, including formal changes (institutionalized) and informal experiments</p> <p>Changes within a single institution, across multiple institutions with a similar purpose (e.g., schools), or across multiple institutions with different purposes (e.g., schools and public health partners)</p> <p>Changes to policy, practice improvements, program expansion or improvements, new infrastructure, workforce expansion or strengthening, data expansion or strengthening, and/or communications expansion or strengthening</p>
POPULATION LEVEL GOALS	... made progress on the site-specific population level goals	<p>Meaningful and positive change on an indicator meaningful to the initiative’s goals</p> <p>Quality and credibility of the data used to measure the change</p>

Process Tracing

One of the most important questions this study sought to answer was whether there is a direct relationship between the collective impact approach and its contribution to population change. The technique used to answer this question is called *process tracing*. Process tracing explores competing hypotheses about plausible explanations of the causes of a given outcome (in this case, population change). The hypotheses include both the contribution of collective impact as well as other types of drivers identified and prioritized by the site visit sites. Using a rigorous analytical process, the analysis assesses and quantifies the degree of contribution that can be connected to each hypothesis or cause. In addition to evaluating activities and outcomes, the evaluator undertakes “process induction” to identify salient, plausible explanations for the outcomes and uses “process verification” to assess the extent to which each of the explanations identified are supported or not supported by the available evidence. The data for process tracing came from interviews, focus groups, reviews of initiative-related systems changes, materials from the initiatives, and facilitated dialogues with groups of stakeholders at each site visit site.

Thematic Analysis

Some of the data fell outside the rubrics and process tracing and helped to answer other key questions, such as the challenges facing collective impact initiatives. These were coded using a conceptually-driven coding framework aligned closely with the analytical rubrics and the process-tracing methodology but also allowed for emergent codes. Some of the data were coded specifically for exploratory analysis using quantitative techniques (crosstabs, chi-square, and k-means cluster analysis), where patterns across study sites were identified. These patterns were then analyzed using the full qualitative data set and thematic findings were generated across study sites with examples from specific study sites. No findings were generated based on the quantitative analysis alone.



PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Phase I

The Study Team engaged the 25 selected study sites in a combination of interviews (n=2 per study site) and conducted document reviews of available materials (e.g., evaluation plans, communication materials, action plans, common agendas, shared measurement system reports). Analysis included application of the rubrics, completion of preparatory steps for the process tracing process, assessment of the quality of data on population changes, and qualitative coding and analysis.

Phase II

The eight site visit sites participated first in a pre-call with a staff member or coordinator from the initiative. One of the critical elements of the Phase II data collection was the documentation of potential relationships for the process-tracing analysis. Study Team analysts used Phase I data to develop a theory of how change happened, inclusive of collective impact conditions, strategies, early outcomes, systems change, population change, and other drivers of change. This was reviewed and revised with feedback from the initiative coordinator during the pre-call. A site visit followed that included:

- Two focus groups: one with stakeholders representing the backbone and governance of the initiative and a second with stakeholders representing the participants of the initiative (including community leaders).
- A process-tracing dialogue: a two-hour facilitated dialogue with stakeholders representing a mix of perspectives from the initiative to test the elements of the contribution story relationships.
- An interview with the initiative evaluator.

Analysis included updating the application of the rubrics based on new insights, process-tracing analysis, and qualitative coding and analysis.

Phase III

During the final analytical phase of the study, the three equity deep-dive sites participated in multi-stakeholder focus groups over the phone, specifically exploring their implementation of equity practices and the outcomes related to equity they have achieved. The data were coded and analyzed qualitatively as a set, as well as with analysis of all data from prior phases.



STUDY FUNDING AND OVERSIGHT

The research study was funded by a group of funders who granted money to FSG from the following funders: the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Houston Endowment, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The contract explicitly stated that “the Work, including the means and methods of the Work, is under Consultant's sole control and discretion. FSG’s only interest is in the results of the Work.”

The study was overseen by two groups. An advisory committee comprised of funders and collective impact field experts met at the beginning of the study to inform the overall design and at the end of the study to review the results and discuss implications. A subset of the advisory committee members served as a steering team, providing more active guidance. These steering team participants helped shape the study design, including weighing decisions that affected the limitations and scope of the study, such as the selection process for each of the study phases. They also surfaced the need for a more in-depth exploration of equity, which was met in part through the addition of three equity deep-dive study sites. See Appendix C for the list of advisory committee and steering team members.

FSG, the Collective Impact Forum, and the Aspen Institute did not exercise any rights or controls over the results of this study. They did not receive any additional opportunities to review or comment on the results or findings outside of the committee processes.



REFLECTIONS ON THE DESIGN: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

All studies must make choices and tradeoffs within their designs and implementation. This study has the following strengths:

- **Multi-site approach:** As mentioned previously, most research and evaluation of collective impact has focused on a single site or set of sites using a similar model (e.g., StriveTogether sites). This study looked at sites that covered a range of focus areas, geographies, and approaches to implementing collective impact.
- **Triangulation across multiple informants, multiple types of data, and multiple analysts:** The study leverages secondary data and data from multiple types of stakeholders, including backbone staff, funders, partners, and community stakeholders. In addition to triangulating data from multiple sources, the Study Team had robust processes for coding and analyzing data that benefited from multiple perspectives.
- **Use of methodologies that allow for comparison across diverse cases:** The use of the rubrics and process tracing methodology provided rigor and greater comparability for identifying patterns and themes emerging from the cross-site analysis. In addition, the inferential tests embedded in the process tracing approach add a more structured way to assessing the strength of contribution than a comparative qualitative assessment alone.

The study also acknowledges the following limitations:

- **Narrow focus within site:** The study sought to deeply understand site experiences around one documented population-level change that was achieved by each initiative. By design, this meant that other areas of work or aspects of that initiative were not explored. Understanding contribution around one change or set of changes is not necessarily generalizable to other areas of work or focus within any given site.

- **Data primarily came from self-report data, from a largely insider point of view:**

While the design sought to maximize the variety of perspectives brought to bear on the questions in the study, it maintained focus on those with enough insider knowledge to engage in a conversation about the contribution story. When considering how far outside an initiative to seek key informants, the decision was made to prioritize informants with a clear understanding of the initiative but who might be skeptical about its impact, rather than those who are fully outside the work. While the discussion protocols sought to minimize group think or confirmation bias, the data were largely limited to what was collected during various qualitative data collection processes with certain groups of people. The study may have uncovered additional or more nuanced information about other contributors to change with more time or scope. Additionally, while the Study Team brought to bear secondary or other data as feasible, some data could not be independently verified outside of being triangulated across the data collection sessions.

In this report, we refer to initiatives' "contribution story." By contribution story, we mean the ways initiatives understand how the collective impact conditions, early changes, systems changes, and alternate drivers added up to lead to documented population change.

- **Some small data sets for some areas of inquiry:** Information around the implementation of the principles of practice came from site visit sites only and were largely centered around how these eight elements supported or impeded the work. Additionally, a strong interest in better understanding how equity was playing out in processes and outcomes emerged during Phase II work; as a result, the Study Team augmented the study with the three deep dive sites to better understand collective impact in sites with an explicit equity focus. While the Study Team was able to make some observations about equity across all sites, the rich data around how that work happens is limited to three of the 25 sites in the study.
- **Limitations in isolating the effects of collective impact:** Isolating the effects of collective impact initiatives is difficult given the likelihood that other system initiatives may be occurring in the space at the same time. This is especially true when collective impact efforts leverage existing policy or practice initiatives. The process-tracing technique attempted to control for this by explicitly including data collection and stakeholder interpretation about other potential causes and their contribution to the change.
- **Determining whether an initiative has failed to achieve population change because of not enough time passing or other factors:** Given the length of time it can take for any collaborative effort to achieve significant systems changes and for those systems changes to be implemented and lead to population changes, it was difficult to determine whether initiatives not seeing any population change were primarily lacking sufficient time. However, the analysis was able to identify some potential challenges facing those initiatives, which signal that even with additional time, they may not see population change.

The study was designed to generate new insights about when and under what conditions the collective impact approach leads to systems and population changes, as well as explore other key concepts including how equity plays out in collective impact and some of the challenges and types of changes experienced. While there are significant limitations, overall the methods allowed for the study aims to be achieved and the findings are in the sections to follow. Further studies will be needed to explore other important questions that remain.



THE STUDY TEAM FIRMS

ORS Impact (ORS) and Spark Policy Institute (Spark) partnered to bring extensive expertise in the evaluation of complex initiatives—including collective impact and other community, multi-sector initiatives—along with systems change, emergent evaluation, and strategic learning. The Study Team entered into this work believing that it does not have real conflicts of interest. However, the Study Team recognized there may be perceived conflicts, including:

- Spark's investment in collective impact work, including authoring a toolkit for backbones, a Foundation Review article, and serving as a backbone for multiple initiatives; Spark's two-year involvement in an Aspen Institute collective impact strategy, serving initially as the backbone and now as the evaluation partner; and the study lead from Spark engaging in periodic partnership with leaders at FSG on thought pieces, such as sessions at AEA, blogs, and an upcoming paper.
- ORS's current work evaluating the Fund for Shared Insight, of which the CI Forum is concurrently a grantee.

Co-leadership helped to mitigate these perceived conflicts, including engaging multiple senior leaders from ORS and Spark helping to design, implement, and share results versus an approach driven strongly from any one point of view.

Both firms believe that those seeking social impact are best served by the best data possible, regardless of result, and that learning, iterating, and improving requires willingness to share good and difficult news. The Study Team brings integrity to its design, implementation, analysis, and reporting, unflinchingly being guided by the data and acknowledging the strengths and limitations that exist.



UNDERSTANDING CONTRIBUTION AND OUTCOMES OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

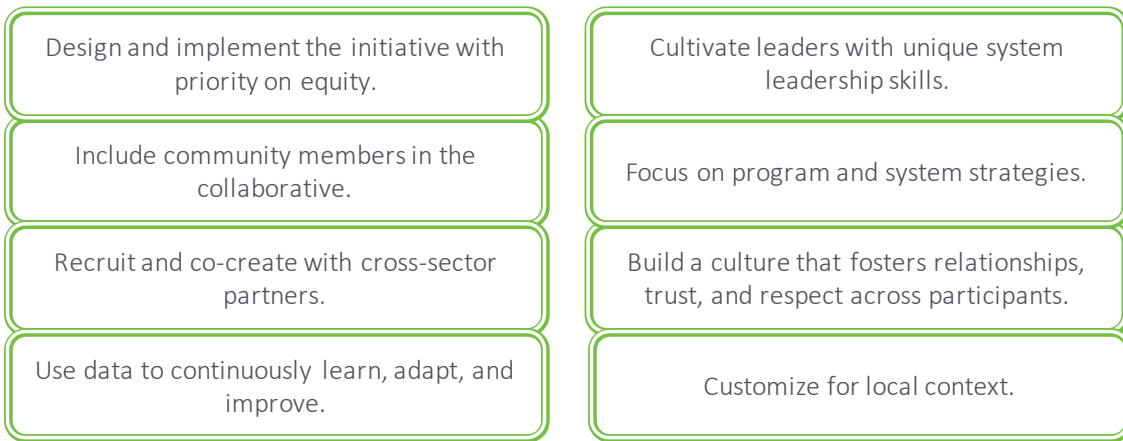
Since 2011, the term “collective impact” has become a widely-used buzzword and a popular approach for a more defined way to engage in collaborative work. According to the original description by John Kania and Mark Kramer and used to this day, collective impact is the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem at scale. Collective impact initiatives are distinct from other forms of collaboration in their cross-sector composition and their implementation of the five conditions of collective impact (Figure 3).

Figure 3 | Five Collective Impact Conditions



Many collective impact initiatives also deploy eight additional principles of practice, which are increasingly recognized as important to achieving population change (Figure 4).

Figure 4 | Eight Principles of Practice

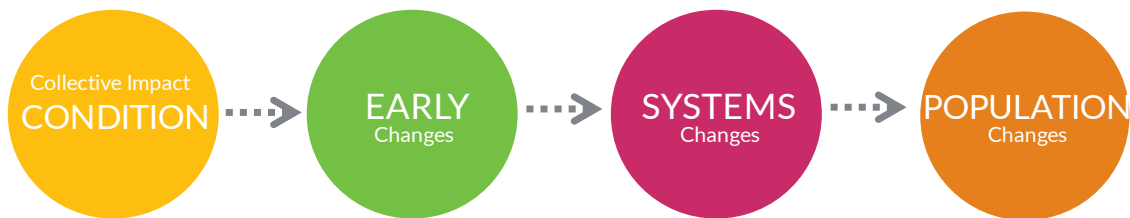


Collective impact has been deployed in many different ways since 2011, including as an orienting approach for new partnerships and as a new approach applied to an existing partnership. Some collective impact approaches have been top-down, initiated and led by actors within government and private systems, others have been community-led, and still others are a mix. Collective impact has been used to solve problems across many geographies and scales as well as across many issue areas (e.g., education, environment, health, economic development, justice, housing, etc.). Equity is sometimes front and center, sometimes desired but less actively acted on, and not always present. Not without its detractors, there has long been sector-wide debate on the merits, values, and limitations of the approach.

To answer the question of *“To what extent and under what conditions does the collective impact approach contribute to systems and populations changes?”* the study had to understand what kinds of changes were happening and then assess the degree to which there has been a relationship between collective impact and these outcomes.

Anchored around the focused population change defined by the initiative, the study used a simplified theory of change model to differentiate between the collective impact conditions, the activities undertaken, the early changes resulting from conditions and activities, and the related systems changes sites hypothesized led to the population change(s) sought or achieved.

Figure 5 | Simplified Theory of Change for Process Tracing



One of the main goals of this study was to understand the relationship between collective impact approaches and systems and population changes. The study also assumed early changes would precede the systems changes and were important to document.



For the purposes of this study, **early changes** are defined as changes to the environment that lay the foundation for systems and policy changes, including such things as increasing partnership, collaboration, awareness of the issue among policymakers and the public, increased availability and use of data, community engagement in the issue, expanded coverage in the media or other communications shifts, etc.



For the purposes of this study, **systems changes** are defined as changes to core institutions within the initiative’s geographic area, including schools, human service systems, local governments, private sector entities, non-profits, community-based organizations, etc. Systems changes were further broken down by whether they were formalized and likely to sustain or more informal experiments. For example, a one-time training with staff in multiple programs might be an important informal shift in the practice, where a new policy requiring competencies for staff is a formalized system change.

The systems change analysis also looked at whether the change happened in a single organization, multiple organizations with a common purpose (both in terms of issue area and sector), or multiple organizations with multiple purposes. Utilizing the same training example, competencies changed in a single school would represent a system change in a single organization. If competencies were changed in multiple schools, that would be multiple organizations with a common purpose. It would be multiple organizations across sectors if the competencies were adopted in both the schools and with non-profits providing afterschool programming.



Population changes are defined here as the changes in the target population of the initiative, which may be specific people within specific systems or geographic areas or with specific needs.

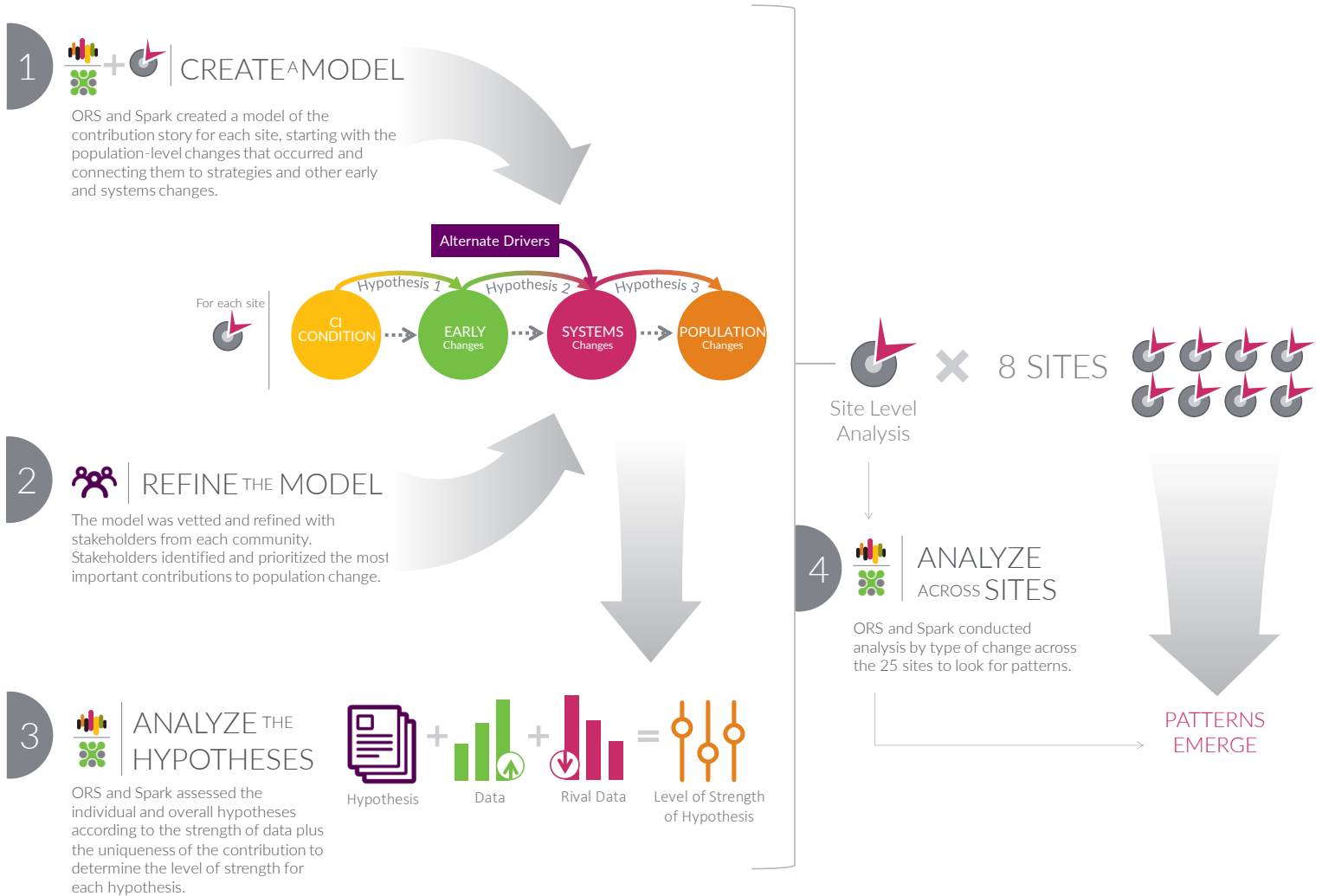
For a subset of sites, the study sought to determine the degree to which collective impact **contributed** to making significant and meaningful progress at the population level in solving the problems the initiatives set out to address. To do this, the Study Team chose a methodology that is designed to untangle questions of contribution: process tracing.

Process tracing seeks to open the “black box” to assess the force or power that gives rise to an outcome. With this method, the Study Team collected additional data from the eight site visit sites that are implementing all five conditions of collective impact and reported achieving at least one documented population-level outcome. These initiatives represent diverse problem focus, location, and scope, and all agreed to participate in the additional data collection through site visits. The eight site visit sites include:

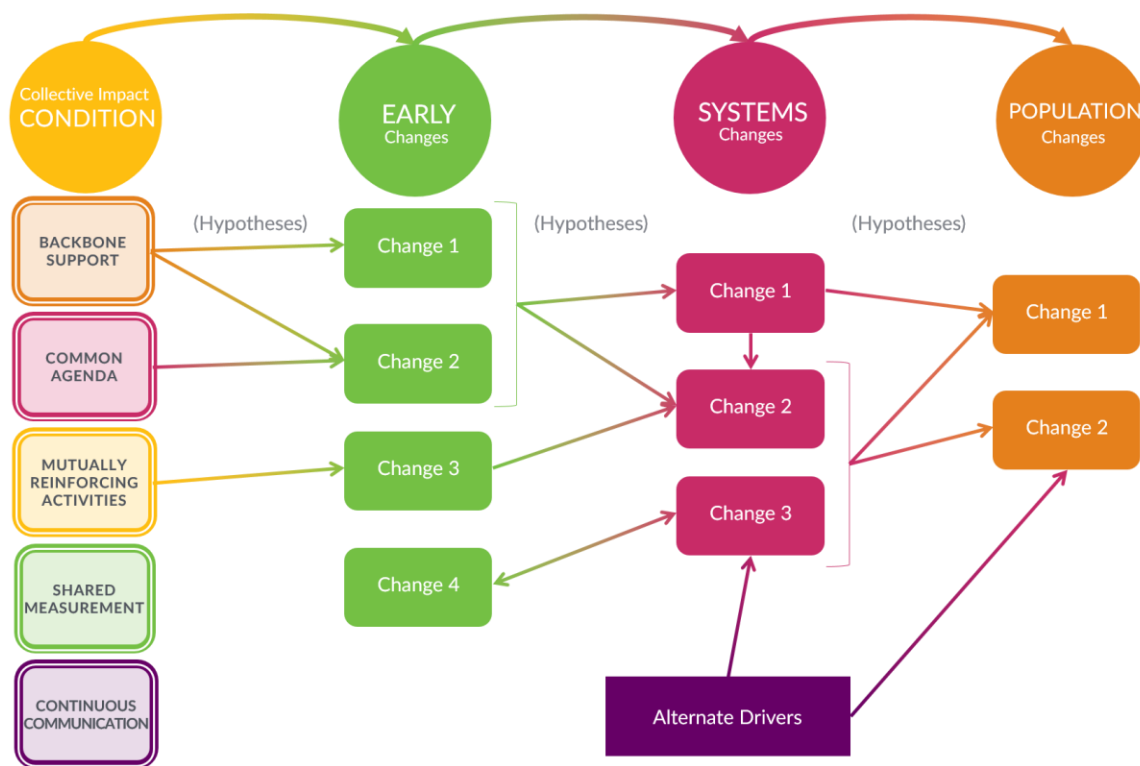
Table 2 | Site Visit Sites

SITE/INITIATIVE NAME	Location	Issue Area
ALIGNMENT NASHVILLE	Nashville, TN	Education – Multi-Issue
COLORADO CONSORTIUM FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION	Colorado	Substance Abuse
COMMUNITIES THAT CARE COALITION: FRANKLIN COUNTY AND THE NORTH QUABBIN REGION	Franklin County, MA	Education – Reducing Teen Social Risk Factors
CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE	Bridgeport, CT	Juvenile Justice
ELIZABETH RIVER PROJECT	Portsmouth, VA	Environmental
HOME FOR GOOD	Los Angeles, CA	Homelessness
MILWAUKEE TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION INITIATIVE	Milwaukee, WI	Teen Pregnancy
SAN DIEGO COUNTY CHILDHOOD OBESITY INITIATIVE	San Diego, CA	Health – Childhood Obesity

PROCESS TRACING EXPLAINED



To implement this method, the Study Team worked with different stakeholders during the on-site site visit to untangle the contribution story around a documented population change for their initiative. The study used these data to create hypotheses about the presumed connections linking these components (e.g., which collective impact conditions led to which early changes). The hypotheses took initiative-specific forms to capture the context, specifics, and nuances of their work.



Sample hypotheses:

Type of Hypotheses	Example Hypothesis
COLLECTIVE IMPACT CONDITIONS TO EARLY CHANGES	Common Agenda, Mutually Reinforcing Activities (action plan and work groups), and Backbone have (1) increased trust among partners (2) created culture change among agencies (toward collaborative work), (3) facilitated development of local work; and (4) maintained high levels of political will.
EARLY CHANGES TO SYSTEMS CHANGES	The early changes (legislative champions/political will, allies, deepened relationships/trust, and public engagement) worked together to lead to the adoption and implementation of legislation and legislatively-mandated implementation/oversight bodies.
SYSTEMS CHANGES TO POPULATIONS CHANGES	More aligned policies and practices within partner agencies/organizations have produced more targeted and higher quality services to homeless clients and increased housing placements for veteran and chronic homeless.
OVERALL THEORY OF CHANGE HYPOTHESIS	The extent of river clean-up and the changed relationship of the community to the water would not have occurred without Elizabeth River Project.


In addition, the study allowed for hypotheses that didn't fit within these linear categories; these are discussed more fully later.

Each hypothesis was rigorously assessed using the data from a variety of sources to critically judge the relationships implied, as well as the strength of the hypothesis against one or more plausible alternative explanations.

Example:

Hypothesis	Evidence (drawn from interviews, site visit meetings, collective impact conditions rubric analysis, and document review)
<p>ORIGINAL: The common agenda, shared measurement system, and the backbone led to increased political will, breadth and depth of partners, and commitment to achieving a shared goal.</p>	<p>Backbone united everyone around a common agenda and common goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership/funding of the backbone was critical to kicking off and moving the work forward • Very strong rating (3) for implementation of the common agenda • Recognition that the backbone brought different partners to the table • Commitment to and measurement of progress on the shared goal: built trust (transparency) and made people want to continue to participate • Setting a goal brings discipline to the systems, helps people concentrate, get motivated and get noticed • Somewhat strong rating for shared measurement (2) – lost point because of usefulness of the data in informing ongoing work, but not an issue here because the data were used to rally everyone around a common outcome • Oversight committee decisions seem to be open and participatory • Somewhat strong rating for backbone (2) – lost point because of limited capacity for coordination across partners
<p>RIVAL: People have been doing this work since the 80s; the prior, ongoing efforts explain the early outcomes.</p>	<p>While people had been working on this for a while, in the past there had been no/limited progress; what made the difference was leadership/funding of the backbone</p>

One benefit of process tracing is standardization in how to assess the strength of the relationships based on two facets: the **certainty** with which one can understand the relationship as well as the **uniqueness** or sufficiency of the elements of the relationship in fully explaining the outcome. Process tracing allows for assessing the strength of the individual parts of the contribution story (e.g., how did collective impact conditions contribute to early changes?) as well as the overall theory of change (i.e., to what degree does the entire story explain how the population change occurred?).

 <p><i>Level of Inferential Strength of Hypothesis</i></p>	<p><i>Strength of Evidence</i></p>
<p>1. The hypothesis is plausible but is neither proven or disproven.</p>	<p>We find evidence that is suggestive of a relationship, but that is insufficient to draw a definitive conclusion as to the contribution to the outcome relative to other rival explanations</p>
<p>2. The hypothesis is certain but not unique.</p>	<p>We find evidence that is sufficient to conclude that a relationship exists, but not to rule out the possibility that the outcome would have also occurred due to rival explanations</p>
<p>3. The hypothesis is plausible and unable to be explained by a rival explanation.</p>	<p>We find evidence that is sufficient to conclude that a relationship exists and that the outcome would not have occurred due to rival explanations</p>
<p>4. The hypothesis is deemed to be “doubly decisive.”</p>	<p>We find evidence that provides high certainty of contribution and that there is no alternative explanation. This level of strength is extremely unlikely when talking about complex systems change initiatives</p>

This section presents findings about the connection between collective impact and population change, as well as achievement of different types of changes and the strength of the hypothesized relationships.⁶

⁶ Appendix D provides a summary of the assessment of the strength of all hypotheses by type.



EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND POPULATION CHANGE

A critical aspect of the study was answering the question of collective impact's contribution to achieved population changes. The study sought to review the weight of evidence for the entire contribution story across the eight site visit sites to determine the overall level of contribution of the collective impact approach to documented population changes.

For all eight site visit sites, collective impact undoubtedly contributed to the desired population change.

Based on the data and process tracing method, the study determined that in these eight cases there is a strong contribution relationship between the implementation of the collective impact model and the observed population changes. The nature of the contribution of collective impact varies by initiative.

For seven of the eight site visit sites, there was strong or compelling data linking **new or expanded programs/services** to the population change. For example, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative achieved key systems changes, all of which represent evidence-based methods to prevent teen pregnancy, which have contributed to a reduction in teen birth rates among girls aged 15 to 17 in Milwaukee and include: (1) modification and implementation of Human Growth and Development Curriculum in Milwaukee Public Schools for grades K-12, including expanded capacity of school leaders and teachers to implement the curriculum; (2) expanded and aligned comprehensive sexuality education programming available in school and in afterschool settings; and (3) increased availability, accessibility, and acceptability of contraception. Increased awareness of the issue, political will, and commitment to achieving a shared goal to reduce teen pregnancy made it easier politically to implement the strategies and, in turn, create the systems change. Similarly, in rural Massachusetts, Communities That Care Coalition has been able to align districts and partners to jointly adopt evidence-based curriculum and programming and develop youth leadership. A number of sites (5 of 8) also made practice improvements that they thought contributed to population changes.

Sometimes programmatic and practice changes result from **policy changes**, something true for five of the site visit sites. For example, a key policy win in Connecticut for Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance was the adoption and implementation of Raise the Age legislation and the legislatively mandated implementation/oversight bodies in 2007. Raise the Age policy along with other changes set the stage for Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance to achieve further changes to the juvenile justice system. Some of these changes included: (1) changed juvenile court practices (i.e., rejecting referrals

involving youth arrested for minor behavior and referring young people to juvenile review boards); (2) changed criteria for which youth can be held in detention; and (3) increased investment by governmental agencies in in-home and community-based services, such as multidimensional family therapy. The systems changes were aided, in part, by the progressive political environment in Connecticut. Together, those systems changes have reshaped the justice system to decrease the number of youth entering and being held in the juvenile justice system. For example, youth can no longer be put into the system for certain types of offenses and are provided with additional in-home and community-based supports and services as alternatives to incarceration. In Colorado, increased access to Naloxone through policy changes, as well as distribution of Naloxone and education about its use, had a direct impact on saving the lives of people who are experiencing an overdose.

For five site visit sites, **finding ways to collectively leverage resources** was a key contributor to achieving population changes. For example, a funders collaborative (one of the Home For Good working groups) collectively implemented aligned funding practices such as leveraging public and private dollars to align to the strategic plan, issuing a universal Request for Proposals (RFP) for grant-making, and increasing private funding to support homeless solutions. For Alignment Nashville, San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, and Elizabeth River Project, attraction of new funds (public and private/philanthropic) allowed key strategies to be implemented. In the case of San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, policy, systems and environmental (PSE) changes in priority San Diego County communities (Chula Vista, Lemon Grove) supported through federal funds led to systems changes (school district and childcare policies and practices) within those communities that then led to population-level outcomes. For Elizabeth River Project, federal and local funding led to the creation of oyster habitats/reefs, a key step to improving river and ecosystem health in Lafayette.



VARIATION IN TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION

Part of the rigor of assessing contribution through process tracing is to identify **plausible rival explanations** and test their strength against available data. In other words, if all else was the same—collective impact was being implemented as described, the external context was equally enabling or challenging—and collective impact was *not* the driving force for change, what would explain the change observed? The types of rival explanations examined for different site visit sites varied and included:

Existing regulations or requirements from other governing bodies could explain what drove change; for example, Environmental Protection Agency regulations in the Chesapeake Bay (Elizabeth River Project) or HUD requirements for homeless serving agencies in Los Angeles (Home For Good).

Unrelated programs could have contributed to or accounted for the population outcome, such as other prevention programs implemented by schools in Massachusetts (Communities That Care

Coalition) or the adoption and implementation of clinical guidelines among physicians, an effort outside of the Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention initiative.

Evidence that the *strength or qualities of the implemented intervention* led to population change, but less clear evidence of the unique contribution of collective impact to the achievement of outcomes, such as the high school redesign implementation and district leadership changes in Nashville (Alignment Nashville) or the degree to which the funding and prevailing public health prevention approaches drove change in communities in San Diego (San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative).

Other external factors including national trends, such as heroin prices or youth crime (Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention) or increased general public focus on the issues of safe sex and teen pregnancy could have been enough to account for community actions (Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative); and the contribution of other enabling conditions, such as occurrence of the effort in a generally progressive state (Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance).

As the variability of the types of rivals may suggest, their relative strength for explaining the population change meant that while the study did identify a contribution story in all eight cases, the nature of the contribution did vary.

Three site visit sites had compelling evidence that the collective impact approach made a strong contribution to population changes, with low plausibility of an alternative explanation for how that change could have otherwise occurred.

These site visit sites represented a range of content areas with strong evidence and no plausible explanation for how change could have otherwise occurred. This was true for the work of Elizabeth River Project, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, and Home For Good. In each case, the study had strong evidence that change had occurred, strong evidence linking the different components of the work to the change, and no plausible alternative hypotheses to better explain or augment an understanding of how change happened. For Home For Good, the specific focus on a targeted homeless population, the alignment and coordination of funding and services across multiple partners in the county, and the widespread adoption of a common system went beyond what federal requirements or other external conditions could have wrought without the benefit of the backbone infrastructure, common agenda, shared measurement system, and mutually reinforcing activities. Similarly, for Elizabeth River Project, the degree to which work went beyond regulatory requirements and the degree of engagement from a range of different stakeholders seem implausible but for the work occurring as part of the overall approach. Finally, in Milwaukee, the approach of increasing awareness of the issue, political will, and commitment to achieving a shared goal made it easier to implement the strategies (all evidence-based methods to prevent teen pregnancy) and in turn, create the systems changes. This has contributed to a reduction in teen birth rates among girls aged 15 to 17

in Milwaukee above and beyond national downward trends. While in most cases there may have been other positive external factors at play, they did not present an alternative hypothesis that could plausibly explain the full extent of the documented population change.

Five site visit sites' data provided compelling evidence that collective impact had been a necessary element of the population change story, but that collective impact alone was insufficient for explaining the population change achieved.

In these site visit sites, there was clear data of population change that had occurred, and strong evidence that collective impact made a difference. However, unlike the previously-mentioned site visit sites, a combination of other external drivers along with supportive external factors made the unique contribution of collective impact less certain. Another way of understanding this level of contribution is that collective impact contributed and was *necessary* for achieving early and systems changes that contributed to population change, but that it was not *sufficient* for explaining the population change seen. While there are ways in which collective impact also made a clear contribution, the unique value of collective impact in explaining change is lessened.

For example, the study had less strong data by which to disentangle the contributions of the public health policy, systems, and environmental changes models used in San Diego (San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative), an approach that could have resulted in similar systems changes and population changes without the added value of collective impact. Communities That Care Coalition stakeholders noted that decreased substance use rates were also likely spurred by standalone school and district substance use reduction efforts as well as the work of other community and regional coalitions working on substance use prevention, not all subsumed under the coalition umbrella. In addition, the reported substance use population change numbers have been statistically adjusted for state and national trends in substance use reduction in an effort to remove the effect of state and national policies and programs and national trends in use types. The initiative reports that approximately 80% of the variation in self-reported use reduction is accounted for by these state and national trends. In these cases, data suggested that the work and impact moved faster, was more sustainable, or was of better quality because of the contributions of collective impact.

It is important to note that these categories do not suggest that one type of contribution is more optimal or qualitatively better than the other; the role of the collective impact initiatives in contributing to population change alongside other efforts or enablers is a critical and valuable aspect of social change.

Variability across sites with different types of contribution to population change

The three site visit sites with no strong plausible alternative explanations, and the five site visit sites where collective impact was necessary but insufficient for achieving population change had interesting differences:

Focus on Data. Site visit sites with no plausible alternative explanation for change more frequently: (1) implemented data strategies; (2) included the shared measurement system in their explanation for how change happened; and (3) prioritized data-related early and/or systems changes as a critical part of their contribution story. For example, Home For Good used outcome data from their shared measurement system as well as information from other data systems they created to help better prioritize and deliver services. Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative leveraged their goal (reduce the teen birth rate by 46% by 2015) to increase partners' commitment and increase transparency by annually reporting on progress to hold themselves accountable. While there was usage and inclusion of data among the other five site visit sites, it was less consistent.

Focus on Resources. The three site visit sites with a unique contribution relationship had a stronger focus on implementing strategies related to resource allocation and funding (e.g., developing collaborative funds; engaging diverse funding sources, such as private, local, federal, and/or philanthropic dollars); and more frequent inclusion of hypotheses about how collective impact directly contributed to more resources for the work. For example, Elizabeth River Project saw a direct connection between the strength of its backbone and leadership style with its ability to attract funding.

Focus on Political Will and Policies. Only one of the three site visit sites with no plausible alternative explanation for change focused on policy strategies, building political will, and seeing policy changes as key components to understanding their contribution story. Yet among the other five site visit sites, this focus was more common. For example, the work of Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance focused on early changes around building legislative champions as part of their efforts for successful adoption and implementation of policy change, including the Raise the Age legislation.

More and Different Systems Changes. The three site visit sites with no strong plausible alternative for change had, on average, slightly more systems changes prioritized and more multi-sector outcomes.



OUTCOMES IN COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVES

In addition to interrogating the overall contribution story, the study explored the kinds of changes seen within collective impact initiatives and, for site visit sites, also disentangled the strength of contribution within the different parts of the overall story. This section provides more detail related to:

- Early changes and their connections to collective impact conditions;
- Systems changes and their connections to early changes and collective impact conditions;
- Population changes and their connections to systems changes; and
- Other hypothesized relationships found among site visit sites.



EARLY CHANGES AND THEIR CONNECTIONS TO COLLECTIVE IMPACT CONDITIONS

For the purposes of this study, early changes are defined as changes to the environment that lay the foundation for systems and policy changes, such as increasing partnership, collaboration, awareness of the issue among policymakers and the public, increased availability and use of data, community engagement in the issue, expanded coverage in the media or other communications shifts, etc. The study assumed that before systems and population change was possible, various types of early changes would be needed to lay the foundation for the larger changes. The study analyzed the presence of different types of changes across all 25 sites and explored whether there were interesting relationships between the parts of the model.

Sites are achieving a range of early changes that are logically linked to collective impact conditions and set the stage for further out systems changes and population changes.

For site visit sites, the study looked at what early changes the initiatives prioritized as meaningful parts of their contribution story. Site visit sites credited 34 early changes with a role in their contribution story. The most frequent outcomes identified by initiatives as critical components of the early part of the work were largely around:

- **Strengthening partnerships** (six of eight site visit sites): including partnership structures, partnership quality, and communication among partners.
- **Building and enhancing collaboration** (six site visit sites): including creation of new or deepening of existing collaborative structures, such as a community of practice; organizations or

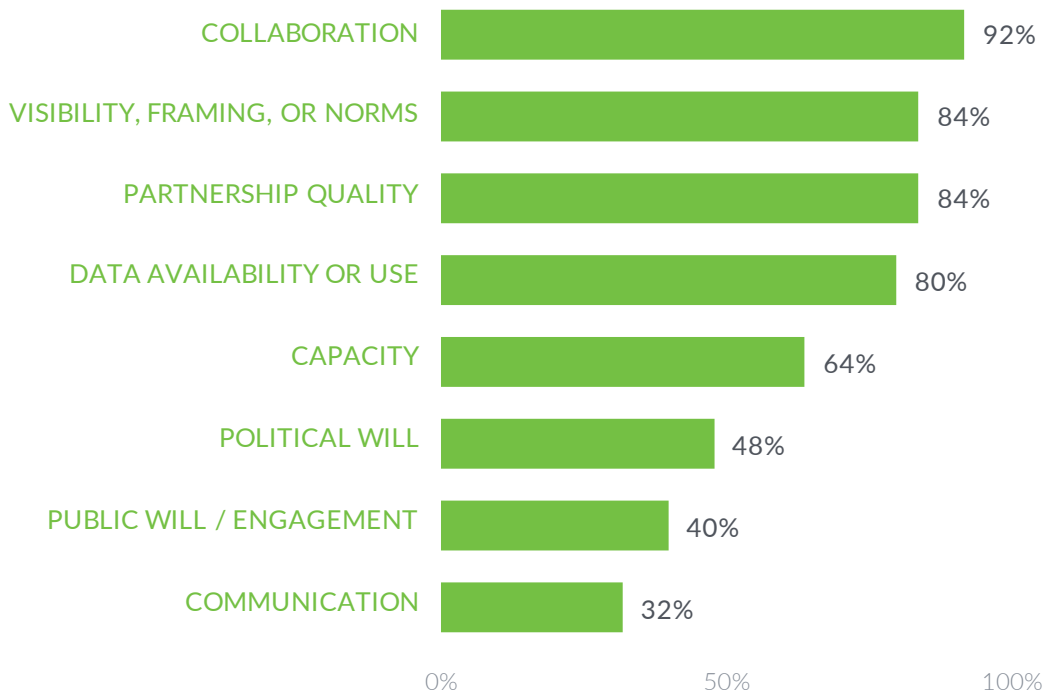
individuals collaborating more frequently outside of the formal collective impact structures; and organizations applying for funding together or developing products that reflect shared priorities, such as a policy agenda.

- **Increased visibility** or changes in the way the issue or issue area was framed or viewed (six site visit sites): including increased awareness of or decreased tolerance for the issue or problem; increased attention to the initiative; or increased visibility/credibility of the partners within the initiative.
- **Building political will** (five site visit sites): including new influential champions supported the initiative, including the business community and political leaders (e.g., city council legislators, school boards) as well as administrative governmental partners (most commonly school principals and superintendents).

Across all 25 study sites, sites also frequently showed changes in collaboration, partnership quality, visibility, framing, or norms, but not political will. Other common types of early changes include:

- **Increased data availability or use**, including increased collection of or access to data related to the initiative's goals/strategies; increased use of data to make decisions; or development of a framework or systems to think about data, such as a literature reviews, a systems map, or data profile. As an example, Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless strengthened its data infrastructure and increased its use of data to align and make strategic decisions across three working groups.
- **Increased capacity**, including developing trainings or guidance for staff (e.g., curriculum, toolkits, resources databases); conducting informational site visits with other jurisdictions; or increasing knowledge or ability to address systems change by, for example, engaging the community, managing groups, or advancing equity. For instance, KConnect engaged a consulting firm to help each of its workgroups apply and develop strategies to advance an equity lens.

Figure 6 | Proportion of Sites that Achieved Early Changes (N=25)



Interestingly, while political will was a regularly prioritized early change among site visit sites, it was significantly less prevalent in the broader sample. Twelve study sites (six site visit sites and six overall study sites) demonstrated increases in this area and spoke of the ability to increase the speed at which change was implemented, particularly as a result of increases in administrative champions who are often responsible for policy/practice change implementation. Informal systems changes, such as implementation of communications campaigns or pilot programs, were also able to help build political will. For example, Mission: Graduate was able to increase buy-in among school principals and superintendents as a result of two pilot programs that showed successful results.

The study also found a relationship between study sites with strong political will and the ability to achieve changes related to workforce expansion and development. Study sites often, but not always, had either broad or explicit strategies that sought to cultivate these types of champions. Broad strategies focused on stakeholder engagement or cultivating public/private partnerships. Some initiatives had explicit strategies focused on developing messages to appeal to certain partner groups or cultivating partnership with explicit groups. In one example, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative had a strategy focused on cultivating diverse partners using messaging that made an economic and business case. In another example, Home For Good implemented a broad strategy focused on building public/private partnerships and increasing political will among the business community and public leaders to address the issue of homelessness.

There are strong relationships between collective impact conditions and early changes among site visit sites.



For site visit sites, the study sought to understand what aspects of the collective impact conditions were most important for achieving early changes that sites prioritized as meaningful parts of their contribution story. All site visit sites referenced the critical role the backbone played in achieving early changes. Specific aspects of the backbone role included convening, facilitating, relationship-building, and communicating. The backbone role was seen as critical in creating trust and building commitment. For six of the eight site visit sites, their hypotheses at this stage also named mutually reinforcing activities and/or common agenda as critical to the changes they influenced.

For example, Alignment Nashville’s backbone and initiative partners engaged in intentional communication strategies designed to build buy-in and public will to support not only the goal of increasing graduation rates and college/career readiness but also the vision of supporting the district’s own strategic initiative and changing the negative public narrative around the district’s performance. These communication strategies resulted in more influential champions for the work and increased community partner engagement. Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance’s backbone and common agenda (1) expanded the universe of allies and (2) deepened relationships and trust, including between governmental and non-governmental partners.

Not surprisingly, when the process tracing tests were applied to assess the strength of the 14 hypothesized connections between the collective impact conditions and the early changes cited, the strength of data and unique contribution resulted in high ratings of confidence in these connections. Overall, these connections had the highest degree of certainty and a very low level of likelihood of an alternative explanation.



SYSTEMS CHANGES AND THEIR CONNECTIONS TO EARLY CHANGES AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT CONDITIONS

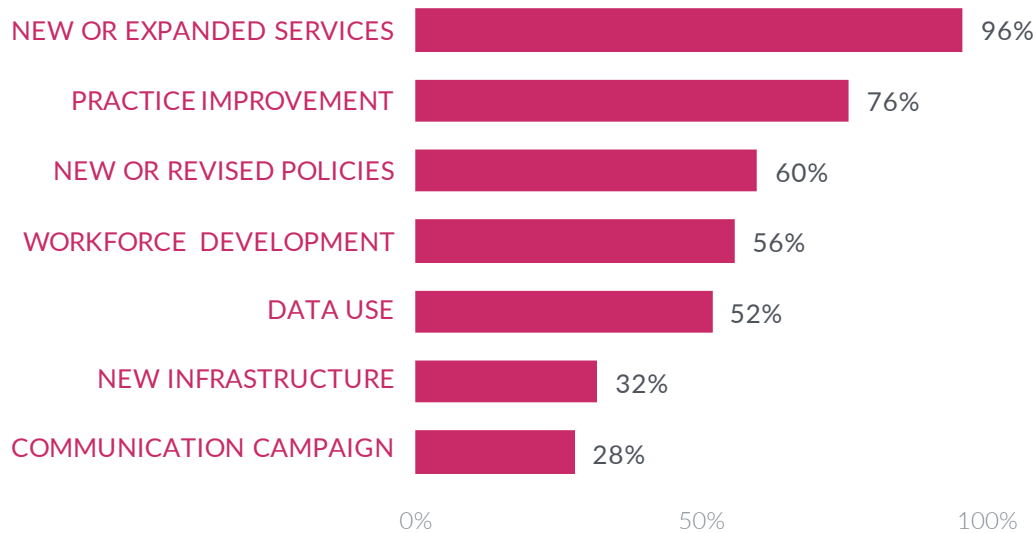
For the purposes of this study, systems changes are defined as the changes to core institutions within the initiative’s geographic area, such as schools, human service systems, local government, private sector entities, non-profits, community-based organizations, etc. Systems changes were further broken down by whether they were formalized and likely to be sustained or more informal experiments that could lay the groundwork for future formalized changes. The systems change analysis also looked at whether the change happened in a single organization, multiple organizations with a common purpose (both in terms of issue area and sector), or multiple organizations with multiple purposes.

Sites most frequently show systems changes in services, practices and policies.

Across the site visit sites, there were 33 systems changes prioritized in the contribution stories related to the population change of focus. Most of the prioritized outcomes represented formal changes (82% of outcomes) across similar or multi-sector organizations (48% and 30%, respectively.) The most frequent systems changes resulting from early changes cited by site visit sites are new and enhanced services (6 of 8) and improved practices (6 of 8). For example, better formal and informal communication, increased collaboration and trust across partners, and adoption and buy-in to a common agenda led to Communities That Care Coalition strengthening existing and creating new substance use prevention efforts, including implementation of common evidence-based prevention curriculum across nine districts. In Elizabeth River Project, engaged and committed partners led to new alliances and programs, such as resident engagement in seeding oyster beds, shoreline restoration projects, and support for voluntary practices undertaken by schools and businesses.

While the study found that study sites could identify anywhere from as few as two to nearly 20 systems changes that they directly influenced, like site visit sites, more study sites achieved expansions or changes to services (96%) than any other type of change.

Figure 7 | Proportion of Sites that Achieved Different Types of System Changes (N=25)



The least common types of systems change were communication systems or campaigns (28%), and changes to infrastructure (32%).

➤ *Spotlight on Public Will and Engagement*

Ten study sites demonstrated increases in public will or engagement, a relatively low proportion of the study sample. While less prevalent, there were linkages found in the data between sites seeing public will early changes and sites seeing practice improvements (including increased alignment), workforce development, expansion of services, and policy. It was not always clear how increases in public will helped facilitate these systems changes, but there were a few study sites with clear linkages between community organizing, increased public awareness and public will, and subsequent pressure on legislators which contributed to the passage of policy.

Study sites who had demonstrated increases in public will or engagement typically had an explicit focus on community engagement, community organizing, or creating mechanisms for community to have a voice in issues. For example, Living SJ had strategies focused on engaging community in the development of a common agenda using a structured process and building community partnerships. Many of these initiatives had a large focus on equity.

Spotlight on Infrastructure- focused Sites



The study also looked for patterns common among initiatives with similar focus areas. While less prevalent, some interesting findings emerged related to sites focused on infrastructure.

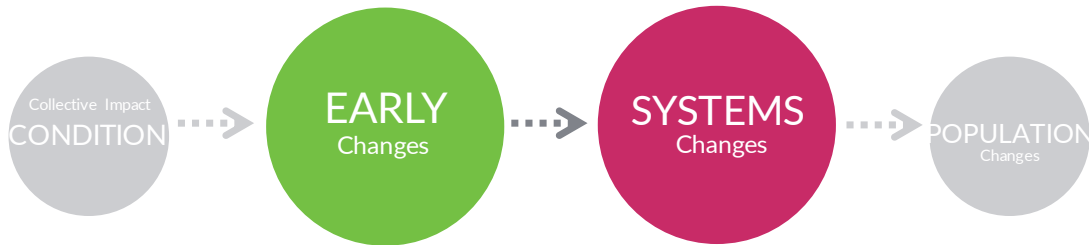
Three environmental and two economic development study sites have a significant physical infrastructure focus. For four of those sites, this resulted in systems changes that include new physical infrastructure ranging from slaughter plants and revamped trucks to broadband expansion and waste and storm water treatment facilities. One initiative promotes systems changes that are designed to lead to infrastructure changes, such as the creation of programs and initiatives to expand trails and solar installations.

For the economic development study sites (SOAR and Vermont Farm to Plate), the changes occurred in infrastructure owned by private-sector entities—businesses who need to see the return on investment of the shift. In two of the three environmental study sites the infrastructure is owned by local government; in one environmental study site with many different infrastructure outcomes (Elizabeth River Project), the “wins” are many and embedded in a variety of local government systems. The third environmental study site seems to be leveraging more cross-sector projects and initiatives to drive toward infrastructure changes rather than housing the changes in specific government- or private-sector entities. The mechanisms for advancing infrastructure changes are likely different depending on whether the private sector is being asked to build out (or is supported to build out) new infrastructure vs. public entities or multi-entity groups.

Beyond just these five study sites, almost none of the eight study sites that achieved changes in infrastructure reported having increased the political will to support the work (12% did). However, 100% of these eight sites saw shifts in the framing, visibility and/or norms associated with their issue, suggesting the support needed to achieve infrastructure shifts may not be as much political as public and institutional.

*Examples of typical systems outcomes from sites focused on **Education** and **Homelessness** can be found in Appendix E.*

There are strong relationships between early changes and prioritized systems changes among site visit sites.



For site visit sites, the study sought to understand what early changes sites prioritized as meaningful key contributors to prioritized systems changes. Five of the eight site visit sites had hypothesized connections between early changes and systems changes.⁷ All five sites continued to mention strengthening partnership and/or building and expanding collaborations as key aspects of their contribution stories, but thematically, the nature of partnership early outcomes focused on the deepening of the relationships, the expansion of the relationships, and the degree of commitment and engagement as key drivers of systems changes rather than earlier relationship-building changes related to building trust and commitment.

Some sites saw connections directly between their collective impact conditions and systems changes. Three site visit sites, Home For Good, San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, and Alignment Nashville, didn't have explicit hypotheses about the connection between early changes and systems changes. In all three cases, they instead had hypotheses about how collective impact conditions directly led to systems changes. In three of these cases, the initiatives saw a direct connection between collective impact conditions and receiving funding to support their work. Alignment Nashville's backbone, along with district partners, collaborated on and won a Small Learning Communities grant they used to establish the high school Academies program; the Academies program has been the signature systems change supporting improved graduation and college/career readiness, a step they see as directly leading to systems changes in schools. They also all described ways in which their collective impact conditions - their backbone and mutually reinforcing activities - led directly to more practice systems changes unmediated by other intermediate outcomes. Home For Good, working through its Policy and Practice workgroup, leveraged new HUD requirements to bring together agencies across the county to implement a common entry assessment and coordinated entry service system for serving homeless individuals, a change in practices across a number of agencies.

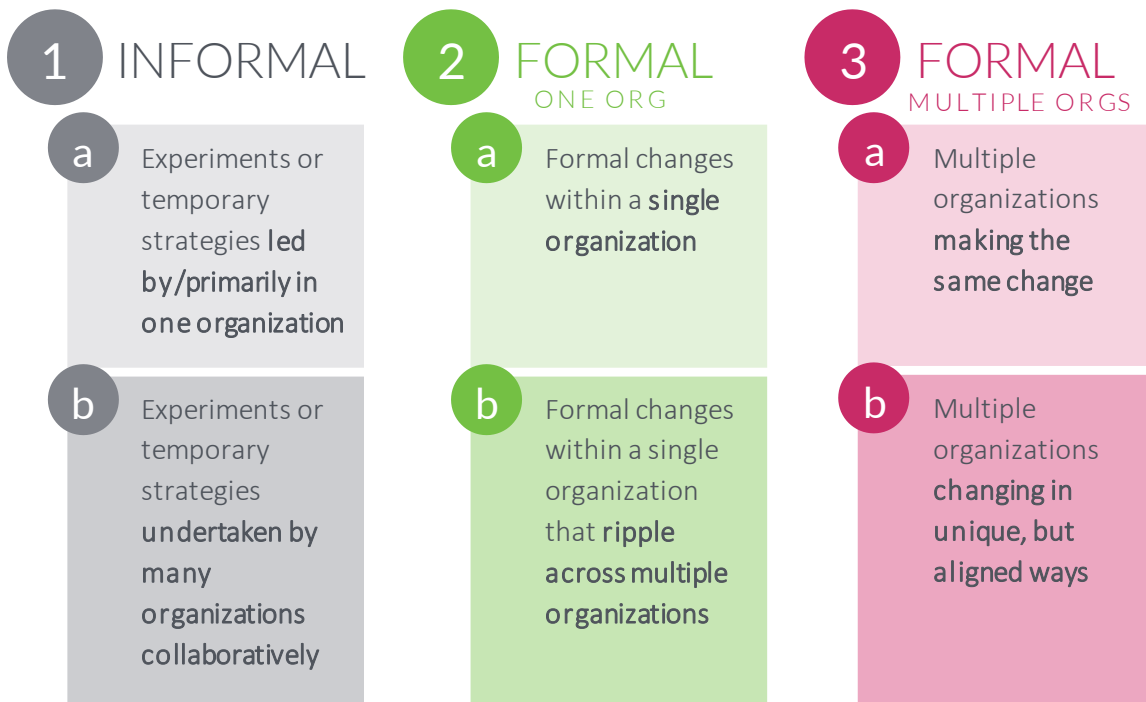
⁷ Three sites did not have specific hypotheses linking early changes and systems changes.

When the process tracing tests were applied to assess the strength of the hypothesized relationships to systems changes, it was also found that the majority of the 10 hypotheses made had data that made them compelling and unlikely to have an alternative explanation, resulting in a high assessment of the contribution of the early change to the systems change described.

Emerging Framework: A variety of types of systems changes can advance study sites' work over time.

Beyond the frequency of types of systems changes, a larger pattern emerged in the types of changes that are common across study sites. Looking across the sites, some systems changes were relatively informal, representing early experiments and temporary shifts. Other changes were formal adoptions of new rules, policies, practices, and uses of funding. These sometimes occurred within a single organization, but there are also many examples of formalized changing across multiple organizations and even across different sectors. Overall, most study sites reported a variety of different systems changes that fell into multiple categories among the types below (Figure 8).

Figure 8 | Categories of Systems Change



1 a *Type 1a: Experiments or Temporary Strategies Led By/Primarily in One Organization*

The informal changes that happened with a single organization were often government-based (including schools) and in non-profits. For example, Project U-Turn piloted new employment and education programs and new college exposure programs. Vermont Farm to Plate tried out a match-making forum and training programs designed to help local food producers understand how they can contract with large food service providers in the state. Many of these informal changes involve some form of training or capacity building for various organizations, sometimes laying the groundwork for a specific new model to become a priority in the organization.

1 b *Type 1b: Experiments or Temporary Strategies Undertaken by Many Organizations Collaboratively*

Other informal changes happened across multiple organizations, though their ultimate impact may be on a specific organization. For example, South Platte Urban Waters Partnership received a one-time grant that allowed their Forest Service office and other partners to conduct a mapping of their watershed. The study site reported that the Forest Service office has since internalized their role in the work and the initiative and has increased their focus on watersheds and watershed forestry.

Quite a few study sites had short-term, multi-organization communications campaigns that required funding, commitment of internal resources, and shared action, thus operating like informal systems change. For example, Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention had a Take Meds Seriously campaign implemented across multiple partners. While this type of temporary campaign, similar to trainings, does not fundamentally shift the system, it is an example of the type of mutually reinforcing action that fully engages multiple parts of a system in behaving in new and collaborative ways to achieve a shared goal.

Both types of informal changes can be valuable—without them, it can be difficult to make the case for institutionalized changes. They can also lay the groundwork for cross-systems changes that can be difficult to initiate otherwise.

2 a *Type 2a: Formal Changes within a Single Organization*

Many organizations involved with the study sites made internal changes, such as changes to their training of staff or in how they delivered services to the target population. These changes can play an important role in helping solve the problem but do not necessarily result in other parts of the system changing as well. For example, Aspen Cradle to Career Initiative influenced the adoption of a new policy mandating specific professional development for counselors. Within the same initiative, local community colleges changed their policy and sent automatic letters of acceptance to all local high school students. These two relatively independent actions are likely to have a positive and perhaps even direct impact on the students the initiative seeks to support but did not have a wide-reaching

impact on the rest of the system. Their isolated nature also suggests they might be easier policies to remove in the future, making them similar to the informal experiments explored above.

2 b *Type 2b: Formal Changes within a Single Organization that Ripple Across Multiple Organizations*

Some of the changes within a single organization represent practice shifts that were critical for the system overall, such as when a specific foodbank working with Vermont Farm to Plate changed its process for food pickup/food rescue, affecting how other organizations engaged with the foodbank and the resources available in the community. Similarly, the State Department of Education working with Coalition for New Britain's Youth prioritized the inclusion of chronic absenteeism as a new indicator in their plan which had a direct impact on school districts throughout state, as they had to begin to track and respond to this issue.

Another example of the ripple effect comes from Ottawa Growing Up Great, where one of their biggest funders incorporated the initiative's Three Pillar framework into their assessment tool for selecting who they fund. This naturally has a ripple effect by changing who might receive funding from the foundation as well as modeling a behavior (adoption of the framework) that other organizations took on as well.

3 a *Type 3a: Multiple Organizations Making the Same Change*

Many of the examples of multiple organizations engaging in systems change together were replication examples, where the organizations all did something similar. Sometimes this occurred within a single type of organization (e.g., schools), such as when Project U-Turn developed an Opportunity Network that repurposed dollars to develop diverse educational options, thus engaging alternative education programs across 15 different schools in the network. Another example is when meat producers working with Vermont Farm to Plate changed their production techniques to have animals processed year-round instead of just during a few months of the year.

Other times, multi-organization systems changes occurred within a shared commitment to solving the problem but with very different roles in the system. For example, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative modified sexual education programming in both school settings and after school settings, including both new programming, and training for staff and school leaders. Furthermore, Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention successfully established "take back" locations in both pharmacies (private sector) and law enforcement locations (local public sector) where safe disposal of drugs could occur.

3 b *Type 3b: Multiple Organizations Changing in Unique, but Aligned Ways*

Some of the larger systems changes involved multiple organizations shifting concurrently, but not necessarily making the same change in each organization. For example, Living SJ developed an early

learning center in a low-income, high-poverty neighborhood for a six-year period. It required many different partners to pool resources and integrate each of their specific services into the center; some partners deployed a kindergarten-readiness tool as well. While everyone implemented together, they each contributed in their unique ways.

Some study sites had very formalized shifts that cut across multiple parts of the system, such as the policy changes advanced by Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. This included changing criteria for which youth can be held in detention, thus impacting the courts and detention facilities, and adopting legislation that required MOUs between the policy departments and local boards of education.



POPULATION CHANGES

Population changes are defined here as changes in the target population of the initiative, which may be specific people within specific systems or geographic areas or with specific needs.

Overall, 20 of the 25 study sites showed evidence of population changes, based on reliable and valid data. Eighteen study sites had changes in one issue area (e.g., an education outcome and employment outcome) while two study sites saw improved outcomes in two different issue areas.

Education: The most common type of population change, present in eight study sites, was in education outcomes, such as high school graduation, college and career readiness, and enrollment in higher education. For example, Project U-Turn has seen steady increases in graduation rates over the course of the initiative: the four-year high school graduation rate for the 2002-2003 cohort was 52%, compared to 64% for the 2008-2009 cohort. The greatest increases were seen among black and Hispanic male students as well as students involved in the justice and foster care systems. Another example is Aspen Cradle to Career Initiative, which showed an increase from 76% to 89% in the percentage of kindergarteners participating in preschool between 2014 and 2016.

Health: Four study sites showed improvements in health outcomes, including deaths from prescription opioids, childhood overweight and obesity, teen birth rates, and substance use and physical activity among young people. For example, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative saw decreases in birth rates among 15 to 17-year-old girls from 52% to 18% between 2006 and 2015.

Homelessness: All three study sites seeking to reduce homelessness showed declines in homelessness, including chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness. For example, Opening Doors saw the number of homeless veterans drop from 88% (in 2011) to 53% (in 2016) and the number of chronically homeless veterans drop from 45% (in 2013) to "functional zero" (in 2016).

Economic: Two study sites showed improvements in economic outcomes. For example, Vermont Farm to Plate saw increases in local food purchases: from \$89 million to \$189 million (between in 2010 and 2014) as well as an 11% increase in the number of jobs in the food system, from 58,000 to 64,084 (between 2009 and 2015). Likewise, SOAR has added approximately 1,000 jobs in eastern Kentucky since its debut in 2013.

Environmental: Two study sites showed improvements in environmental outcomes. For example, Green Umbrella exceeded its 2020 greenspace goal, seeing an 18% increase in acreage of protected greenspace in the eight-county region: from 76,626 in 2013 to 90,550 in 2016.

Food: Two study sites showed improvement in food outcomes, including food waste and access to local food. For example, Vermont Farm to Plate’s foodbank saw a 206% increase in the tons of food rescued from Vermont food enterprises, from 600 tons in 2011 to 1,800 tons in 2016.

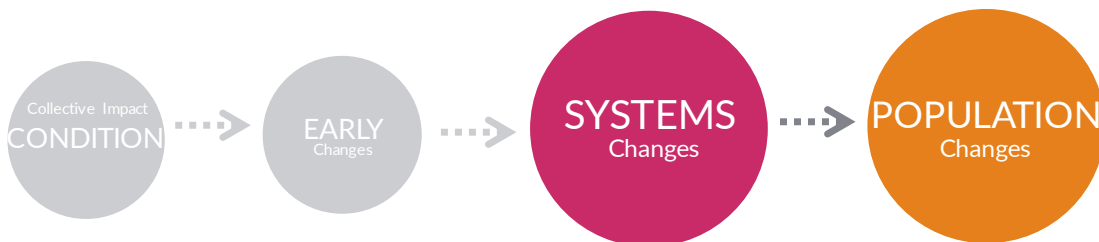
Justice: One study site, Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, showed improvements in justice outcomes, specifically the number of young people that came into contact with the justice system.

Five of the study sites did not experience population change. The exploration of what looked different about these study sites is covered in a later section.

Population changes generally stemmed from changes in services, practices and policies.

The types of systems changes considered critical for explaining how population changes were achieved most frequently included changes in new and expanded services, true for seven of eight site visit sites. Five of the site visit sites had systems changes associated with improved practices and/or policies and four site visit sites included outcomes related to workforce development. Only two site visit sites had infrastructure changes and two included changes in communications as key elements driving population change. No site visit sites had direct relationships between data-related systems and population changes.

The strength of relationships between systems changes and population changes was variable.



Each of the site visit sites had one specific hypothesis that connected their systems changes to their population change. All of the hypotheses described how the suite of systems changes that had been achieved resulted in the population change seen. For example, San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative noted that additional funding supported health-oriented actions and tools at schools and to some extent at childcare facilities. These actions and tools were the big drivers of decreased prevalence of childhood overweight/obesity and included things like active school district wellness councils; wellness policies and practices in school, after school, and preschool; and healthier nutrition and physical activity practices in licensed childcare facilities.

Because of the diversity of the site visit sites, it was not possible to ascertain any patterns tied to specific focus areas.

When the process tracing tests were applied to assess the strength of these hypothesized relationships, the study found a range of strengths of the inferences made in the hypotheses. One site visit site's hypothesis was plausible, but the data did not clearly prove or disprove the relationship. Three site visit sites had evidence that is sufficient to conclude that a relationship exists but not to rule out the possibility that the outcome would have also occurred due to rival explanations. Four site visit sites had data that made the relationship compelling and unlikely to have an alternative explanation.

OTHER HYPOTHESES

As mentioned previously, the work of trying to create population-level change is complex and complicated, and the relationships between all the key elements described would not likely be linear. To stay true to the contribution stories from the site visit sites, initiatives could posit a range of other kinds of hypotheses. Seven of the eight site visit sites had these kinds of hypotheses, 16 hypotheses in all.

Some of these hypotheses suggested different relationships at play in their contribution stories. For example, Communities That Care Coalition articulated some of the interrelationships of the elements of their work. They see that all of these mutually reinforcing efforts and early/system changes together have led to an early change of increased focus on school, family, and community protective risk factors, which in turn has produced a reduction in actual social system risk factors (e.g., family management skills, parental attitudes, community laws/norms toward substance use), another early change. This reduction in social risk was identified by the initiative as the most important driver for reducing substance use, their population change goal.

Elizabeth River Project has a strong belief that one of its critical population change outcomes includes residents' relationship to the river, and that improved river/ecosystem health reinforces the commitment of partners and a positive relationship to and sense of ownership of the river, thus creating a virtuous cycle. Home For Good has seen ways that systems changes themselves beget other

systems changes. For example, aspects of the regional coordinated entry system (e.g., common assessment practices, training and support of regional coordinators) led to agencies and other partners aligning their policies and practices to the common plan.

While there were no emergent themes or patterns across the types of alternative hypotheses or alternate ways in which initiatives understood how contribution happened, the study did account for the variation and initiative-specific contribution story described by each site visit site when assessing its overall theory of change. While the method looks at steps in a chain, the study is not meant to over-simplify the hard and complex work that large scale social change requires.



THE DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

In addition to exploring the contribution of collective impact to any changes in the communities in which it has been implemented, the study also looked at the ways in which the approach was implemented across the 25 study sites and the patterns revealed from this exploration. This section shares findings related to maturity of implementation of the collective impact conditions, lessons from the implementation of the principles of practice, and a specific exploration around equity actions and outcomes.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT CONDITIONS

The collective impact approach is defined by its set of five conditions (backbone support, common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, shared measurement system, and continuous communication) which are intended to provide structure for organizations to create lasting solutions to social problems on a large-scale.

Sites with more mature implementation of the conditions tend to show differences in strategies and outcomes.

Collective impact initiatives are distinct from other forms of collaboration in their cross-sector composition, and their implementation of the five conditions of collective impact (Figure 9). Initiatives engaging in collective impact invest significant effort in implementing these conditions, with varying levels of success in a variety of models.

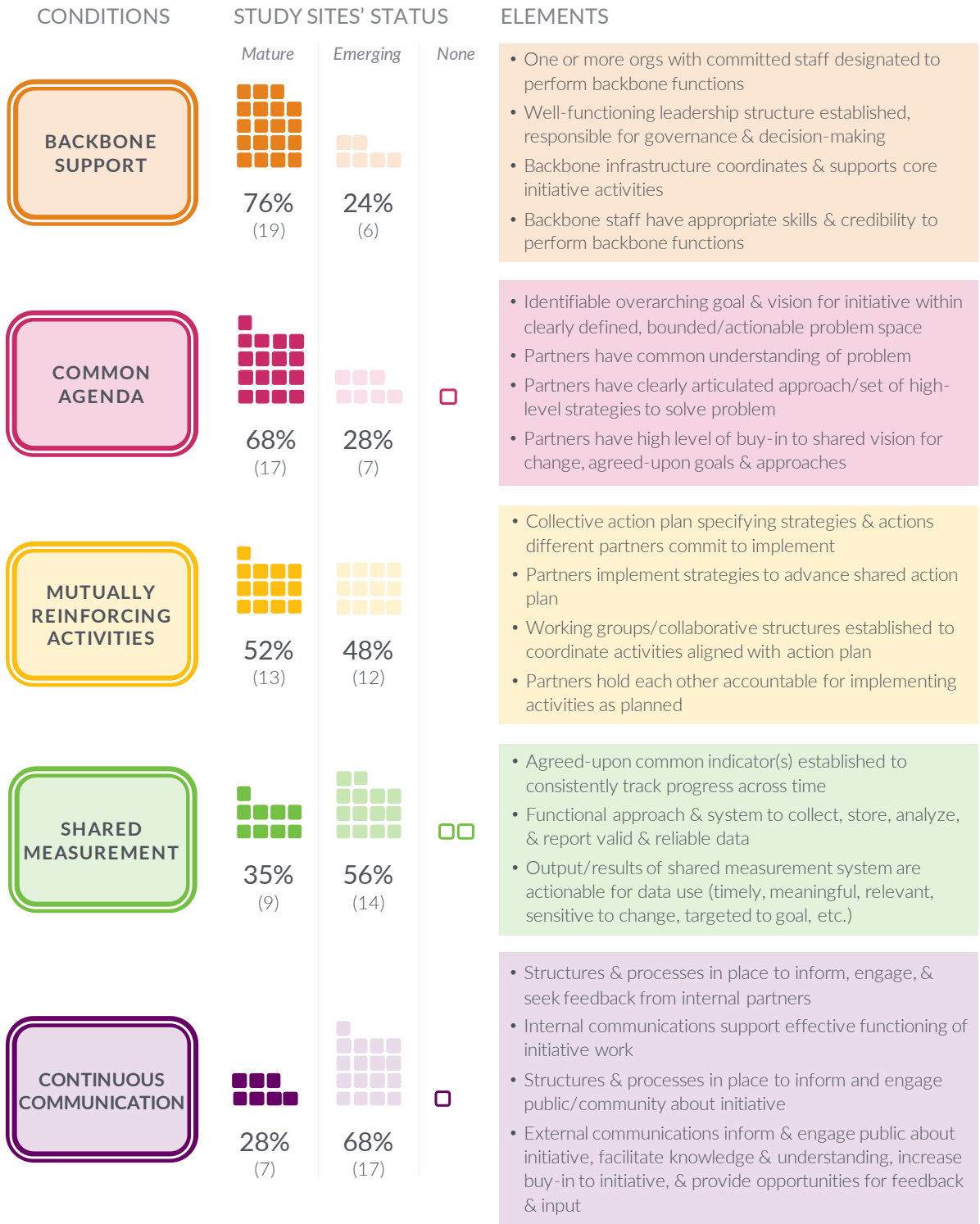
Figure 9 | Five Collective Impact Conditions



Using a rubric, Study Team analysts assessed each of the study sites on each condition as having *mature* or *emerging* implementation. Initiatives with mature implementation have all of the critical elements of the specified condition. Initiatives with emerging implementation have some, but not all elements, or are beginning to develop all elements, but are not strong in them yet.

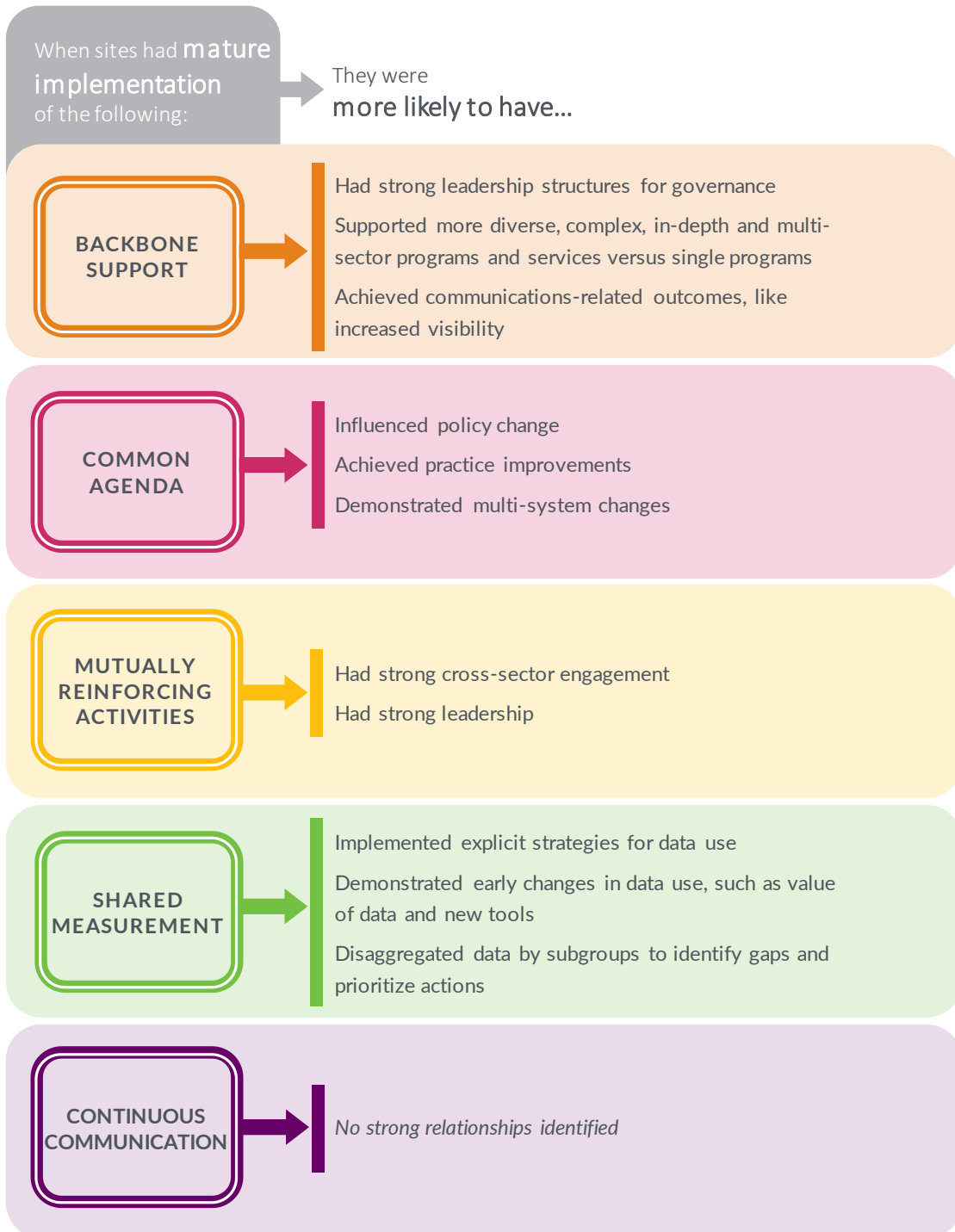
As shown in Figure 10, sites in the study generally had stronger implementation of Backbone Support and Common Agenda and emerging or no implementation for Shared Measurement and Continuous Communication.

Figure 10 | Proportion of Sites that Either have Mature or Emerging Collective Impact Conditions (N=25)



Overall, the study found specific patterns when a site had a mature implementation of a condition, including evidence of specific principles of practice that seemed more likely to be strong when the condition was strong (Figure 11).

Figure 11 | Mature Collective Impact Practices and their Relationships to Strategies and Outcomes: A Summary





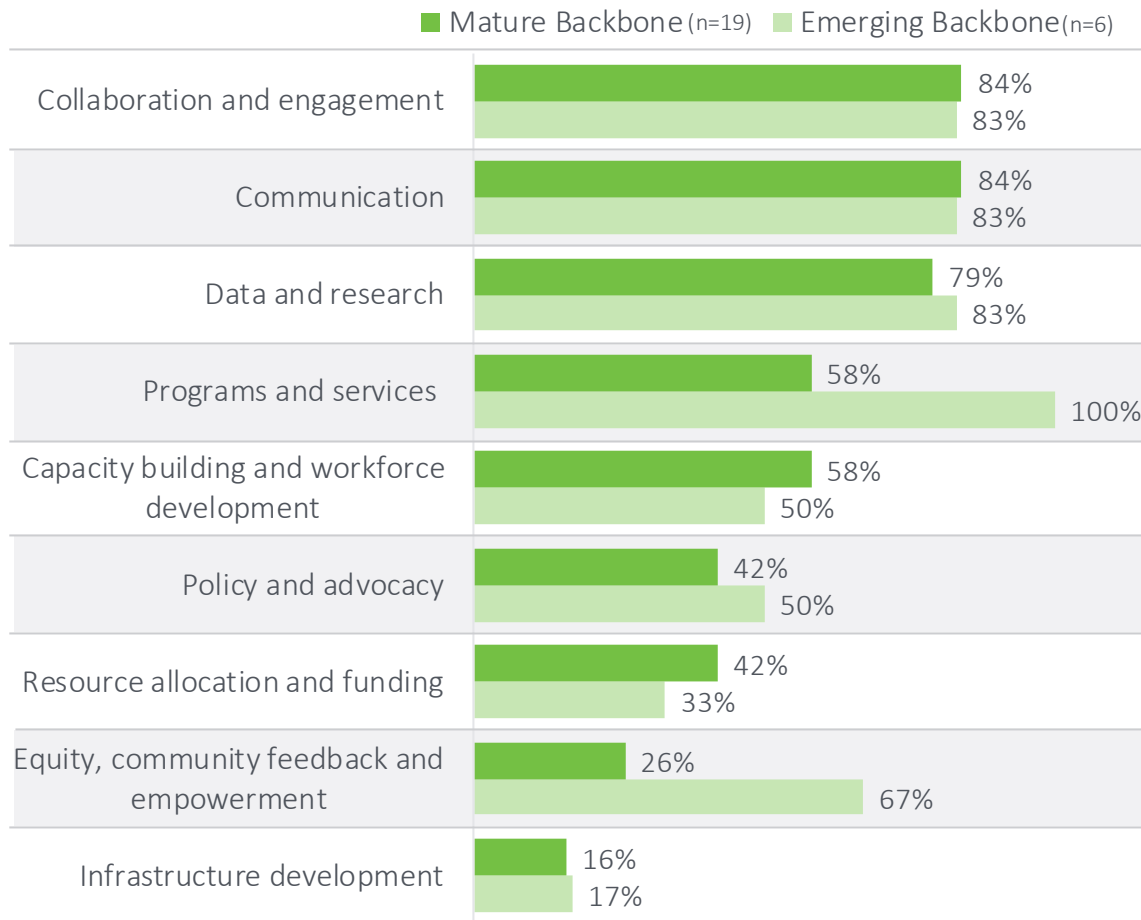
MATURE BACKBONE SUPPORT

Role of mature backbones. Backbones often play a critical role in convening partners and facilitating cross-collaboration and coordination between partners and workgroups. Mature backbone organizations have full-time dedicated staff that attend all workgroup and other collaborative structure meetings to help this cause. Additionally, mature backbones often play more of a convening, facilitating, and coordinating role in a way that empowers partners to guide and implement the work rather than doing all the work themselves. For example, the backbone for Coalition for New Britain's Youth supports mutually reinforcing activities by attending all workgroup meetings to track and support the work, helping workgroup chairs develop agendas, and convening partners outside regular workgroup meetings as needed. The backbone for Mission: Graduate helps make sure the work is aligned with the larger initiative vision by helping to develop meeting agendas and content for leadership meetings, participating in project team meetings (their level of involvement differs between workgroups), and managing internal communication flow. This level of support to the initiative's activities has led to examples of partners aligning education practices, implementing shared campaigns, restructuring their policies, and redesigning curriculum.

Strong leadership and governance. Mature backbone supports often include strong leadership structures and governance. In fact, 83% of the study sites that had a strong leadership structure for the governance of the initiative also had a mature backbone, suggesting the two go hand in hand. For example, Mission: Graduate has a Vision Council which is the leadership structure that has authority for governance and decision-making. The council is comprised of high-level leaders from multiple sectors that bring credibility to the initiative, are heavily invested, and are willing to advocate in support of the initiative. The backbone staff brings research and strategy recommendations to the Council, and the Council advises and validates them.

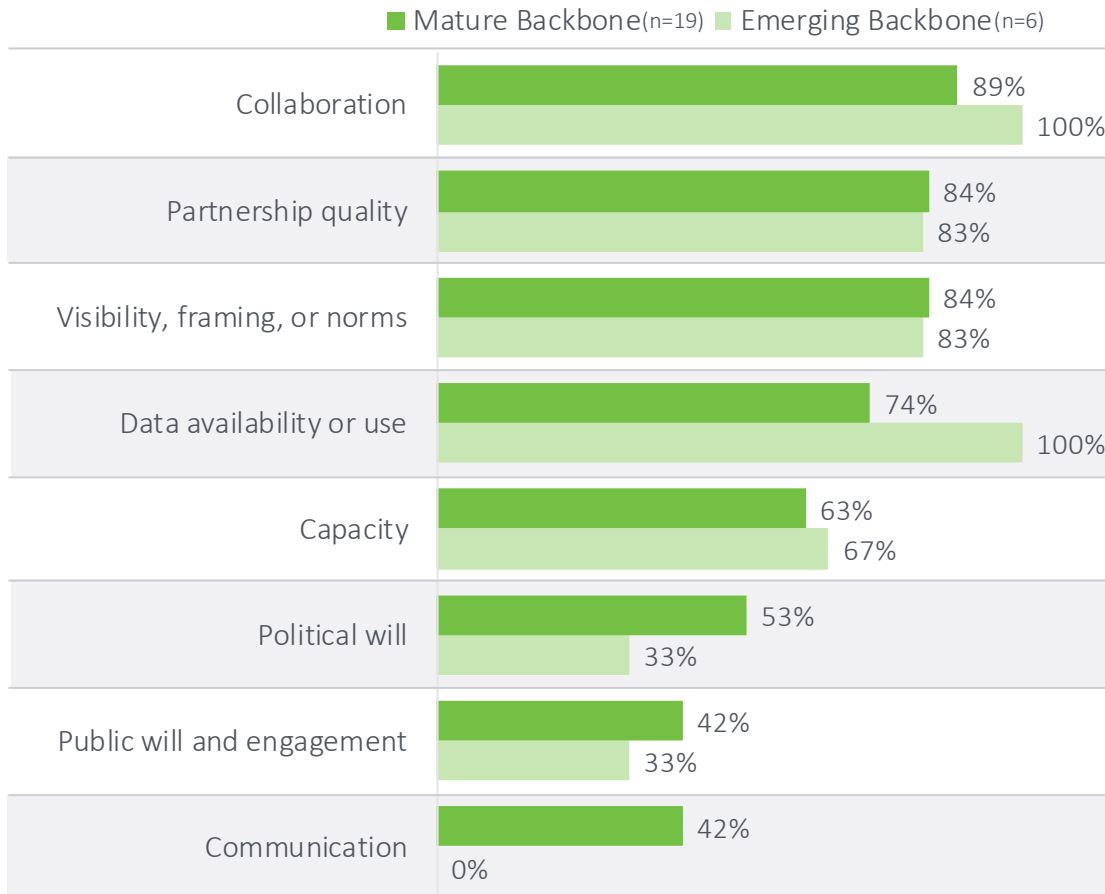
Differences in strategies. The maturity of the backbone is related to its ability to support the strategies and activities of an initiative, leading to the early outcomes experienced by the initiative. In looking at the types of strategies study sites prioritized (and thus backbones helped support), all the study sites with emerging backbones focused on implementing programs and services as a key strategy. In contrast, only 58% of study sites with mature backbones identified strategies related to programs and services. When study sites with mature backbones did include programs and services as a strategy, they tended to be more diverse and complex, multi-sector, and in-depth than those with emerging backbones, regardless of the length of the initiative. For example, Aspen Cradle to Career Initiative has a mature backbone and an extensive list of programs and services that include a wide array of new and improved programmatic solutions ranging from kindergarten through college, within school and outside of school, and with students and their families. In contrast, multiple study sites with emerging backbones and a similar length of time since establishment have programs and service strategies that are narrowly focused on a single population and within a single system.

Figure 12 | Proportion of Mature and Emerging Backbone Sites by Prioritized Strategies (N=25)



Differences in early changes. Forty-two percent of study sites with mature backbones had early changes related to communications (e.g., increased public awareness about a given issue and increased communication between partners that facilitated improved implementation of initiative activities), whereas none of the sites with emerging backbones had these types of early changes. Despite some of the study sites with emerging backbone infrastructure having strategies related to communication, none of them had seen any early changes related to communication. Study sites with emerging backbone infrastructure were more likely to identify barriers related to communication, including controversies over media campaigns due to a controversial topic, trouble creating a coherent strategy for internal communication, challenges in keeping partners engaged, difficulty with community outreach/inclusion, and misunderstandings about who was responsible for implementing the work of the initiative.

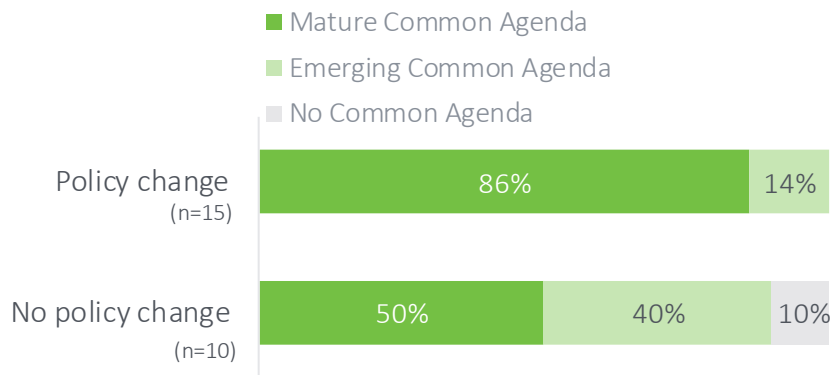
Figure 13 | Proportion of Mature and Emerging Backbone Sites by Early Outcomes (N=25)



MATURE COMMON AGENDA

Relationship to policy change. Compared to study sites with emerging common agendas, study sites with mature common agendas are more likely to see systems changes that include policy changes and changes to existing practices, along with systems changes that required multiple organizations to align their shifts in practice. Eighty-six percent of study sites reporting a policy change they had helped to influence had mature common agendas, suggesting that having a mature common agenda may be important to creating systems changes related to policy change.

Figure 14 | Proportion of Policy Change Sites by Maturity of Common Agenda (N=25)



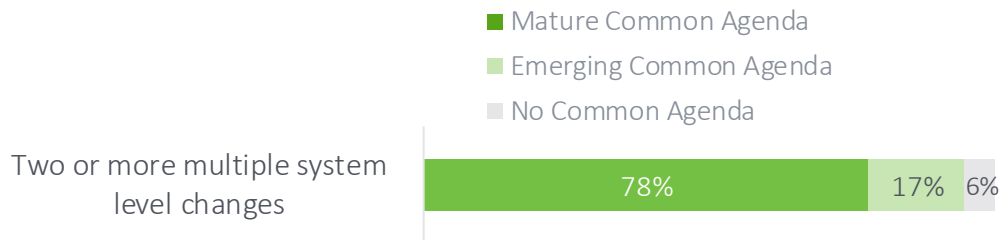
For example, Communities That Care Coalition focuses on substance abuse, healthy eating, and active living (HEAL) among youth, with an approach using non-punitive and prevention-focused approaches through a community action plan that outlines specific strategies for substance abuse and HEAL areas. This initiative was able to influence the adoption of state-level policies on marijuana and alcohol use and curriculum; the state now regularly provides free life-skills trainings around the state.

Relationship to practice improvements. Similarly, 79% of study sites with practice improvements had mature common agendas, suggesting that having a mature common agenda may be important to creating systems changes related to practice improvements. Elizabeth River Project focused on watershed revitalization, has an identifiable overarching goal and vision, as well as five high-level actions/strategies which seem to be consistently messaged across stakeholders. The initiative also has strong buy-in among partners and strategically chooses to focus on a pragmatic, collaborative, solution-oriented approach that does not point blame at any one industry, leading to an increased sense of ownership and willingness to commit resources. This initiative made improvements in ongoing measuring and monitoring practices, including the adoption and implementation of improved methods for measuring and monitoring water quality by an increasing number of partners (e.g., source tracking). It is likely this practice improvement would not have been as successful without partner commitment to a mature common agenda and approach.

Relationship to system change achievement. Again, 78% of study sites with two or more multi-system changes have mature common agendas. These findings suggest that initiatives with mature common agendas are more likely to create systems changes that include multiple types of organizations across multiple sectors and issue areas. For example, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative has an overarching goal and vision, as well as a logic model outlining specific strategies. The initiative has developed goals and work plans collaboratively, which helped create buy-in and ownership across a range of partners, including media, business, public health, elected officials, and private funders. This initiative has created a variety of systems changes involving multiple types of organizations, including

policy changes and leveraging funding to support teen pregnancy prevention and sexual health efforts.

Figure 15 | Proportion of Sites with Two or More Multiple System Level Changes by Maturity of Common Agenda (N=25)



MATURE MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

The study found interesting connections between maturity of mutually reinforcing activities and two of the principle areas, leadership and cross-sector engagement. Because this facet of the principles of practice was only explored as part of the site visits, these data come from eight sites.

Relationship to leadership. Among the site visit sites, those with mature mutually reinforcing activities tend to have strong examples of leadership. The site visit sites reported on the importance of this leadership among backbone staff and partners in the initiative, defining and describing strong leadership as values-based, stable, committed, and collaborative. Leadership is also responsible in some initiatives for clearly articulating the nature of the problem, creating space for the public discourse, and in essence, holding the urgency and importance of the work of the initiative front and center for the other participants.

Relationship to cross-sector engagement. Among the site visit sites, those with mature mutually reinforcing activities tend to have strong examples of cross-sector engagement. Site visit sites reported the importance of having strong participation from the public and private sectors, valuing the roles taken on by families and community members, and appreciating the partnerships formed with other collaborative groups. Some site visit sites created a variety of participation mechanisms to make it easier for cross-sector partners to engage, such as Alignment Nashville’s mix of different levels of collaborative groups and roles within those groups. Other site visit sites are very intentional in having cross-sector participation in each of their workgroups. Generally, site visit sites have an open-door policy where they are both actively recruiting participation and allowing anyone who is interested to engage in the work with the initiative.



MATURE SHARED MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS

Data use strategies and outcomes. Study sites with mature shared measurement systems tend to have explicit strategies related to data use for making decisions. Several study sites are seeing early changes in data use, awareness of the value of data, and use of new tools. At a systems-level, study sites are increasing capacity through more staff or building skills to use data. Beyond the presence of a mature shared measurement system, one of the principles of practice is the use of that data for decision-making purposes. The site visit sites have many successes to report on this principle and some even had explicit strategies related to using data to make decisions. These initiatives share data highlighting progress on key indicators regularly, sometimes in their meetings, through annual reports or briefs, dashboards, and even on the website. However, not all initiatives have this type of comprehensive data sharing present. Some initiatives, particularly those without mature shared measurement systems, have more narrowly disseminated data or very targeted strategies for sharing information with key partners for specific purposes.



CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

No strong relationships. Unlike the other conditions, continuous communication does not appear to be strongly related to many of the strategies and outcomes of collective impact. Rather, it seems to be an extension of a mature backbone and a function that is necessary to support other more central conditions, such as the mutually reinforcing activities.

What Continuous Communication looks like in practice. Almost all study sites have some form of regular communication happening both internally and externally, though often there is not a formal communications plan documenting how outreach should happen, goals for each communication channel, or the relationship between communication strategies and specific work of the initiative. Often, in-depth communication is happening primarily through in-person meetings, such as the approach of Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, where they share information and build awareness during steering committee meetings and workgroup meetings, and then have a light touch strategy between meetings via emails by the backbone. A few study sites with mature continuous communication have established internally-focused communications that include extensive check-ins between stakeholder groups, such as SOAR's action teams engaging in monthly calls, quarterly meetings, and an annual meeting along with backbone-supported monthly email reports and websites. Other study sites balance the internal-focused communications with a heavier focus on public-facing communication channels, such as Elizabeth River Project's extensive use of social media, mailing lists, newsletters, website, and sharing information with the broader community during an Annual River Fest Celebration. Yet, even with all of these different mechanisms in place, there is not a formal communications plan nor significant partner time invested in communications about the initiative (though there is a larger public awareness campaign on the issue). It is important to note

that some initiatives have important work happening related to large public awareness campaigns, which can lead to various shifts in framing and norms. Overall, efforts to inform and educate the public about the initiative, along with internal communications as specific foci of the continuous communication condition appear in implementation to be more tactical than significant, strategic drivers of the work parallel to the other conditions.



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONDITIONS

The study suggests some refinement to understanding the interplay between the conditions.

Beyond exploring the individual conditions and their implementation, the study also considered the collective impact approach as a whole, given the relationships found between the conditions and the ways study sites describe how the conditions play out in practice.

It is clear that the backbone is a foundational condition that supports the presence of the other conditions and is also related to the strength of the principles of practice. Thematically, the study found that mature backbones are often engaged in the initiative from the beginning and play a role in convening partners to develop a common agenda. Furthermore, backbones often play a critical role in making sure initiative activities align with the overarching common agenda. Mutually reinforcing activities benefit from backbones that play facilitative roles, either directly or by building capacity and providing behind the scenes support to others who are facilitating workgroups and moving activities forward. For example, the backbone for Elizabeth River Project partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to convene a 120-member Watershed Action Team to develop and disseminate the Watershed Action plan. The backbone facilitates a collaboration planning process to update the action plan every 5-6 years. For this initiative, having a mature backbone and leadership structure, combined with an inclusive, participatory, shared-credit leadership style focused on joint solutions was necessary for engaging diverse partners and implementing a shared action plan. Similarly, the backbone for Vermont Farm to Plate supported an extensive process to create an overarching strategic plan that included creating a strategic planning process team, hosting eight regional food summits to collect input from the public, conducting six focus groups with food system experts, and holding six work sessions with industry leaders to understand system dynamics. The plan is being implemented statewide by more than 350 member organizations. Additionally, both of these backbones play a role in overseeing implementation of the plan by supporting communication and coordination between partners.

Backbones are often responsible for implementing communication activities, including internal communication between partners and initiative structures, as well as externally by keeping up websites, newsletters, media presence, networking, and outreach. For example, the backbone for

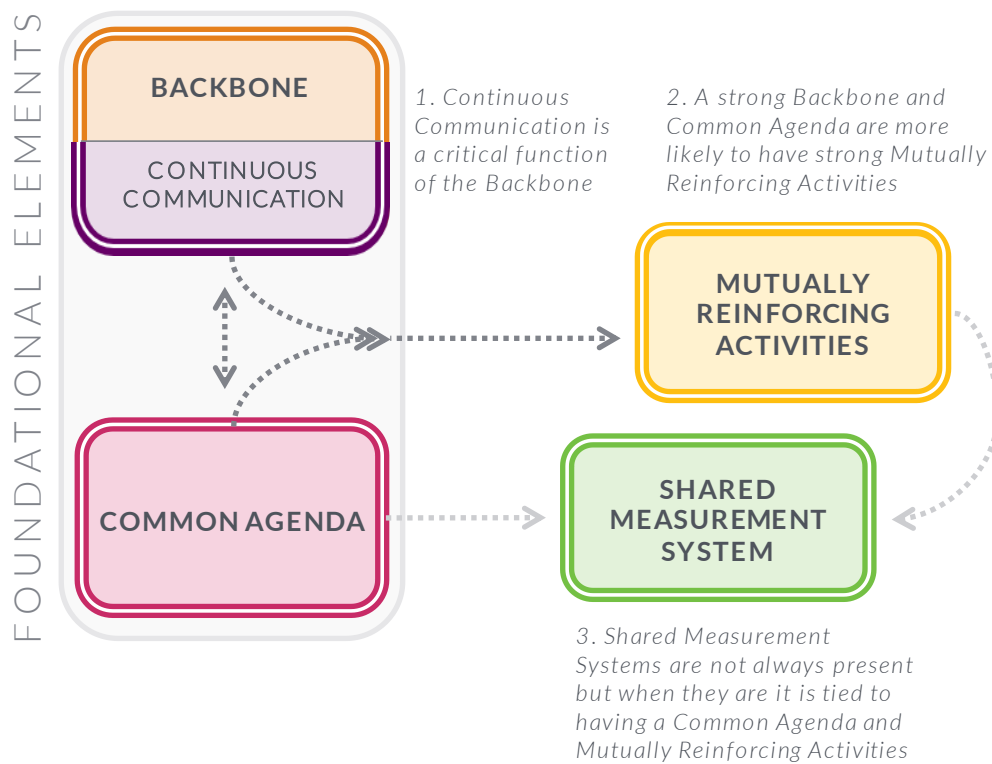
Home For Good facilitates internal coordination and collaboration by communicating frequently through multiple venues with partners, including attending all initiative meetings, networking with partners, and holding informal calls/contacts to provide assistance. The backbone also supports the initiative in the public-facing communications, including supporting campaigns, media releases, and community “needs sensing.”

Shared measurement systems were the least likely condition to be implemented fully, and sometimes this condition was simply not present; however, when it was present it was identified as important and often had many data strategies related to it.

Continuous communication was generally less of a focus among study sites, treated and described largely as a function the backbone fulfilled, not a central element of their work. This was seen in the analysis quite clearly in the lack of any relationship between the maturity of a study site’s continuous communication and the types of outcomes the initiative was achieving.

Given these findings, the study suggests a slightly refined way of understanding the interplay of the conditions, as illustrated in Figure 16.

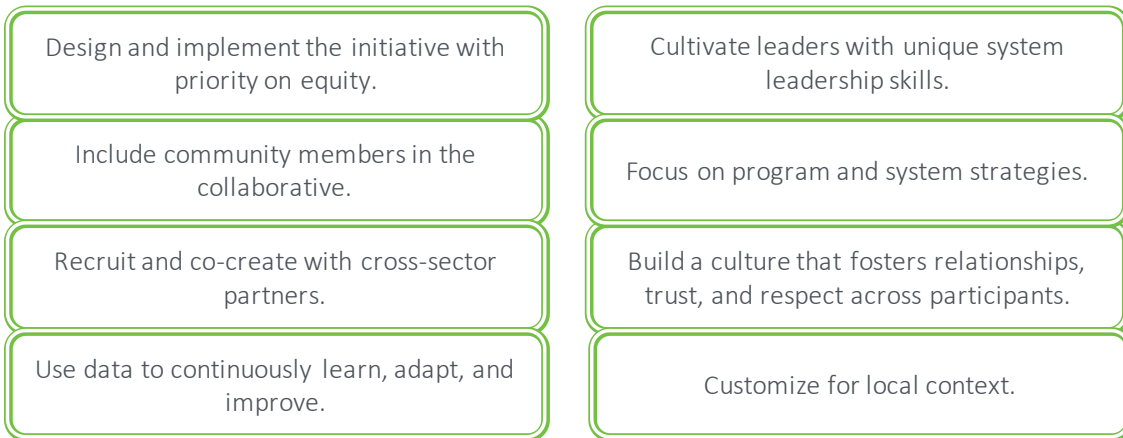
Figure 16 | The Relationship Between the Collective Impact Conditions





LEARNING ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

For each collective impact condition, the study sought to understand the relative strength of implementation, what conditions looked like in practice, and how conditions related to the strategies and outcomes achieved by the initiatives. A more recent addition to understanding the collective impact approach is a set of eight principles of practice. Released in 2016 and informed by lessons shared among collective impact practitioners, they include:



Unlike the collective impact conditions, the “how” of implementing the principles of practice are not clearly documented in the broader literature. The study more fully explored site visit sites’ experiences working with some key areas: leadership, cross-sector work, and equity. This section lays out key findings from the vantage point of the eight site visit sites.



LEADERSHIP

Strong leadership is critical to the success of a collective impact initiative, as was identified previously. The site visit sites reported on the importance of this leadership among backbone staff and partners in the initiative, defining and describing strong leadership as values-based, stable, committed, and collaborative. Leadership is also responsible in some initiatives for clearly articulating the nature of the problem and creating space for the public discourse. Many initiatives identified the importance of leaders having a deep understanding of the problem and issue.

Many initiatives described the growth in leadership over time, either the strength of the leaders or the diversity and representation across leaders. They also describe specific roles their leaders take on, from governing roles (e.g., chairing committees or running the backbone) to influential actions (e.g., advancing legislation), to being the visible face of the work in the broader community. While leaders

in some initiatives are also leaders in major institutions (e.g., state partners, school districts), other initiatives have leaders who are from their community and/or are directly affected by the problem.

Engaging Community and Partners in Leadership

Building capacity. A few of the mature backbone study sites have backbones that work to build leadership capacity among partners to help with backbone-type functions, sustainability, and implementing aligned action. For example, Vermont Farm to Plate’s backbone originally provided a lot of direct support, which absorbed much of their available capacity. To address this, they established a new structure where workgroup chairs come together and receive capacity building support/training from the backbone, have signed contracts, and receive stipends for their role, which include tracking accountability and facilitating meetings. The backbone still plays a direct role in moving the work forward when needed.

Sharing leadership opportunities. Site visit sites with strategically placed stakeholders in leadership positions were seen as helpful in moving the workgroups forward. This includes having experts/agency staff in leadership positions, splitting the workgroup chair role between agency and community stakeholders, and having committed, passionate, and skilled people leading the workgroups. For example, Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention has workgroup chairs that take action and drive the work forward. The initiative has specific expectations for their chairs, including looking for agency representatives with a passion for the work and who can take responsibility for facilitating the meetings. They still have challenges, such as variability in workgroup lead capacity and leadership style. Additionally, having “experts” or agencies in leadership positions can lend itself to equity issues, such as how they hold the space for authentic engagement by affected community members. In another example, Alignment Nashville has a co-chair structure for their action teams where one chair must be a district-level stakeholder and the other must be a community-level stakeholder. This helps strengthen the partnership and implementation.

Challenges in Leadership

While the sites have many leadership strengths, they are also struggling with some dynamics that make leadership difficult to sustain and grow.

- **Turnover.** Turnover can be high, either when leaders exit entirely, or when they become less active over time. Multiple initiatives reported work “stalling” when key leaders turned over and others noted that leaders leave due to fatigue.
- **Individual effectiveness.** Some leaders are more effective than others in the role they take on, such as advancing the work of a workgroup or influencing policymakers. When leaders have significant roles within the initiative, their individual leadership styles can both influence the success of the work and also create very different dynamics in different parts of the initiative.

For some sites, this dynamic suggests a need for more training to support leaders in the roles they have taken on.

- **Diversifying leadership.** Overall, many sites recognize they could diversify their leadership more, including having more community members, youth, people directly affected by the problem, and people of color in leadership roles throughout the initiative.

CROSS-SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

Cross-sector involvement at a project level within the initiatives allows for specific, meaningful engagement by partners from very different types of organizations and helps projects to be more effective. For example, Alignment Nashville’s partners have worked together on specific projects, including development of pre-K online resources/tools for families and partners (government, district, private providers, community members) and aligning funding for industry certifications that may not have been as effective if all partners were not involved. Similarly, Elizabeth River Project has partners—including businesses, residents/homeowners, and local government entities—that are doing a lot to align their practices with initiative goals, such as businesses and schools throughout the watershed adopting environmental steward practices, pollution reduction projects, and habitat creation through a River Star Project.

In both above cases, the initiatives also noted the importance of the cross-sector nature of workgroup leadership. In study sites with strong action plans, clear examples were reported of many partners implementing the plan together, rather than one or only a few organizations doing the majority of the work. Some of these study sites also have examples of community members (e.g., residents or representatives from organizations embedded in the community) taking leading roles in implementing the work. For example, Project U-Turn described a transition from most of the collaborative structures in the initiative being at a leadership level to having an action team structure allowing goals to be pursued with the right set of people coming together for that work. This shift is seen by participants as an important transition to help the work move faster and is associated with examples of mutually reinforcing activities.

Challenges with Cross-sector Engagement

Overall, the eight site visit sites report a strong commitment to cross-sector collaboration, even as they identify many challenges given their direct experience doing this kind of work, particularly around alignment and meaningful engagement.

- **Aligning across sectors is still challenging, with particular challenges emerging for different kinds of partners.** Many site visit sites reported challenges with engaging partners and aligning across partner agendas, particularly when organizations had very different purposes. For example, one site visit site reported it was easier to align school and community organizations

than to align with law enforcement and businesses. But even in similar areas of focus, there can be challenges. Another site visit site reported it was difficult to align organizations whose purposes ranged from substance abuse prevention to substance abuse recovery and treatment.

- Quite a few site visit sites struggled with engaging *community members, youth and community-based* organizations, sometimes including faith-based organizations.
 - Site visit sites also struggled with the engagement of *philanthropy and specifically high-net worth individuals*, finding it difficult to find a compelling “seat at the table” or role for these individuals.
 - One site visit site explained that *for-profits* often participate with a revenue or profit motive, a motivation which does not always align well with the agendas of other participants in the initiative or the actions planned by the initiative.
 - One site visit site found it difficult to engage their *local government* partners due to the size of the city’s staff, lack of time and people power to engage in collaboration, and challenges with consistency in local government due to elections and changes in leadership.
- **Time.** Site visit sites reported a need for more capacity to do the engagement work necessary for effective cross-sector involvement. As one site visit site said, “*you can engage in cross-sector collaboration with limited capacity, but you cannot bring it to scale and represent the full set of actors needed.*” It also takes capacity to overcome the typical challenges facing a collaborative group, such as competition, resource sharing, communication and miscommunications, sharing credit, managing confidentiality concerns, handling liability/insurance needs for implementation of shared strategies, and dealing with collaboration in large geographic areas.
 - **Ongoing work required.** Another common theme was the complexity of how cross-sector engagement changes over time. For some site visit sites, the stable involvement of a core set of actors over the years has been a strength, though they also see issues with needing new perspectives to be brought in. Other site visit sites reported an ebb and flow of the representativeness and engagement of their cross-sector partners.



USING DATA FOR DECISION MAKING

Shared measurement systems are a critical element of collective impact initiatives’ data infrastructure. Shared measurement systems for many initiatives included either a set of agreed upon indicators, tracked consistently over time, or a common data collection tool. Initiatives supplemented shared measurement system data with data from other sources, for example, using polling or target

population surveys to understand their problem better or program evaluation results to understand potential solutions.

The site visits offered an opportunity to understand how sites with more mature shared measurement systems developed their approaches. All three of the site visit sites with strong, mature, and consistent implementation of shared measurement systems developed their own systems for data collection, including: creating a school-based survey that is administered annually; partnering with a university to collect environmental indicators; and building an integrated coordinated data-tracking system across partners. Building their own system afforded initiatives some flexibility in identifying the most important types of information. The remaining five site visit sites had a shared measurement system that was still emerging, of variable quality, or in partial implementation. These five relied primarily on publicly-reported data, and reported challenges with securing timely, meaningful, and relevant data, and data sensitive to change over time. Both types of site visit sites experienced challenges with having access to the “right” information.

From a capacity perspective, some initiatives have been able to staff their backbones to include data expertise, such as coordinators and analysts. Others rely on partners to lead data and research workgroups, even if the data is compiled and communicated by the backbone. Capacity is also recognized as more than just the capacity of formal researchers, though funding dedicated to data collection, evaluation, and expertise was also noted. Rather, some site visit sites talked about the need for their stakeholders to have the capacity to use data effectively, and other initiatives are providing trainings so this can happen.

The Focus of Mature Shared Measurement Systems

There are five buckets that helped describe how the nine initiatives with a mature shared measurement system used their shared measurement systems data: (1) as an accountability tool; (2) to measure, report on, and improve progress; (3) to drive changes in practice, including making decisions on which programs or investments to make; (4) to help describe the scope of the issue and build partnerships; and (5) to inform and influence policy.

Accountability: All the site visit sites with mature shared measurement systems had a strong accountability focus included in their shared measurement system. Initiatives found the focus valuable and implemented strategies to ensure data were measured consistently across settings and to make data accessible to different audiences to increase transparency. For example, the primary purpose of Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative’s shared measurement system was to set an explicit goal and hold itself accountable to making change. Because the primary purpose of most shared measurement systems was accountability, most systems focused on measuring outcome data. Seven of the eight site visit sites only included outcome metrics; of these seven, five included only long-term outcomes.

Improve progress: Many sites have some form of tracking around their specific activities and progress in their work. One site described this as using data as a tool to help them be “honest about their progress” and clearly define the gaps and the problem they want to solve. Other sites described using data to help them refine and improve their practices as an initiative.

Improve practice: Many study sites with mature shared measurement systems used the data as a tool to drive changes in practices, including prioritizing populations or geographies; identifying needs, gaps or strategies; implementing processes to better target or deliver services; or funding the most effective or necessary components of the work. For example, Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention uses data programmatically, directing where to send Naloxone (a drug that can prevent death from an overdose), selecting where to target provider education, and determining where syringe take-back programs are most needed. Three study sites—all of which addressed issues of homelessness—had some of the strongest examples of implementing data-driven practice changes. These initiatives used their shared measurement system as a foundational component of the work, transitioning to a coordinated entry system that required partners to use common metrics and tools, linking data across geographic units, and creating a transparent system for prioritizing clients and judging progress.

Partnerships: A few study sites used shared measurement system data to explore the issue and build relationships, using data from the shared measurement system to help partners see the big picture (i.e., the relationship between outcomes, the full scope of communities’ assets/challenges), provoke discussion among partners, and help build trust. For example, providing data to partners and working together to prioritize clients helped Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless increase trust among community partners and backbone staff. Similarly, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention initiative used data to track progress and keep people engaged and excited.

Policy: Lastly, some sites, like Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, used data to both set their policy priorities and inform the development of specific policies. Home For Good used their shared measurement system data to help describe the extent of the problem and build public will, using data to create a sense of urgency around the problem and demonstrate how long it would take to address the problem using the current approaches. This approach contributed to the passage of two ballot measures.

Challenges Associated with Shared Measurement Systems

Accessing data. Some study sites experienced technical challenges in accessing data. This was particularly true—but not always—for initiatives that relied on secondary data. One initiative created an explicit strategy to build governmental capacity to monitor and publicly report on short-term outcome metrics. While useful, the data that was reported only provided a small snapshot of the system, saying little about long-term impact and effectiveness. However, there was little the initiative could do to obtain additional information.

A number of challenges arose related to **what data are—or are not—collected** that impede data use.

- **No nearer-term measures.** Study sites that only included long-term (ultimate) outcomes in their shared measurement system experienced significant challenges around data use. For these initiatives, the shared measurement system was primarily focused on measuring progress/accountability as opposed to generating data that could be used to inform policy or refine strategy implementation. Shorter-term metrics were needed to help inform the day-to-day work of the initiative. For example, one initiative stakeholder explained during their interview that while the shared measurement system data *“it has been helpful to look at those indicators over time... to help us understand whether the situations and circumstances are getting better or worse for people,”* the interviewee also described the need for different measures to help judge the impact of specific strategies and inform ongoing work.
- **Wrong level or gaps.** Site visit sites indicate data is sometimes not useful when it is not at the right level (e.g., community level versus case level). A couple of initiatives are struggling with gaps in the data, such as having data from some geographic areas and not others or some types of institutions and not others.
- **Other data gaps, such as systems measures or better ways of determining efficacy of specific efforts.** One site visit site mentioned it needed more systems-level measures and data that goes beyond the specific programmatic outcomes associated with the issue they are addressing—in other words, data that describes the context and other drivers of the problem. For some initiatives, this means data on public understanding and perceptions. Site visit sites reported lacking data that could help identify what aspects of the initiative were driving outcomes and/or help inform decision-making; that is, they knew they were making progress, but exactly what was driving that was somewhat of a “black box”. The study did not have data to better understand when and how initiatives use evaluation as part of their overall data use strategy.

Using data. Other initiatives struggle more with the process of using data, finding that even if the data is the right data, it is not necessarily used when decisions are being made or only gets used in some settings, leading to much of the work not being data driven. In some cases, this had to do with a culture of or focus on data-driven learning. One study site mentioned that the initiative did not have a focus on data-driven learning because there had never been an explicit value placed on evaluation when the initiative was developed. Two site visit sites also named the need for a common framework or plan that articulates when and where to use what data, with one noting that data use *“currently feels a little random.”* A couple of study sites even reported mistrust among partners related to sharing and reporting data. Limited capacity and accessibility of data were also cited.



IMPLEMENTING AN EQUITY APPROACH

Most efforts to collectively create social change occur within systems and institutions that have systemic barriers that keep groups and individuals from benefitting equally, whether it be in regard to educational opportunities, access to clean and safe water, or reducing substance use and addiction. As the social sector has deepened and broadened conversations about persistent inequities and how to support a truly more equitable society, the role and importance of equity in collective impact has evolved and strengthened over the last several years. Not only are the five conditions thought to be important for change, but also for a growing understanding of how an equity lens can sharpen focus and action, put power for decisions and solutions in the hands of those most deeply affected, and transform systems into accessible pathways to success. While not the primary focus of this study, it is this emerging importance that led to the Study Team taking a deeper look at how equity plays out in many different collective impact settings and to begin exploring the relationships among equity capacity and intent, targeted actions, inclusion and representation, systems, and ultimately outcomes. The data in this study only lightly scratches the surface of this deep and complex area, but the data suggest some potential relationships and issues to be aware of from the on-the-ground partners.

For the purposes of this research, equity was defined in a fairly narrow way—primarily to more easily observe the indicators of an equitable collective impact approach, rather than as a deep, critical analysis of the factors and barriers that contribute to equity in a myriad of ways. This definition of equity is gleaned from the Forum’s discussions on equity and community engagement:

Equity is fairness achieved through systematically assessing disparities in opportunities and outcomes caused by structures and systems and by addressing these disparities through meaningful inclusion and representation of affected communities and individuals, targeted actions, and changes in institutional structures and systems to remove barriers and increase pathways to success.

To narrow gaps while improving overall outcomes, an equity perspective requires: asking what disparities exist among different groups; taking into account historical and current institutional and structural sources of inequality; and taking explicit steps to build the social, economic, and political power of the people most affected by inequities. An underlying assumption is that not everyone starts at the same place and that some people need different resources and support to achieve the same outcomes. It requires a proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all.

The study collected data from all of study sites about their capacity to engage in equity actions, their intent and focus, actions, inclusion and empowerment of those with lived experiences, systems changes and ultimate outcomes.

The analytic rubric used to code and analyze these data included five aspects:

- **Capacity** to engage in equity action, including explicitness of intent or focus, capacity-building activities, shared language, and credibility of the initiative backbone and leadership with the community
- Equity-focused **actions** including using locally relevant and disaggregated data to understand disparities, targeting actions to greatest need, building on community strengths and assets for solutions, and engaging in deep structural analysis of inequity root causes
- Representation and meaningful **inclusion**, including those with lived experience being adequately represented in leadership, governance, and initiative work, shifting of power to those affected most by the problem being addressed, and successfully engaging those who typically do not participate
- **Equity systems changes** that are defined by removing structural barriers, increasing access, and creating new pathways through practices and policies designed to remove systemic factors causing inequality
- **Equity population changes**, that is closing gaps in outcomes for all groups

Deficiencies in any one of these areas can lead to less effective change and continued persistence of outcome and access disparities. Without an explicit equity focus and effort in every aspect of collective impact, opportunities to directly tackle structural barriers are missed, and change is not as robust or lasting as the promise collective impact potentially can have, even when intentions are good.

Equity was explored through document review and key stakeholder interviews across all 25 sites. Additional exploration occurred in the eight site visit sites. For the three deep-dive equity sites, additional stakeholder dialogues were conducted. The three study sites for which a deep-dive investigation was conducted have the richest data, and many of the examples below draw on those equity deep-dive sites, which include the following:

ARISE: This initiative focuses on Alaskan Native and Native American youth in Anchorage Alaska and is aimed at supporting them academically, socially, and culturally. The initiative emerged from the community and works alongside, and in addition to, a larger cradle-to-career collective impact initiative in Anchorage.

Promesa: This initiative serves the Boyle Heights neighborhood in Los Angeles, California, where the population is mostly Hispanic/Latino. They are focused on disadvantaged students and public high schools that lack resources, with particular attention to youth experiencing inequities, including English Language Learners, undocumented immigrants, special education students, incarcerated youth, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender youth.

RGV Focus: This initiative is focused on students in the Texas Rio Grande four-county region with a particular focus on Dreamers and recent immigrants. They seek to transform college readiness, access, and success among these students.

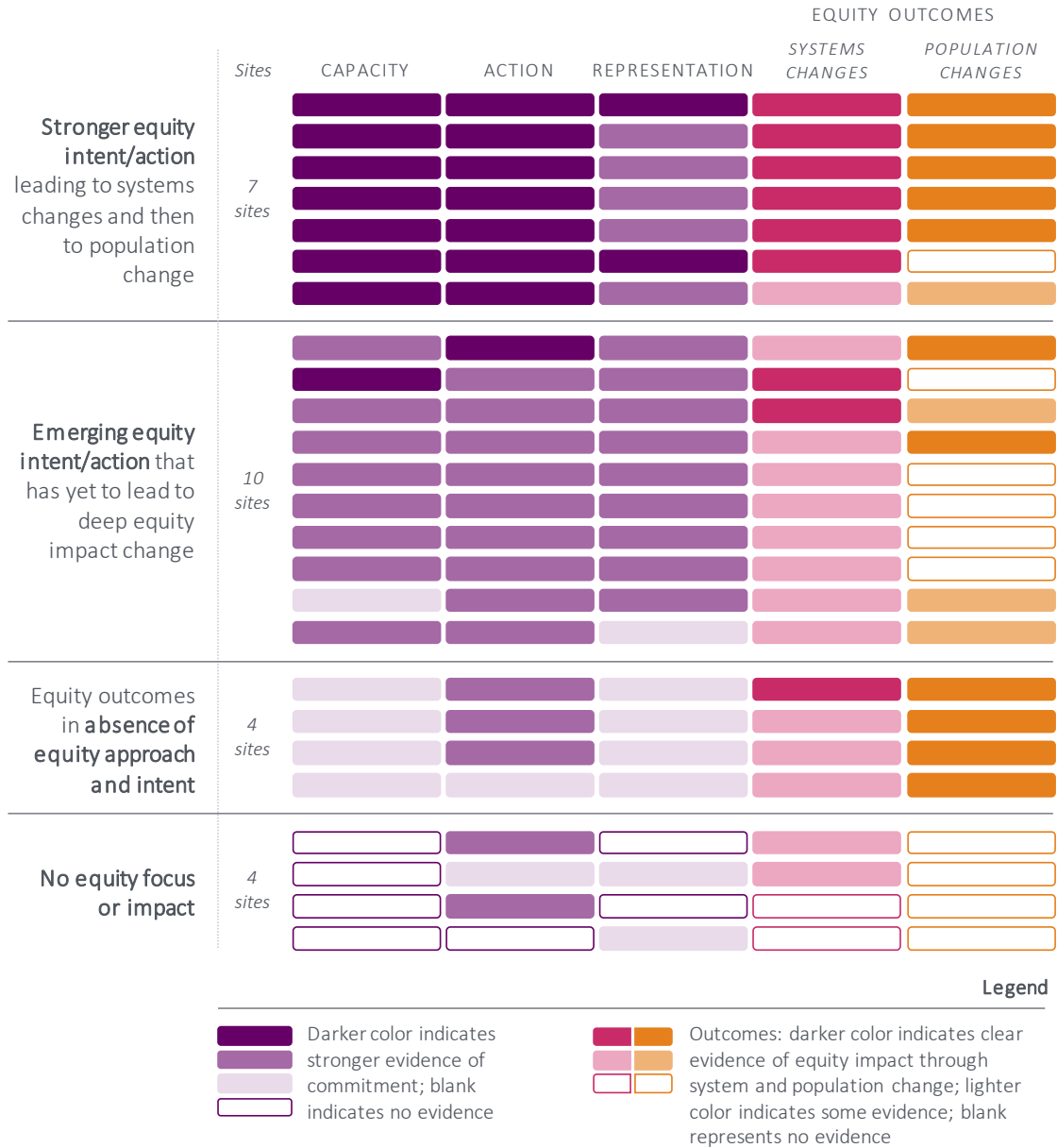
Through these efforts, the study explored how a subset of collective impact initiatives manifested different components of equity and the relationships among equity capacity, action, inclusion/representation and systems and population changes.



WHAT DOES EQUITY LOOK LIKE ACROSS COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVES?

A collective impact initiative that is implementing equity well will have a combination of: (1) capacity, targeted action, and meaningful inclusion and representation of people with lived experience of the problem being addressed; and (2) be achieving significant systems and population change. The study found a wide range of capacity, targeted action, meaningful inclusion, and equity impact across all 25 sites (see Figure 17).

Figure 17 | Models of Commitment to Equity Found in the Sites and Their Equity Capacity, Equity Action and Representation Ratings



These facets of equity commitment and outcomes are explored more fully in the following sections.



CAPACITY TO ENGAGE IN EQUITY ACTIONS

Collective impact initiatives were identified as having high capacity to engage in equity actions when:

1. They articulated an explicit equity lens;
2. The backbone built capacity and readiness to engage communities, develop leaders, and shift power;
3. The initiative partners have a shared definition and approach to equity; and
4. Initiative leaders and backbone have credibility with and are trusted by local communities.

About a third of the sites (8 sites) have strong equity capacity, while another third (8 sites) are emerging in building their capacity to take on equity work.

When and how an equity approach is adopted. While many sites had at least some capacity to engage in equity actions, this capacity varied significantly with respect to timing. For example, Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership, Aspen Cradle to Career Initiative, Living SJ and others had an explicit equity focus from the beginning of their work—a concrete and specific description of what mattered to them from an equity lens, including goals and activities. Other sites began a focus on equity commitment later in the lifecycle of their initiative. For example, sites such as Green Umbrella, Coalition for New Britain’s Youth, Alignment Nashville, and Communities That Care Coalition have begun exploring what it means to have an explicit equity focus but have not yet fully developed an approach or model. Some study sites with an emerging focus on equity have begun to set equity-focused goals, use data differently, engage in training, and generally include equity issues in planning dialogues. A couple of study sites have engaged outside experts and conducted research to help them make this transition. In at least one case, the transition to an equity focus was triggered from outside the initiative by one of the primary funders. Others have shifted how they look at equity over time—for example, RGV Focus shifted its focus to place-based equity because nearly all of the students in their schools are Hispanic and low income. Rather than looking at equity from a race or economic lens, they began looking at disparities across schools with nearly identical demographics to identify and address gaps in resources, capacity, and opportunities at the school level. Some initiatives did not show overall high capacity to engage in equity work, yet there was an implicit focus on equity due to the overall goals of the initiative. For example, Home For Good and Opening Doors both had population focuses that included individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and veterans, which led them to engage in targeted actions related to the populations they served.

High capacity approaches vary. In practice, initiatives demonstrating the highest level of capacity approach their equity work in different ways. For example, the backbone organizations of Promesa and ARISE appear to derive some of their credibility from their designation as an identity-based

organization, and experience working in a community. On the other hand, while RGV Focus is not a part of an identity-based organization, it serves a primarily Latino/Hispanic population. RGV Focus and Promesa also engage in equity-related consulting or training, suggesting an equity competence and desire to build competence among its partner organizations. While only one equity deep-dive site with a strong equity commitment has codified a shared equity lens among partners, there is evidence to suggest that partners in all three equity deep-dive sites are thinking about equity in the same way by being brought into the idea that the initiative that is inherently about equity.



PRIORITIZING EQUITY FOCUSED ACTIONS

Study sites were identified as prioritizing equity-focused actions when they:

1. Used locally relevant and disaggregated data to identify priorities and areas for intervention;
2. Prioritized strategies focused on addressing disparities;
3. Prioritized solutions that build on the beneficiary community's assets and resources; and
4. Developed interventions, made key decisions, and set policies using an analysis of structural inequities that drive disparities (identifying the root causes of inequity).

With respect to prioritizing equity-focused actions, about a third of the study sites are implementing strong, targeted actions to focus their efforts on needs and structural aspects of inequity, while more than half are emerging on this dimension. Emerging sites tended to have less focus on analysis of structural root causes and leveraging community assets for solutions. Nearly all of the strong and emerging sites disaggregated locally-relevant data to target their interventions to address the greatest needs.

Problem definition and equity focus. Some of the study sites with the strongest overall equity commitment defined the problem they were seeking to solve with a very clear target population bounded by geography and social issue, using data to shape the definition. These sites have a clear focus on a disadvantaged population rather than everyone affected by the issue. For example, Living SJ identified a priority population of children in poverty in the city of St. John, with particular focus on generational poverty. Similarly, ARISE has a focus on indigenous students in Alaska with attention to their economic inequities along with education inequities. While many study sites (both those with an emerging equity commitment and those with no equity commitment) defined their problem with a very broad target population, some of the study sites with less of a commitment to equity prioritized very specific populations, such as the three homelessness-focused initiatives, all of which had populations narrowly and geographically defined. This problem definition results in de facto high

ratings for equity actions despite lacking an explicit equity lens to the work. This is discussed further on in this section.

Equity actions and data use. In practice, initiatives that highly prioritized equity-focused actions tended to center their work around the development and implementation of programs meant to serve specific sub-groups of a population. All of the study sites that have strong equity-focused actions also have data-use strategies, often tied to programmatic work, and mostly equity focused. These data strategies include looking at disparities and gaps to prioritize interventions, changing narratives, increasing accountability, transparency, and progress tracking through public reporting of data, collecting additional culturally-relevant local sources of data to fill information gaps, and use of data to assess and adapt strategies and approaches. All equity deep-dive sites use locally-relevant data to understand disparities and develop programs, often creating their own data due to a lack of available public data. Primary equity strategies in Promesa and RGV Focus involve educating local institutional players (districts, principals/administrators) on analyzing disaggregated student-level outcomes. Other primary strategies employed by Promesa and ARISE involve ensuring community-driven approaches and buy-in through leadership structures. Some initiatives prioritize a strategy of educating system players on data disaggregation and interpretation to prioritize a subset of the population that is experiencing inequity. These initiatives have also had some success in using data to identify and act on a specific priority action that will increase equity. For example, Living SJ prioritized health access by opening a community health center based on emergency room visit data that showed a high number of non-emergency visits were from a specific portion of the city.

Equity actions and communications. In addition to data strategies, many initiatives with equity-focused actions leveraged communication campaigns designed to increase public awareness on a variety of social issues by educating, providing information, and changing social norms. These initiatives are using collaboration and engagement strategies aimed at building and strengthening relationships across partners and sectors, developing leadership skills, creating buy-in, and creating shared frameworks to guide collaborative work. While use of policy advocacy strategies is not as consistent across the sites with higher equity capacity and actions, when there is policy work underway it often relates to education and at-risk youth/family social policies at the state and local level.

Lack of focus on root causes. Despite the oft-included focus on addressing structural inequities in equity best practices and literature, as well as an acknowledgement of structural inequities by some initiatives, none of the study sites appear to have systematically tackled the root causes of the inequities. Study sites have instead chosen to focus on programs, information sharing, practice changes, etc. One study site with a focus on students considered resources and opportunities at a community level rather than just at the student level, but still fell short of tackling fundamental root causes of inequities.



REPRESENTATION AND MEANINGFUL INCLUSION

Study sites were identified as having strong representation and meaningful inclusion when:

- Leaders, implementers, and influencers are representative of the of entire community intended to benefit from the initiative in terms of demographics and lived experience;
- The initiative is meaningfully engaging of and empowering to the community; and
- The initiative makes an effort to engage non-joiners and traditionally disenfranchised groups (e.g., meetings at convenient times/locations, bilingual translation, transportation/child care, or compensation for time/expertise).

A challenging area. In general, most sites struggled with implementing inclusion strategies that ensured adequate representation and shifted power to the communities being affected. Many of the emerging sites on this dimension made some attempts to diversify their leadership and governance structures and processes, although in many cases only a few board members and leaders had lived experience. Much of the leadership and governance membership appear to be system leaders—agencies, business community members, and funders. There is some evidence of including nonprofits that represent communities, but many fewer examples of empowering parents, students, and/or residents to make decisions and execute solutions based on community assets. One of the equity deep-dive sites that overall has both a strong equity focus and is achieving outcomes that have an equity intent also has a relatively low level of meaningful inclusion. They have partners who tend to speak for communities, but most partners are not directly connected to community members. The backbone organization noted they tend to leverage existing partnerships and resources to engage the youth, parent, and community voice. They have used organizations to conduct focus groups with parents on behalf of their initiative and have made changes to materials in response to constituent feedback. The site’s participants in the study perceive their focus on systems-level change as a primary reason they don’t meaningfully include the community; at the same time, participants in the equity dialogue spoke about the difficulty of one organization representing the community, and about how the norms of the meetings are a barrier to including the community voice. The beneficiary population is primarily non-English speaking, and all meetings are conducted in English and *“with people in suits, people who are dressed nicely...people (the community) would feel intimidated by.”* In addition, one partner shared an example of a parent from a community-based organization who tried to attend meetings but was unable to engage in the discussion because there was a “knowledge gap.”

Grassroots organizing leading to inclusion. The only two sites who had strong ratings on this dimension employed grassroots community organizing approaches to engage the community, parents and students (ARISE and Promesa), and intentionally included community members and parents in the design, implementation, and leadership of the work. In addition, these initiatives provide opportunities for community, parents, and youth to have input and voice. ARISE and Promesa empower parents and the broader community to engage in workgroups and decision-making

structures, and often enable them to lead those workgroups and structures through additional support including leadership training (Promesa), data dialogues where data is analyzed and supplemented with anecdotal data (ARISE), and free childcare (Promesa). Promesa's model includes resident leadership (often more than 50% of attendees) at all levels, from the general assembly meetings to the steering committee, to the hiring committees who decide on initiative staffing. ARISE has many examples of parents leading in designing and implementing specific strategies, including chairing and setting agendas for planning meetings and developing online resources. While engagement of the broader community and parents appears to be well developed and meaningful, both initiatives acknowledge difficulty meaningfully engaging youth or students.

EQUITY ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

As noted earlier, the study wanted to understand both how equity actions were occurring in collective impact initiatives as well as how equity outcomes were being met. Study sites were identified as achieving equity-related outcomes when there was evidence that the population changes associated with the initiative appear to have improved equity for a specific population (e.g., greater decreases in teen births among black/Hispanic families) and/or have one or more systems changes intended to have a positive impact on equity.

Types of Systems Change Outcomes that Advance Equity

In practice, initiatives that implement a moderate to strong level of equity actions were more likely than those with low levels of equity (N=25) to engage in program-focused, capacity-building, and workforce-development strategies and subsequently the majority of their systems changes are also programmatically focused. All of the study sites (N=7) that were moderate to strong on the three areas of equity commitment (capacity, actions, and representation) reported systems changes related to:

Programmatic Changes: Nearly two-thirds of equity-focused systems changes across these seven sites are related to identifying new practices/programs to meet specific population needs and scaling up existing programs to have greater reach or access. In addition, changes focus on improving programs and practice quality and seek to align them across different organizations and sectors. Initiatives often expanded programs/services or worked to improve quality through creating provider networks.

Workforce Changes: Most of these seven equity-committed study sites engaged in some type of training, often tied to new models (e.g., restorative justice or social emotional learning) that are being deployed more broadly. Coaching and mentoring strategies are also employed to support workforce development. However, it was not common to see systems changes designed to expand or change the composition of the workforce to be more reflective of the community being served or otherwise strengthened.

Funding Change: In addition to services, many of the study sites with the highest commitment to equity also influenced systems changes related to funding. Funding and resource allocation systems changes included governmental investment, obtaining grants, and leveraging existing funding streams in partner organizations and agencies. Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, for example established a collaborative fund across business and philanthropic organizations.

Data/Research Changes: Many study sites with a deep commitment to equity had significant data strategies leading to systems changes around data use and research, including establishing data sharing agreements among partners, conducting system-wide surveys and assessments, and creating data systems to facilitate exchange of data across organizations and sectors.

Policy Change: With most study sites having advocacy strategies as part of their work, it was not surprising to see many examples of policy changes at the state and local level. In addition to state and local, some sites influenced school district policies and advocated nationally.

Only one of these initiatives focused on changing infrastructure.

Population Change Outcomes that Advance Equity

As noted previously, 20 of the 25 study sites reported at least one meaningful population change in outcomes. Among those, 65% had at least one change that could be expected to increase equity, such as the following: decreasing the homelessness rate among chronically homeless individuals; increasing graduation rates and post-secondary certifications for targeted populations; increasing the number of jobs and workforce development opportunities for targeted populations; or increasing food access and employment for low-income workers.

Equity Commitment and its Relationship to Equity Outcomes

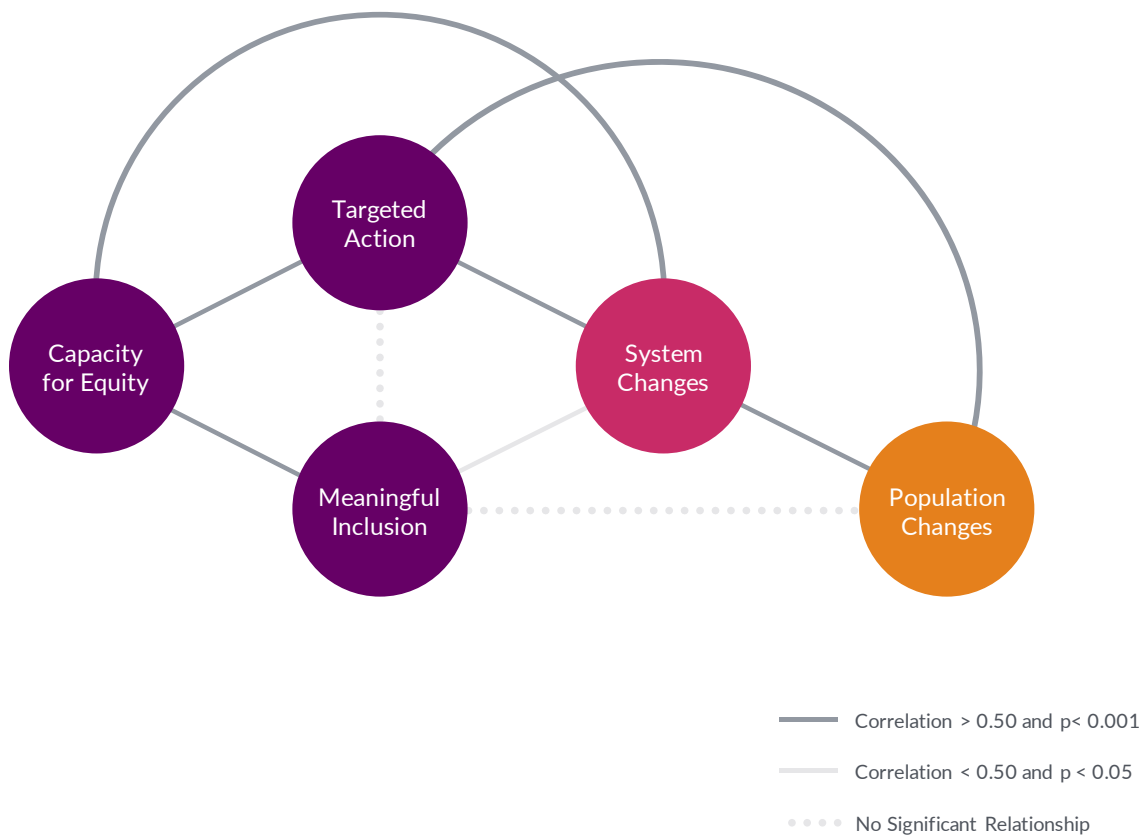
While the study design doesn't support conclusions about how equity capacity, action, and inclusion leads to systems and population changes, it did examine the descriptive relationships among these five components to tease out how they co-occur. The following relationships were found (see Figure 18).

- In most cases, capacity is positively associated with targeted action and meaningful inclusion. Initiatives that are committed to equity, have a shared language around equity, and are building their capacity to become more equity-focused are also the ones that field more actions targeted at specific groups and have higher levels of meaningful inclusion of those with lived experience in the leadership, governance, and work.
- Targeted action and meaningful inclusion do not appear to be strongly related to one another.
- All three aspects of equity commitment (capacity, targeted action, and meaningful inclusion) are positively associated with systems changes that address structural barriers and target

specific populations. Meaningful inclusion, while positively related, was not as strong a predictor of systems change as equity capacity or equity actions.

- Equity commitment is not directly related to population change. Rather it appears to predict population changes through systems change. This suggests that equity efforts work to reduce structural and institutional barriers that would impede success, and once those barriers are removed, population change happens.

Figure 18 | The Relationship Between the Collective Impact Conditions



While one might expect to see a high commitment to equity resulting in an impact on equity, these relationships were more complicated when looking across the initiatives. The study sites fell into three buckets that illustrate this complexity:⁸

1. Stronger equity intent/action leading to systems changes and then to population change (7 sites);
2. Emerging equity intent/action but not yet achieving systems and population changes at scale (4 stronger sites, and 6 early/emerging sites);
3. Those achieving equity outcomes without using an equity approach (4 sites); and
4. Those with no equity approach and few to no equity outcomes (4 sites).

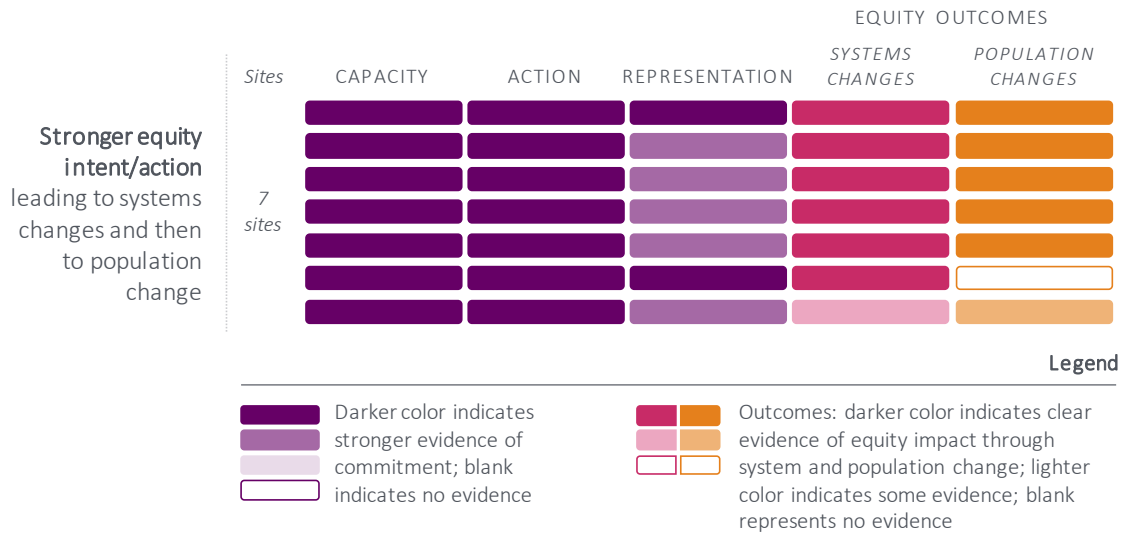
Below, the study digs deeper into each of the three groups to help identify what is needed to achieve an impact on equity and when intent and effort is not sufficient to do so. The study also explores the types of systems changes that can contribute to increased equity among impacted populations.

Stronger Equity Intent/Action Leading to Equity Impact (7 Sites)

Deep, explicit commitment to equity. The initiatives with the strongest equity work all have an explicit equity lens, shared understanding of what equity means, active equity capacity-building of the backbone and partners, and credibility with the communities they are working with. They also have strong, targeted actions and use locally-relevant disaggregated data to identify needs, target interventions to those needs, build on community solutions and address structural conditions underlying inequities (Figure 19). Two sites, ARISE and Promesa, deeply involve their communities in the work and leadership. The remaining sites have some efforts for meaningful inclusion but may not have strong representation in leadership/governance or have challenges engaging and empowering members of the community. Six of the seven initiatives have achieved significant systems changes, and five have achieved equity-focused population changes.

⁸ Four of 25 study sites neither had any focus on equity nor were achieving equity outcomes.

Figure 19 | Initiatives Implementing Strong Equity Approaches and Subsequent Systems and Population Impact



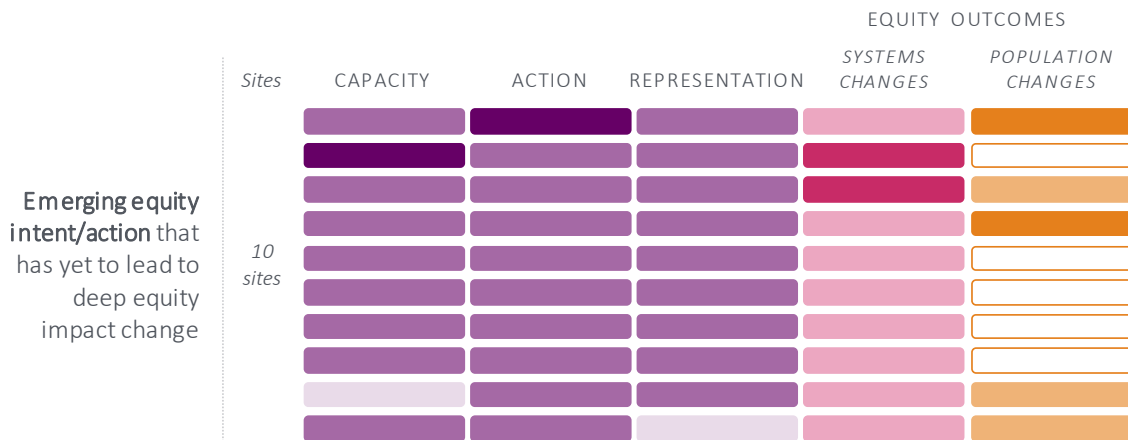
Equity-focused system changes. The seven initiatives with moderate to strong equity approaches (as seen by their capacity, action, and meaningful inclusion) are achieving many different systems changes intended to increase equity. In particular, they are making policy and rule changes, building the capacity of institutions, and developing/creating resources for beneficiaries/community. For example, Promesa led the development of a wellness center serving both children and families, while RGV Focus created an ongoing event to assist families with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) forms. Example outcomes across all three of the equity deep-dive sites involve increasing the institutional capacity of education systems and embedding equity in existing systems rather than creating new systems.

Equity-focused population change. The majority of study sites with high ratings for equity-related systems changes are achieving at least some equity-focused population change. For example, Promesa has equity-focused targets for all of its targeted population changes and is achieving meaningful change across all three population outcomes, including increasing graduation rates in a school with low-income and diverse students from 48% in 2011 to 96% in 2016. Project U-Turn and Aspen Cradle to Career Initiative are also achieving meaningful change across all of their equity-focused population outcomes, including Project U-Turn’s analysis that shows changes in graduation rates across race and income categories. RGV Focus and Living SJ are achieving meaningful change on approximately half of their equity-focused population changes.

Emerging Equity Intent/Action That Has yet to Lead to Deep Equity Impact Change (10 Sites)

Ten of the collective impact study sites fell into the emerging equity impact category (Figure 20). These sites have emerging equity initiatives or are implementing some, but not all of the aspects of an equity approach. Eight of the 10 sites demonstrated emerging capacity, and nine out of 10 sites were rated as emerging in prioritizing equity focused actions and meaningful representation and inclusion. Many of the initiatives were either beginning the process of addressing equity or had an implicit equity focus infused throughout their work that was not necessarily rooted in addressing systemic inequity.

Figure 20| Initiatives with emerging equity approaches and subsequent systems and population impact



Mixed results on equity outcomes. These sites’ achievement of equity impact is variable and emerging. For example, two sites, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy and Mission Graduate, are moving the needle on their outcomes which are primarily targeted toward specific groups (reducing teen pregnancy rates for low-income teens and increasing graduation rates for Hispanic students), but are not seeing strong shifts in systems to date. Conversely, two other initiatives are making significant system level shifts but are not yet seeing gaps close at a population level. There are some factors that may be related to not achieving much change, including longevity of initiatives, leadership change, struggles to bring partners on board with a common agenda, and meaningfully including beneficiaries and diverse organizational partners. These patterns suggest that even with a strong equity focus, outcomes may not be achieved if there are fundamental challenges to shared vision, action, and leadership, and it may be early to tell the impact of the initiatives’ work in some cases.

No equity outcomes yet. Six of the 10 study sites with an emerging commitment to equity are not yet showing strong equity focused systems changes or population changes at this point. Of these six sites, three of them have recently shifted their overall focus to one of equity (e.g., closing achievement

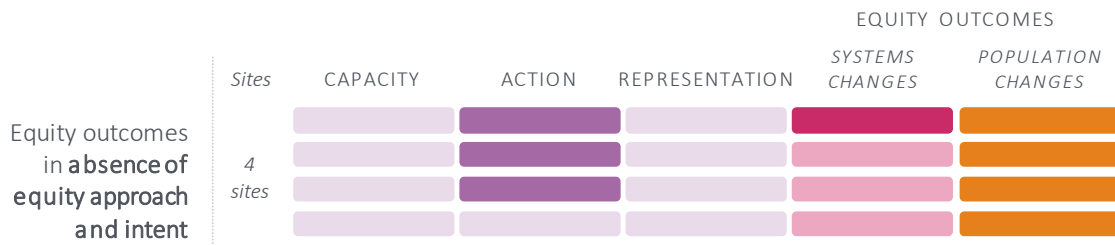
gaps) and thus have not had much time to see systems shift as a result. There are some examples of more informal workforce development and programmatic shifts, but not much in terms more formalized policy and practice changes.

For five of these six sites, systems changes were identified that were more general and universally aimed at the whole population rather than targeted to specific population needs. For example, one study site has achieved a number of equity-focused systems changes, but fewer than half of their reported systems changes are targeted to specific sub-populations or are not generally designed to address structural inequities. Most of their systems changes are programmatic in focus, and many of them are universal.

Equity Outcomes in Absence of Equity Approach and Intent (4 Sites)

While there is a positive relationship between equity-focused actions and subsequent equity-focused outcomes overall, there is a group of study sites that are targeting interventions and making systems changes that are leading to improved outcomes for specific populations, though they lack an explicit focus on equity and have little meaningful inclusion and representation (Figure 21). Largely this is by virtue of addressing a problem that disproportionately affects a disadvantage population.

Figure 21 | Initiatives Achieving Equity Impact with No Equity Approach



Problem definition. These four sites focused on narrowly defined populations that are considered “high risk,” such as veteran and chronic homeless populations and workforce development and economic growth in Appalachia, a geographic region negatively impacted by the decline of coal and manufacturing jobs. All four had a significant and direct influence on the problem they sought to address, and many of the initiatives provide direct services to the population. For example, Opening Doors has contributed to dropping the veteran homeless rate by 98%, effectively ending homelessness for this group, while also dropping the chronic homelessness rate by 68%. SOAR has successfully placed more than 1,000 displaced coal workers in new jobs. The key for these initiatives appears to lie in actions and systems changes across the initiative that naturally focus on high-need populations experiencing inequities, and, as a result, their programmatic and policy solutions have a disproportionate benefit to those groups. Though they don’t talk about addressing underlying structural factors related to disproportionate outcomes for these target populations, their strategies

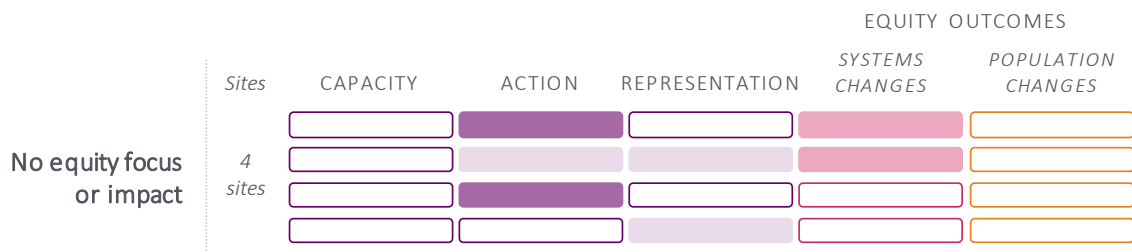
and activities do target some of those structural issues, and their programmatic work alleviates the symptoms of the problem for the target populations. This includes some initiatives using disaggregated data that helps show impact on specific subpopulations, including race and income. The initiatives also contributed to systems changes that have a direct impact on equity, including setting up local hubs and care teams in vulnerable communities; changing assessment tools to include a vulnerability index; developing a coordinated entry system to identify the highest-risk individuals; removing criminal background checks from housing applications; providing job training, and putting in broadband infrastructure to support displaced workers in rural areas.

Targeted problem definition does not equal equity. While these study sites do not have an explicit focus and or attend very deeply to issues of representation and inclusion, they are achieving impact that could be described as equity-focused, in that better systems and outcomes appear to be benefitting high-risk populations. Equity, as defined for this study, however, goes beyond simply achieving outcomes. Equity implies other outcomes are equally as important, such as shifting the power dynamic, empowering communities to make decisions, and implementing solutions that build on strengths. Because of their top-down nature and approach focused on ameliorating deficits, these sites would not be considered strong equity sites.

Absence of Equity Approach and Intent and Equity Outcomes (4 Sites)

Four of the study sites did not have a strong focus on equity or targeted actions, and also were not engaged in achieving equity-focused outcomes. These four sites were focused on more infrastructure than social outcomes (e.g., river water quality, broadband expansion) or did not have sufficient evidence of to judge equity action and outcomes (Figure 22).

Figure 22 | Initiatives with No Equity Approach





OVERALL REFLECTIONS ON EQUITY AND THE STUDY

Equity is a growing concern for collective impact initiatives—with the assumption that lasting and meaningful change is much more difficult or impossible to achieve without explicitly addressing the systemic barriers that keep some groups from being successful. Without an intentional focus on equity, persistent gaps in outcomes and opportunities will persist.

While most of the study sites saw the value of infusing equity into their work, only a few have been able to develop their capacity, sharply target their interventions to the greatest need, and authentically engage and empower the communities they are serving. Some of the challenges that sites identified included knowing how to effectively engage communities, having access to needed data for deep root cause analysis, and developing shared agreements and buy-in across partners for an equity approach.



EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

The study did a light touch exploration on the types of supports that collective impact sites identify as important to their success or barriers. This was explored briefly with the eight site visit sites.

Funding. In general, funding was identified as critical. A number of funding successes were identified, including new and increased funding for functioning of the initiative and for specific programs and strategies. In addition, sites identified increases in collaborative funding efforts and alignment of funding priorities. Some sites reported success in long-term funding streams, such as legislative appropriations, capital campaigns and long-term grants. Site visit sites also described funding environments that had many significant challenges, including a need for additional, more sustainable and diversified funding, along with specific challenges related to collaborative funding. There is a scarcity of funding resources for backbone support, and initiatives feel their backbones are under-resourced and lack staff capacity. Initiatives struggle to find sustainable, long-term funding streams for their work and infrastructure. Much of the external funding is grant or other short-term funding which makes it difficult to engage in stable multi-year planning. There is also a need for broader diversification of funding to weather bumps in resource availability. State and governmental funding processes are cumbersome, not transparent, and hard to navigate, making it difficult to disseminate funds and get collaborative projects off the ground. Funding shortages can lead to competition for scarce resources among initiative partners.

Capacity building and supports. Initiatives reported receiving technical assistance and capacity support through two main avenues—participation in a larger network of peers and direct support from consultants—both from national models and more specialized content expertise. A number of site visit sites are themselves recognized as leaders and supports to the field more broadly. Recognition

includes: identification of the site as a model program or leader, peer endorsement, replication of the specific model, and external awards. For example, Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative has been recognized by United Way Worldwide as a model program, and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recognized Home For Good as a model, adopting some of the initiative's approaches to federal guidelines for programs serving people who are homeless. Multiple site visit sites also provide technical assistance and support to other communities who want to start a collective impact initiative.



SITES WITHOUT POPULATION CHANGE

In the original study design, the Study Team planned to conduct a similar process-tracing exercise with two sites strongly implementing a collective impact approach but with varying degrees of success at achieving their population changes. For the cases where population change was *not* in evidence, the Study Team expected to look for patterns around the types of changes being achieved but which are not, at least yet, driving population level change, and to explore what barriers or factors have been at play to impede expected progress.

As the site sample was created, data suggested that the strongest rationale for no population change would likely be lack of time. Given that, the Study Team expanded the number of population change sites in the process tracing methodology from six to eight, with the belief that more positive population change cases would result in increased confidence in the findings compared to the more negligible benefit likely gained from results from two site visit sites without change.

The study did, however, include five study sites that did not have documented, meaningful population changes against which were compared the eight site visit sites. Key findings are listed on the following pages.

Differences between Site Visit Sites and No Population Change Sites

Less strong implementation of the collective impact approach. Study sites without population change had significantly lower average ratings⁹ on the collective impact rubric; site visit sites rated 2.6, while these five non-site visit sites rated 2.1. Most of the study sites without population change had moderate levels of implementation of collective impact conditions, including shared measurement system, continuous communication, and backbone infrastructure. In particular, sites without population change had well developed internal communication mechanisms but lacked effective mechanisms for external communication. The study also found that the 12 population-change non-site visit study sites averaged 2.6 out of 3.0 for their overall rubric score.

Significantly different rates of achieving some outcomes. Other differences occurred among the kinds of changes the two types of sites demonstrated. For example, site visit sites had significantly more achievement of early changes in *partnership* (40%¹⁰ more site visit sites achieved this kind of early change), *policy systems changes* (68%¹¹ more sites achieved) and *practice improvements* (48%¹² more sites achieved). Site visit sites also had significantly more systems changes within one organization or similar organizations.

Other notable differences in outcome achievement. There were non-significant but notably different rates of outcome achievement associated with *political will* (35% lower among sites without population change), *new and expanded services* (20% lower), and higher average numbers of *multi-sector partnerships* (1.2 compared to 2.8 among site visit sites).

Less time implementing. One significant factor is the length of the initiative. All study sites without population change ranged in duration from five to eight years; site visit sites tended to have more longevity with sites being in operation from eight to 25 years, with an average of 14 years.

Understanding Barriers to Population Change

Besides—or because of—being relatively new initiatives, these study sites without population change experienced some specific challenges that may have prevented them from achieving change.

Establishing a Common Agenda. Some study sites without population change struggled with establishing a common agenda that all partners supported and developing clearly-defined strategies and work plans. For example, after one initiative worked with a consultant to develop a common agenda there was pushback from partners; as a result, they are still working to develop clear

⁹ $p \leq .05$

¹⁰ $p \leq .05$

¹¹ $p \leq .05$

¹² $p \leq .10$

strategies for implementation. Another initiative began in 2013 and did not have a work plan until 2017. As a result, there have been a limited number of systems changes in these initiatives.

Measuring impacts. All study sites without population change expressed some challenges with measuring impact. Although one study site without population change had achieved many diverse and significant systems changes, they felt that the data they were tracking in their shared measurement system was not sensitive enough to reflect the progress they had made. Two study sites without population change lacked infrastructure for collecting meaningful and valid data and have had to spend significant time investing in these systems. As a result, these initiatives have experienced challenges measuring their impact.

Other internal and external challenges. Some study sites without population change had challenges with internal processes which contributed to challenges with moving the work forward, specifically transition of staff or difficulties in the backbone agency or leadership group structure. Others had challenges in the external environment, including competing initiative(s), resource constraints, and political constraints due to local or federal context. For example, the transition in regional government led to an environment that did not financially or politically support one site's work. Two other study sites without population change experienced challenges with competing initiatives that made it difficult to foster partner engagement.



IMPLICATIONS

The study findings suggest four overarching implications that may affect how collective impact is implemented and the outcomes it can achieve: the importance of the core foundational work to support long-term focus; the iterative nature of the work and need for feedback loops; the complexity of advancing equity and need for attention to multiple routes for contributing to impact. These implications play out differently for different types of stakeholders, including: funders, implementers, community participants, and evaluators/researchers.



IMPLICATION 1: Collective impact is a long-term proposition; take the time to lay a strong foundation

Many of the study sites achieving population-level change have been around for more than a decade, and none for fewer than three years. Not surprisingly, the study confirms the often-stated belief that collective impact is a long-term play, not a quick-win game. The findings also clearly indicate that there are specific steps initiatives can take upfront to increase their likelihood of success over the long-term, including:

*Recognizing that it is worth the time upfront to **define the problem and target population clearly.***

Some of the study sites that had multiple population-level changes showing significant progress in alignment with their common agenda had defined their problem in such a way that their target population was both:

- Specific instead of or in addition to universal (e.g., a subset of all people experiencing the issue/problem in a defined geographic area, particular subsets who were experiencing heightened needs); and
- Directly reached by the partners at the table (e.g., stakeholders in the initiative provide many of the major services and supports affecting the target population).

Not only does this specificity help initiatives monitor whether they are influencing the problem in a meaningful way, it also helps initiatives have an impact on a population experiencing inequities. By defining the population in such a way as to name those with the greatest needs (e.g., chronically homeless or communities of color), the solutions can be oriented around those needs, rather than generally benefiting everyone experiencing the problem. This allowed some study sites with a limited focus on equity in terms of their capacity, actions, or representation to nonetheless have an impact on equity because of their target population.

*Not rushing to get the five conditions in place, but rather investing thoughtfully in the two that are most foundational upfront: **backbone and common agenda.***

If the work will take years, there is no reason to assume all conditions need to be fully up and running within the first couple years. In fact, the evidence suggests that a deep investment in the strength of the backbone supports and the common agenda in the first couple years will pay off over time. Study sites that had maturity in both of these conditions also had more mature mutually reinforcing actions and many different types of systems changes.

In practice, this suggests:

- Taking the time to find a **credible, skilled and ready backbone** (composed of one or more organizations) who can build trust, convene the right people, and apply the technical skills needed to maintain an effective collaborative environment focused on systems change. It may also mean investing in building the capacity of the backbone. The strongest backbones in the study were highly focused on supporting others to lead and engage in many different meaningful ways—they built networks, rather than taking over the role of leading change.
- Taking the time to develop a **strong common agenda** using an **inclusive, effective process** even if the stakeholders are struggling with process fatigue. While there may be concurrent actions to gain early wins, taking the time to engage in a participatory and complete common agenda

process is likely to pay off in the future with the scope and scale of change that is possible. Sites with the strongest common agendas often effectively engaged many different stakeholders throughout the process, from those affected by the problem to policymakers to implementers. This laid the groundwork for continued engagement in mutually reinforcing activities.



IMPLICATION 2: Systems changes take many forms; be iterative and intentional

The opportunity to look at how 25 different initiatives approached systems change is powerful. It builds an understanding of the many different combinations of formal and informal changes that have occurred, as well as the variability in the changes occurring in one organization and across many. The study found many different routes to driving change:

- Informal partnerships and experiments that lead to formal systems changes across organizations;
- Formal changes within a single organization that lead to formal changes across organizations; and
- Changes within one system (e.g., education) that lead to changes in other systems (e.g., health).

There was not one path or a simple pattern that can be replicated. In fact, the pattern that was found is as simple as:

Systems change is iterative and not fully predictable, with a wide variety of kinds of systems changes playing valuable roles toward population changes.

Some of the changes that occur may or may not be directly tied to population-level change, and yet hold value for other reasons (e.g., building will to keep the work moving, creating greater visibility, establishing partnerships, etc.). Some changes may be hard to envision upfront, and others may be in response to an emergent environmental dynamic.



IMPLICATION 3: Equity goes beyond achieving a set of outcomes; it requires intent, shifting power, and meaningful inclusion along with targeted problem definition and action.

The study findings suggest that equity is broader than simply targeting actions toward a specific group. For collective impact to achieve its full and lasting potential, it is necessary to re-think the systems and structures that produce inequity to begin with. As such, equity in collective impact requires capacity to reflect on and drive an equity perspective, sharply target interventions that will address the greatest need, and shift power from system leaders to the communities who are direct beneficiaries of the work.

Successful equity outcomes stem from capacity for equity work with the backbone and throughout the initiative partners. Backbones who have equity capacity are staffed by individuals with lived experience in leadership and the work, and are engaged in reflective practice about their own power within the system. Initiatives with strong equity capacity have an explicit and shared lens of social justice to guide action.

Bringing community stakeholders to the table and shifting power to their voices, assets, and solutions can drive change at a very different level than system partners speaking on behalf of the community. Strong equity sites are intentional about representation, inclusion, and empowerment.



IMPLICATION 4: Collective impact initiatives take on different roles in driving change; be open to different routes to making a difference

As shown through the site visit sites, the collective impact approach made a difference in a diverse set of circumstances: sometimes as a driver of change, sometimes leveraging existing regulations and conditions and going further, and sometimes as a meaningful support to other critical efforts happening within communities.

Some of the collective impact critics describe collective impact as always taking a driving role, drowning out other efforts and community voices, lacking humility, disrupting other work and networks, and advancing a structure (the backbone) that is inherently top-down. The findings from this study provide a more nuanced understanding of the broader set of roles that initiatives can and do take, all of which have led toward population level impact among the site visit sites.

A more explicit effort to identify the role that is the right fit, given the environment the initiative is implementing within could help strengthen its ability to leverage and contribute to early and systems changes needed to achieve population change. It could help better define what kinds of measures are most important to track, who should be at the table, and how to think about success relative to other efforts in play. It could also ultimately establish the initiative as an important presence in the community, filling a critical and problematic gap, rather than risking replacement of otherwise effective structures and voices.

Specific ways these implications can be brought to bear by funders, implementers, community participants, and evaluators/researchers follow.



IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDERS

<p>Laying a Foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify target population: If you are seeking to initiate a collective impact effort, you may want to name the target population specifically, consider which actors are fundamentally necessary due to direct reach, and/or support the partners to have these dialogues before they go too far down the road. • Assess potential: If you are looking to support an existing collective impact initiative, ask questions about the specific population and the initiative’s ability to influence that population. It might help you decide if the initiative is likely to achieve the desired change. • Support credible backbone identification: Recognize that a strong backbone must be credible with the stakeholders and have or build the skills to facilitate others to be strong leaders in the work and maintain the long-term focus on systems-level change. Given the importance of credibility, recognize that you may not be the right organization to select the backbone organization(s)—consider a collaborative selection process.
<p>Long-Term Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a strong foundation: With early stage initiatives, consider offering general operating support, offsetting the costs of participation for lower resourced stakeholders, and generally help the planning stage be successful instead of creating pressure to get to action and outcomes.
<p>Iterative Nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss systems change goals: When supporting the work of a collective impact initiative, ask questions about why different systems changes were prioritized rather than assume they are all intended to have direct impact on the problem. Even the act of asking the question can be helpful, as it may lead to thoughtful dialogues about the mix of direct and indirect changes being pursued.
<p>Advancing Equity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support capacity for equity: When working with existing initiatives, supporting work to strengthen capacity may help the initiative to advance equity even as it builds its ability to maintain an equity commitment over time. • Practice meaningful inclusion and representation: Consider funding community-driven collective impact initiatives and providing support to help them drive change.
<p>Considering the role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open to many roles: How you judge the success of the collective impact effort directly influences how participants believe it needs to operate. Are you willing to have the work be one of many contributors, filling in a critical gap, but not driving the work? Are you open to the work being focused on tapping into key environmental leverage points, rather than pushing against the current? Consider actively supporting the participants in the initiative to identify and advance the initiative’s contribution in the way they understand to be appropriate and needed.



IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTERS

<p>Laying a Foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the target population: Consider examining how your target populations are currently defined and ask whether a more narrowly defined population would be helpful in focusing the work. You may also want to assess the extent to which the engaged partners have direct influence over the population. If they do not, it may be a question of recruiting new partners, seeking to influence specific external organizations, and/or redefining the target population.
<p>Long-Term Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on laying a strong foundation: It’s important to be patient and focused on laying a strong foundation and guiding direction for the work. Often the strength of a common agenda is heavily affected by the clarity of the problem definition and solutions, and the buy-in of the stakeholders needed to implement it. • Assess your capacity: No organization or group of stakeholders is likely to be 100% ready to tackle long-term systemic change. Take the time to assess the strengths of the stakeholders and backbone organization(s), identify areas to build capacity, and reach out to get support.
<p>Iterative Nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize your actions: Keep in mind that there is no “right” answer for what systems changes are needed—many different changes may be helpful to advance, from direct impact on the problem to creating an environment that enables continued work on the problem. However, that doesn’t mean all systems changes are okay to do—keep an eye out for “wrong” changes—changes that risk moving the needle in the wrong direction.
<p>Advancing Equity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a shared vision for equity: With the community, determine what equity looks like, and develop a shared equity perspective and plan that aligns with their needs and capitalizes on their strengths and assets for solutions. • Focus on action while building capacity: Avoid stalling your work because the capacity and representation aren’t everything you know they should be. Instead, consider continuing to strengthen these areas concurrent with holding yourself accountable to taking actions that have an equity focus.
<p>Considering the role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be context aware and intentional: Early thought about what type of role the initiative can play may position the initiative to be seen more widely as a positive contributor to the environment. Some collective impact initiatives might be in a leading role, but not always. Take the time to assess your environment to identify first whether your initiative’s leadership is a value add (filling in a gap) or risks creating competing efforts. Collective impact initiatives can also supplement exiting work or focus on specific environmental leverage points.



IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

<p>Laying a Foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess potential success: With many communities being asked to participate in different systems-driven planning processes, it can be hard to judge which ones are most worth your time. One way to make that judgement is to assess whether the process is intentional and participatory in how the initiative is selecting its backbone and defining a common agenda. These two critical first steps should be done with full participation of many different stakeholders, including those from the communities most affected. These are signals of potential future success in driving systems change. • Improve the process: If the early processes aren't effective at engaging stakeholders and framing the problem in a way that clearly identifies the target population and systemic problem to solve, the long-term work may not achieve as much. Be ready to be a strong voice for slowing down the process to do it right.
<p>Long-Term Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient and yet maintain the sense of urgency: It may feel like people are taking too long to make a difference on an immediate and pressing problem facing your community. Giving space for the foundation to be laid is critical, but so too is keeping the sense of urgency that the problem must be solved. It is a difficult balance—holding front and center the urgent nature of the issue while celebrating and supporting what feel like baby steps. That balance is one that community participants are uniquely placed to help maintain.
<p>Iterative Nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know there are lots of avenues for change: Collective impact initiatives benefit from partnering and making changes with similar organizations and a range of partners that touch issues in lots of different ways. There's room for experimentation in how these different players partner together and work to address common problems. Encourage all stakeholders have a role in learning from and taking action in response to lessons about different kinds of systems changes that can advance the work.
<p>Advancing Equity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support action, build commitment: Few sites in the study had a strong equity foundation across their capacity and representation, yet many were beginning to advance actions directly related to equity even as they worked on these other areas. Be a champion for not waiting to take action (and help find those meaningful actions), even as you hold your partners accountable for building a foundation to advance equity in your community. • Advocate for your community: Equity means shifting power dynamics and generating solutions that align with community priorities. Advocate for these priorities to be the foundation of the work.
<p>Considering the role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create awareness of existing work to complement and support: Knowing that collective impact initiatives can play a range of roles, from leading to supporting, one of the critical early steps is identifying how the initiative will fit into the broader environment. You can help ensure that environmental assessment is explicitly taking into account community leadership, capacity, and efforts and how the work can complement and support what already exists, not risk replacing it.



IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATORS AND RESEARCHERS

<p>Laying a Foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply a developmental approach: Early stage collective impact initiatives are innovations in development. No two initiatives can or should be the same—how they emerge is unique to their history and context. Bringing a developmental evaluation approach allows you to be an active support to the complex backbone and common agenda process, rather than focusing on making judgments about what these processes should look like.
<p>Long-Term Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient and realistic: Be realistic and helpful in what you are measuring over the first couple years. This is not just process evaluation. Changing how people collaborate, how networks change, changing levels of trust, and building readiness to take shared action all happen concurrently with developing a common agenda. There are important outcome measures early in this process that can help the backbone and leaders understand how to strengthen the work. At the same time, don't try to jump to outcomes that are about the problem—it may put pressure on the stakeholders to move too quickly early in their work.
<p>Iterative Nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the “why” of systems changes: You can offer real value to an initiative and its iterative process of systems change by going beyond capturing evidence of systems changes to helping to document intent and ultimately why the changes mattered. An initiative that is advancing a variety of changes that influence one dynamic (e.g., strengthening collaboration, freeing up resources for experimentation across partners), but not advancing another part of the issue (e.g., improving outcomes for the target population) can benefit from seeing the patterns in the value-add of their work.
<p>Advancing Equity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpack equity concepts: Be careful not to judge the equity focus of an initiative too narrowly, such as primarily focusing on the capacity of the backbone or the representation of the partners. The concept of being ready and able to address equity is far more complex and worth unpacking as the initiative advances its work in this area. Seek evidence of equity-oriented actions and equity impact (and lack of impact) across the many different outcomes of the initiative.
<p>Considering the role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help define the role: In the process of developing the theory of change, you can help stakeholders to more clearly articulate how they see the initiative in the broader environment, what the other drivers of change are, and ultimately what role the initiative will take on. Be open to the idea it might be a supporting role, instead of a leading role, in driving change. • Judge the success of the initiative based on how participants believe it needs to operate: Is the initiative intended to be one of many contributors, filling in a critical gap, but not driving the work? Is the approach meant to tap into key environmental leverage points, rather than pushing against the current? Consider actively supporting the participants in the CI initiative to identify and advance the contribution of the initiative in the way they understand to be appropriate and needed, and consider what kinds of questions should be asked to inform the work along the way.



CONCLUSION

As noted at the beginning, collective impact as an approach has been debated, lauded, and dissected in the social sector since its emergence. While many collective impact efforts claim to have achieved population-level results, this is the first methodologically rigorous study that has looked across multiple efforts to systematically explore the results they are achieving, challenges they face, and lessons they have learned.

Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact took on this project as a partnership providing a balance between Spark's knowledgeable insider status and ORS' role as inquisitive skeptics. Both firms shared the goal of rigorously interrogating collective impact across multiple settings, focus areas, and approaches for implementation to get to the nub of the issue: what difference has collective impact made on the ground? What can the social sector better understand from this study to further community efforts to make real and durable social impact in communities?

In the end, the data clearly showed cases when the approach meaningfully contributed to documented population changes, clarified ways that systems changes occur to support collective impact common agendas, largely reinforced the importance of four of the five conditions, and pointed to better understanding of what equity approaches and outcomes can look like. The study also provides fodder for collective impact funders, implementers, community participants, and evaluators and researchers, raising considerations and concepts that can be applied to ongoing, on-the-ground collective impact initiatives.

While this research study is an important contribution to the field, it is not—and cannot be—the final word on collective impact’s effectiveness. Every study has its limitations and questions that are out of scope. Many critical questions remain around getting to equity, comparing collective impact to other models of change, learning from failed initiatives, and more. Ongoing exploration will continue to help those in the social sector who spend time, money, and social capital in their pursuit of resolving—sustainably and at scale—deeply entrenched and complex social problems.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STUDY METHODS

APPENDIX B: COLLECTIVE IMPACT STUDY SITES

APPENDIX C: ADVISORY COMMITTEE LIST

APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES' STRENGTH

APPENDIX E: CHANGES IN EDUCATION AND
HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES





APPENDIX A: STUDY METHODS

The methods used to answer the study questions are detailed below, beginning with site selection and data collection and ending with the analysis process. For additional information, please contact Spark Policy Institute or ORS Impact, including for access to the rubrics used as analytical tools and the protocols for interviews and site visits.



PHASE I: SITE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

Site Selection Process

The identification of the collective impact sites included in the Phase 1 cross-site scan—a total of 25 sites—involved three primary steps: (1) data collection and screening; (2a) in-depth web review and (2b) external vetting; and (3) phone screening. Steps 1, 2a, and 2b were completed iteratively as new nomination data was received.

Step 1: Data Collection and Initial Screening

Collective impact site nominations were solicited using a variety of approaches, including a FSG blog post, a request for nominations sent to the Collective Impact Forum email list, and Twitter tweets. Nominations were accepted through an online survey platform (the survey link was included in social media outreach) as well as via email to the study coordinator. Sites were asked to provide the name of the initiative, its focus areas, its geographic location, the collective impact conditions being implemented, and the length of time the initiative had been operating. Between April 6 and April 20, 2017, the team received 126 unduplicated nominations (11 were duplicates).

All nominations were screened. Initiatives were included in the next phase of review if they reported they were (1) located in the United States or Canada; (2) in operation for three years or more; and (3) implementing two or more of the collective impact conditions. Of the 126 unduplicated nominations, 106 were move forward for in-depth review (step 2a).

The nominations were supplemented with collective impact site data from two sources: the Collective Impact Forum Directory and a Collective Impact Forum survey administered in February 2017. Potential sites were identified from these sources if they: (1) met the three screening criteria described above, (2) were not duplicative of any of the sites identified above; and (3) addressed topics and/or were in geographic areas that were underrepresented in the nominations. Twenty-four sites from the Directory and six from the survey data fulfilled these criteria, yielding a total of 136 potential sites.

Step 2: In-Depth Web Review and External Vetting

In-Depth Web Review (2a): In-depth web reviews of the 136 sites were divided among three members of the study team. Using information publicly available on the internet, the primary reviewer sought to verify that the initiative was (1) a collective impact initiative (a collection of partners working toward a common goal, following the conditions of collective impact, regardless of use of specific terminology) and (2) had been operating for three years or more. The search also sought to understand (1) if/what systems and population changes the initiative had achieved; (2) the initiative's geographic location and level; and (3) the primary issue the initiative was targeting (e.g., education, justice, poverty).

Based on the web reviews, the primary reviewer made a recommendation for study inclusion. Sites were recommended for inclusion if they: (1) were verified to be a collective impact initiative; (2) were verified to have been operating for three years or more; and (3) had achieved at least some systems and/or population-level change.

Two quality checks were completed of these recommendations. First, a senior researcher reviewed all ratings provided by the three primary reviewers and standardized the recommendations for inclusion and rationales. Second, the study coordinator reviewed all rationales and original data and made final recommendations for inclusion. During the quality check, sites were eliminated due to (1) insufficient evidence of collective impact approach implementation; (2) insufficient evidence of population and/or systems change; (3) conflicts of interest related to previous partnership or evaluation work with the study team; or to (4) achieve diversity in parent initiatives—i.e., include no more than three sites that were a part of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network and no more than two sites that were part of the Promise Neighborhoods initiative. Consideration was also given to achieving diversity in (1) geographic location and level of the initiative (national, regional, city/county, neighborhood); (2) issues the initiative was addressing; and (3) the level of population changes the initiative had achieved.

External Vetting (2b): At two points during the in-depth web review, sites being considered for inclusion were presented to the study's Steering Committee; 34 sites were presented on April 24 and 39 sites were presented on May 3. The Steering Committee was asked to identify any "red flags"—e.g., conflicts of interest, sites currently participating in other known research studies. The Steering Committee (a) provided input on additional sites in order to achieve greater site diversity (that fed into the nominations process and screening process, Step 1, described above) and (b) recommended the exclusion of sites when too many were included under the same parent initiative (i.e., inclusions of multiple sites from the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, that informed quality checking vetting criterion, described above).

Step 2 yielded 46 potential sites—39 identified as "highly recommended," which moved forward into Step 3, and 7 identified as "recommended," which would be available as back-up sites, but were not moved forward to Step 3.

Step 3: Phone Screening

Emails were sent to the primary point of contact for each of the 39 sites. Sites were asked to confirm via email that they were comfortable with their initiative being publicly characterized as a collective impact effort and to indicate whether they were interested in participating in the study. Up to two-follow-up emails were sent.

For each site that responded expressing potential interest in participating (n=31), brief calls were set up with the site's primary point of contact so that a study team member could provide additional information on the study (e.g., its purpose, expectations for participation, benefits for sites), address any questions, and ask the primary contact to confirm interest within three days. Once a site confirmed interest in participating, either during or after the call, the primary point of contact was asked to (1) sign a memorandum of understanding; (2) identify two individuals to participate in telephone interviews who could provide information on how the initiative was being implemented and progress made; and (3) provide key documents, including the most recent action plan, annual report, evaluation report, theory of change, and communication products. In total, 25 sites participated in Phase I data collection.

Data Collection Process

Phase I data collection included an iterative process of reviewing documents and conducting two telephone interviews (with the initiative lead and one additional person). Prior to the first interview, one member of the study team conducted a structured review of documents shared by the site and web-based information to index evidence for collective impact conditions, equity actions, early changes, systems changes, and population changes, noting where documentation or information was strong, thin, or missing. The reviewer completed (1) a summary sheet that was used to tailor the interview protocol, and (2) a visual representation of the site's theory of change that was shared with the site prior to the interview.

The interview guide included 25 questions in five domains: (1) background (e.g., interviewee role in project); (2) collective impact approach (e.g., overarching goal/vision, how partners work together, communication mechanisms, measuring progress); (3) areas of change (e.g., changes the initiative has achieved, how those changes were driven by the initiative as well as external factors); (4) equity and inclusion (e.g., extent to which equity is a priority, equity-focused work, equity challenges); and (5) conclusion (e.g., unintended impacts, challenges). At the end of the first interview, the interviewee was asked to provide additional documentation that he/she referenced or supported the points he/she had made. The interviewer used the interview notes, the interview transcript, and/or additional documents provide by the first interviewee to further tailor the interview guide for the second interview so that it could be used to garner additional details and/or missing information.

All interviews took roughly two hours to complete. Interviewees provided verbal consent to participate in the study and were compensated with a \$50 gift card. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A number of steps were taken to assure the quality of the interview process. First, the interview protocol was pilot tested with two individuals who participated in a collective impact initiative (one initiative lead and one

support staff from the backbone). Second, the interviewers were trained on the interview protocol, including how to customize protocol based on the initial document review. Interviewers conducted or observed the pilot and early interviews and received coaching and feedback on the early interviews. Third, continuity in interviewer was maintained within sites; the same person conducted the interview with both site representatives.

PHASE II: SITE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

Site Selection Process

Site selection for Phase II was based on a modified Delphi ranking process with the goal of selecting eight sites that presented the strongest cases for examining relationships between the collective impact conditions, early and systems changes, and population changes, building from the scores and analysis of rubric results. The Delphi approach relies on a panel of experts (in this case, study team members) ranking the a given array of units on a clear set of criteria, tabulating those ratings, resolving through panel discussion final ratings for each unit, and producing a final ranking of the set. The Delphi panel used the following six criteria:

- *Strength of evidence that all five collective impact conditions have been implemented* using a three-point scale (0 = plausible evidence of 0-2 conditions present; 1 = plausible evidence of 3-4 conditions present; 2 = plausible evidence of all 5 conditions present).
- *Strength of evidence that collective impact has contributed value beyond individual partner efforts* using a three-point scale: 0 = no value add of collective impact initiative beyond partner efforts (changes would have happened anyway); 1 = emerging value add (some efforts benefit from collective approach, but not consistent across partners or strategies); 2= high value add (e.g., broad scope of aligned practice, policy and resources).
- *Evidence of high-impact and meaningful systems changes* using a three-point scale: 0 = no clear systems change or most are early (informal/within sector) or will not meaningfully contribute to population change; 1 = some systems changes are formal, scaled or cross-sector; 2 = most systems changes are formal, scaled and cross sector.
- *Has one or more verifiable and meaningful population outcomes* using a three-point scale: 0 = no changes; 1 = positive programmatic or pilot change; 2 = positive change across the whole population or subpopulation.
- *Strength of evidence that collective impact has contributed to early and/or system changes* using a three-point scale: 0 = no evidence of early or system changes as a results of collective impact initiative; some evidence of early and/or system changes (in some sectors or partners); 2 = extensive evidence of early and/or system changes (e.g., initiative wide, multiple sectors, partners).
- *Plausibility of links between systems changes and population impacts* using a three-point scale: 0 = none; 1 = vague or inferred; 2 = explicitly articulated by the site.

To participate in Phase II, sites had to have minimum scores of “2” on collective impact conditions (first criteria above) and population outcomes (fourth criteria above), and at least a “1” on collective impact contributing to early and systems changes (fifth criteria above). This initial filter resulted in 10 sites that met the criteria (of the 25 Phase I sites). We ranked each site by their average score across the criteria; the top eight sites were selected to be a part of Phase II, with the remaining serving as back-ups (see Table A1 below). The list of 10 sites was reviewed by our research Steering Committee to identify any red flags or issues prior to finalizing the list. Once the list was final, we reached out to the eight sites to invite them to participate in Phase II. All eight agreed to participate.

Table A1 | Phase II Sites

SITE/INITIATIVE NAME	Location	Issue Area
ALIGNMENT NASHVILLE	Nashville, TN	Education – Multi-Issue
COLORADO CONSORTIUM FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION	Colorado	Substance Abuse
COMMUNITIES THAT CARE COALITION: FRANKLIN COUNTY AND THE NORTH QUABBIN REGION	Franklin County, MA	Education – Reducing Teen Social Risk Factors
CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE	Bridgeport, CT	Juvenile Justice
ELIZABETH RIVER PROJECT	Portsmouth, VA	Environmental
HOME FOR GOOD	Los Angeles, CA	Homelessness
MILWAUKEE TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION INITIATIVE	Milwaukee, WI	Teen Pregnancy
SAN DIEGO COUNTY CHILDHOOD OBESITY INITIATIVE	San Diego, CA	Health – Childhood Obesity

Data Collection Process

To prepare for each site visit, one member of the study team (one of the three site visit leads) conducted a call with the primary contact to provide additional information on the site visit, including an overview of the data collection processes (i.e., two pre-site visit calls and three in-person dialogues). The site liaison was asked to identify individuals to participate in each data collection process. Scheduling of the three in-person dialogues was based on participant availability and the desire to obtain a range of perspectives.

The first pre-site call was with the initiative's evaluator (internal, external, data manager, or person with the most relevant knowledge) for the purpose of assessing the quality of the data and systems used to track the population change that was put forward as an initiative goal with evidence of achievement. Questions focused on understanding the meaningfulness of the change, how the change was measured, and how the initiative assessed progress over time.

The goal of the second pre-site call—with the initiative lead—was to gather additional information on the site's theory of change. Questions focused on exploring a visual depiction of the relationship between the collective impact conditions, early change, system changes, population changes, and alternate drivers, which was developed by the study team based on data collected thus far. The visual depiction of the theory of change was sent to the interviewee in advance of the call. The interviewer took detailed notes during the each of the pre-site visit calls, which were used to verify that significant population-level change had occurred and update the site's theory of change.

The first two in-person dialogues (i.e., the stakeholder dialogues) used the same protocol but included different sets of stakeholders. One dialogue sought to include members from backbone, steering or leadership team members, core founding members, advisory committee members and funders; while the other sought to include core implementation partners (e.g., work group leads), community-based organizations, and community leaders. Both two-hour interactive dialogues included six to eight individuals. The dialogues explored: (1) ways that the initiative has implemented the collective impact conditions; (2) ways the initiative has implemented the collective impact principles of practice, including cross-sector collaboration, data use, and equity; (3) challenges faced in implementing the initiative; and (4) the role of funding and other supports.

The third in-person dialogue (i.e., the process tracing dialogue) explored how the initiative's strategies led to systems change and population change. The dialogue sought to include eight to ten people who could provide information about how the collective impact initiative has created change and could include individuals who participated in one of the earlier stakeholder dialogues. The two-and-a-half-hour discussion focused on gathering specific evidence that linked the initiative's implementation of collective impact conditions and other strategies, early changes, systems changes, and other drivers of change to the ultimate outcomes (i.e., population-level changes). Participants added and removed elements representing the collective impact condition implementation activities and the above types of changes until consensus was reached, and then they weighted different drivers.¹ All three dialogues were audio recorded. Recordings were used to supplement detailed notes taken during the discussion by a member of the study team.

The three dialogues were completed in one day or over a day and a half at a location chosen by the site liaison. Each participant was compensated with a \$50 gift card for his/her participation. All site visit protocols were pilot tested (with the collective impact initiative members who participated in the pilot of the Phase I interview

¹ In our first process tracing dialogue, participants used sticker voting to lift up important elements in the theory of change, but they did not provide weights. This minimal difference in process did not meaningfully impact the data for the overall analysis.

protocols). The three site visit leads were trained on implementing the protocols, all study team members involved in site visits conducted or observed the pilot, and after the first two site visits they met to troubleshoot challenges.

PHASE III: SITE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

At the request of our Steering Committee, to understand more deeply how equity integrates into the collective impact approach, we selected three of our original sites to do a deeper dive. The research questions we aimed to address include the following:

- What does it mean to for a collective impact initiative to explicitly focus on equity?
- What does implementation of the collective impact conditions and principles of practice look like in collective impact initiatives with an explicit equity focus? How does this compare with collective impact initiatives with less of an equity focus?
- What systems changes have been realized in collective impact initiatives with an explicit equity focus? How does this compare with collective impact initiatives with less of an equity focus?

Site Selection Process

To answer these questions, we reviewed our sample of 25 sites against the following criteria:

- Explicit equity-focused issues area and/or specifically targeted to equity-focused population;
- Driven by those with lived experience: either run by or significant involvement in action planning and implementation;
- Not primarily "top-down": collaborative is not established by or composed primarily of funders, agencies, and governmental agencies;
- Relatively strong implementation of collective impact conditions; and
- Evidence of systems change, even if a series of smaller, earlier changes.

Our review yielded three sites that met the above criteria:

- **ARISE** focuses explicitly on Alaskan Native/Native Indian (AN/NI) youth in Anchorage, Alaska and is aimed at supporting them academically, socially, and culturally. In 2013, ARISE emerged from native community conversations about how to better serve Alaska Native students in the Anchorage School District. The initiative works alongside, and in addition to, a larger cradle to career collective impact initiative in Anchorage, 90 by 2020. ARISE was originally intended to be a working group of the larger initiative but chose to remain separate to preserve its focus and priority on AN/NI students.
- **Promesa** serves the Boyle Heights neighborhood in Los Angeles, California where the population is mostly Hispanic/Latino. The initiative explicitly focuses on serving disadvantaged students and public high schools

that lack of resources. Moving forward, the initiative is focusing more heavily on groups with more need, including English Language Learners, undocumented immigrants, children and youth in special education, incarcerated youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth. In 2009, the Boyle Heights neighborhood secured a half-million-dollar Promise Neighborhood Planning Grant that supported a two-year planning process, engaging hundreds of residents, youth, community organizations, schools, and other allies to reflect on the gains and challenges in the Boyle Heights community. Ultimately, using a grassroots community organizing approach, these residents developed and prioritized short- and long-term goals and strategies that were informed by residents' lived experiences, needs, and research. The model of the initiative is adapted from the federal Community Schools program.

- **RGV Focus** serves the Rio Grande Valley region in Texas, made up of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties. The population is mostly “economically disadvantaged” and Hispanic/Latino. The initiative explicitly focuses on Dreamers and recent immigrants. Launched in 2012, RGV Focus seeks to transform college readiness, access, and success among students living in the Texas Rio Grande’s four-county region. The initiative is region-wide, comprised of agency leaders and decision makers, and is a StriveTogether model site. The Executive Director of the initiative is well-known as an equity expert and speaks nationally on the topic.

Data Collection Process

Each of the three sites convened a group of diverse stakeholders—including leaders and frontline staff from key partner and implementing organizations, who were entirely predominately people of color—to help us understand more deeply four dimensions of equity work:

- The capacity of the initiative to engage equity work;
- How the initiative is prioritizing equity-focused actions;
- The degree of meaningful representation and inclusion; and
- The equity outcomes each initiative is achieving.

With the stakeholders and one or two backbone staff members we conducted a virtual structured dialogue. We asked the group first to rate their initiative on each dimension then to describe the process of getting there, evidence of success, and any challenges and associated solutions. We ended the session asking the group to identify any lessons learned about infusing equity into their work.

ANALYTICAL METHODS

The study leveraged a set of rubrics and process tracing as the core analytical tools, supplemented by thematic analysis. All data was coded prior to applying the rubrics or process tracing methodology.

Data Coding

The research team created a codebook guided by the research questions. The codebook included 11 domains: collective impact conditions (based on the indicators identified in the rubrics), equity (based on the indicator identified in the rubrics), strategies, early changes, systems changes, population changes, alternate drivers of change, other impacts, collective impact principles of practice, challenges, and other key aspects of site implementation (e.g., history, site model). Codes book domains were roughly equivalent for the Phase I and Phase II sites, except for a few additional codes used with the Phase II sites. Each code included a brief definition of the code as well as examples. The codebook was refined and finalized based on its application to the first few sites coded.

Two members of the research team were assigned to code each site. The team worked together to code the documents and complete the analysis workbook (discussed below). The team uploaded and coded the following documents in Dedoose: transcripts from the two interviews collected, documents provide by the sites, notes from the two pre-site calls (Phase II only), and notes from the two site visit stakeholder dialogues (Phase II only). Graphics content and document format prevented some documents from being uploaded. In those instances, information from the documents was used to populate the analysis workbook. Notes from the process tracing dialogue in the site visits were not coded in this system, however, as they were used directly in the process tracing analysis (see “Process Tracing Analysis” below).

While the research team was coding documents, they also completed an analysis workbook for each site; the workbook had a tab for each rubric or thematic analysis section. Phase I sites had eight tabs: site background, collective impact conditions rubric, equity rubric, strategies, early changes, systems changes, population changes, and thematic barriers. Phase II sites had four additional tabs: alternate drivers, consequences, collective impact principles of practice, and external supports. Research team staff populated analysis workbooks with (1) synthesized information from the coded documents as well as the documents developed to prepare for the phase I interviews (e.g., how a condition was implemented, what change occurred); (2) personal reflections and observations (e.g., the extent to which data were clear and consistent, gaps in the data); and (3) exemplar excerpts or quotes (to illustrate the points being made). In this way, the research team used the analysis workbooks as memos (e.g., to keep track of discrete changes, to identify places where additional analysis was needed). The researcher later used the rubrics to assign numerical ratings on each of the rubric categories and to work inductively to identify “types” when no pre-determined categories had been identified in the codebook (e.g., for strategies, systems changes, alternative drivers).

The process for coding Phase I and Phase II sites was largely the same. The primary difference was the need to explicitly code and document in the analysis workbook the relationship between collective impact conditions, alternate drivers and outcomes, including the ways in which change happened over time for Phase II sites. This was accomplished by co-applying codes to the same segment of text, for example, “systems change 1” and “continuous communication” to illustrate the role of continuous communication in driving the change.

A number of quality assurance processes were implemented to ensure consistency in coding across team members. Detailed guidance was developed to illustrate application of the codes, including numerous examples of when and how the codes should be applied. All team members were trained on implementing the codebook through two half-day interactive sessions. All staff were asked to independently code two interview transcripts and dialogued during the training sessions to come to consensus on coding. Two leads were responsible for reviewing staff coding and providing detailed written feedback. Coding was completed by two-member teams either by site (Phase I) or by tab of the analysis workbook (Phase II). For each tab of the analysis workbook, an “expert” was designated. After all coding was complete and the analysis workbook was populated, the expert reviewed each tab across sites in order to ensure consistency in the ways results were described, categorized, and rated.

Rubrics

As indicated in the main body of the report, the study utilized a set of rubrics that included evaluative criteria, quality definitions for those criteria by level of achievement, and a scoring strategy. Tables A2 – A5 provide detailed lists of indicators for each rubric. The rubrics were further fleshed out with descriptions of what a site would look like if it was at a mature level, an emerging level, or absent for each category.

Table A2 | Collective Impact Rubrics

Categories	Indicators
Backbone Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative has established a steering committee or leadership structure with responsibility and authority for governance and decision-making • The initiative has designated one or more organizations that have dedicated staff to perform backbone functions • The backbone infrastructure coordinates and supports core initiative activities such as guiding vision and strategy, convening stakeholders, supporting alignment and shared measurement practices, building public will, community engagement, and ownership, advancing policy, and mobilizing resources • Backbone staff are seen as having appropriate skills and credibility to perform backbone functions
Common Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners and participants have a common understanding of the problem • There is an identifiable overarching goal and vision for the initiative with clearly defined boundaries and focus • Partners and participants have clearly articulated a portfolio of strategies and agreed-upon actions to that drive change • Partners are committed to a shared vision for change and have agreement upon the goals and approaches to achieving that vision

Categories	Indicators
Mutually Reinforcing Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative has a collective plan of action that specifies the strategies and actions that different partners have committed to implementing • Partners are aligning their own practices and actions with initiative goals and collective action plan(s) • Working groups (or other collaborative structures) are established to coordinate activities in alignment with the plan of action • Partners hold each other accountable for implementing activities as planned
Continuous Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative has structures and processes in place to inform, engage, and seek feedback from internal (collective impact partners) stakeholders, such as working groups that hold regular meetings, newsletters, or online platforms • The initiative has structures and processes in place to engage external stakeholders, such as regular meetings, websites, public convenings, public reports, and social and traditional media campaigns • Communication strategies and messages about decisions, actions, priorities, and other important aspects of the initiative are public and transparent • Communication is wide-reaching and adapted to reach a broad audience of participants
Shared Measurement System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative has established a set of agreed-upon indicators and data collection methods to track progress toward its outcomes • The initiative has a well-designed data infrastructure for storing and reporting data • Quality data on a set of meaningful indicators is available to partners in a timely manner • collective impact partners use data from the shared measurement system to make decisions and establish priorities

Table A3 | Equity Rubric

RUBRIC	Indicators
Capacity for Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backbone has necessary skills and attitudes to engage communities, develop leaders, and shift power • Initiative partners demonstrate readiness to engage in equity work through openness to dialogue and willingness to examine systemic inequity • Initiative leaders and backbone have credibility with and are trusted by local communities

RUBRIC	<i>Indicators</i>
Equity Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative uses locally relevant and disaggregated data to identify priorities and areas for intervention • The initiative prioritizes strategies focused on addressing the disparities experienced by a focus population • Initiative solutions are shaped by community members and build on community assets and resources • Initiative partners engage in an ongoing analysis of structural inequities that drive disparities to identify systemic or root causes of inequity when developing interventions, making key decisions, or setting policies
Representation and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of leaders, implementers, and influencers are representative of the communities intended to benefit from the initiative • Resources are consistently provided to support participation of community members across multiple aspects of the initiative (e.g., meetings at convenient times/locations, bi-lingual translation of meetings, transportation/ child care, compensation for time and expertise) • Initiative makes effort to engage non-joiners and traditionally disenfranchised group

Table A4 | Systems Change Rubric

RUBRIC	<i>Types of Change</i>
Level of Formalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalized: Adoption of new policies and formalized practices, structural changes that affect resource allocations and service offerings and leveraging of new resource that support the initiative • Informal: Experiments, one-time attempts, grant funded, temporary, explorations of new practices that support the initiative
Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within System/Sector: Occurs within the institutions at one level of government, within one sector, and in one issue area • Multi-System/Sector: Occurs with intentional alignment across multiple institutions at multiple levels of government, across sectors, or across issue areas
Equity Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative leaders can articulate the equity intent underlying specific systems changes they sought to advance • Initiative actions focus on promoting policy, systems, and structural change to remove barriers to equity in addition to programmatic change

Table A5 | Population Change Rubric

RUBRIC	Indicator
Quality of Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative has documentation associated with data to show source, quality, and reasonable analyses for how to assess change for all groups of focus • There is baseline or comparison and follow-up data tracked • The initiative has documentation of population-level targets with defined goals of what changes, by how much and by when
Meaningfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative has a comparison point and can describe why their change is meaningful and if they consider it to be on-track
Link to Collective Impact Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative can make clear links between their collective impact efforts and relevant population changes
Equity Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative has evidence of relevant equity-focused population level changes associated with a given focus area • Initiative has a comparison point and can describe why their change is meaningful and if they consider it to be on-track

Process Tracing

One of the most important questions this study sought to answer is whether there is a direct relationship between the collective impact approach and population change. As noted in the body of the report, the technique used to answer this question is called *process tracing*. Process tracing explores competing hypotheses reflecting different plausible explanations of the causes of a given outcome (in this case, a population change). To implement this method, site visit leads created the following products based on the data collected during the site visits: a summary narrative of the contribution story, an updated theory of change noting proportional weights assigned by the stakeholders, and a set of site-specific hypotheses that described how the site’s stakeholders understood the presumed connections between the components (e.g., which collective impact conditions led to which early changes). The hypotheses took initiative-specific forms to capture the context, specifics, and nuances of each site’s work. Each hypothesis was rated as “necessary” or not (i.e., were the elements required for change to have occurred?), “sufficient” or not (i.e., is the achievement of the first part of the hypothesis enough to fully explain the achievement of the second half of the hypothesis?). Evidence and rationale were provided to explain the ratings. Site leads also rated the plausibility of an alternative scenario that provided a stronger explanation of the relationship than the site hypothesis, providing additional evidence and rationale. They then provided an overall rating of high, medium or low for the strength of each relationship based on all the data, considering strength of evidence, the ability to triangulate data, and the strength of the alternative. In addition to rating each hypothesis, site leads made a summary judgement about the strength of the relationship between the full set of hypotheses and the population level change.

One of the project leads then reviewed the site leads’ data and assessed each hypothesis against the process tracing tests, focusing on two facets: the certainty with which you can understand the relationship as well as the uniqueness or sufficiency of the elements of the relationship in fully explaining the outcome. Process tracing accounts for assessing the strength of the individual parts of the contribution story (e.g., how did collective impact conditions contribute to early changes?) as well as the overall theory of change (i.e., to what degree does this entire story explain how the population change occurred?) Table A6 shows the levels of inferential strength assessed through process tracing.

Table A6 | Levels of Inferential Strength Assessed through Process Tracing

Level of Inferential Strength	Strength of Evidence
1. The hypothesis is plausible but is neither proven or disproven.	Evidence is suggestive of a relationship, but insufficient to draw a definitive conclusion as to the contribution to the outcome relative to other rival explanations
2. The hypothesis is certain but not unique.	Evidence is sufficient to conclude a relationship exists, but not to rule out the possibility that the outcome would have also occurred due to rival explanations
3. The hypothesis is plausible and unable to be explained by a rival explanation.	Evidence is sufficient to conclude that a relationship exists and that the outcome would not have occurred due to rival explanations
4. The hypothesis is deemed to be “doubly decisive”	Evidence provides high certainty of contribution and there is no alternative explanation. This level of strength is extremely unlikely when talking about complex systems change initiatives.

Site leads reviewed and affirmed these assessments.

The hypotheses were then analyzed by type (see Table A7).

Table A7 | Types of Hypotheses Analyzed in Process Tracing

Type of Hypotheses	Example Hypothesis
COLLECTIVE IMPACT CONDITIONS TO EARLY CHANGES	Common Agenda, Mutually Reinforcing Activities (action plan and work groups) and Backbone have (1) increased trust among partners (2) created culture change among agencies (toward collaborative work), (3) facilitated development of local work; and (4) maintained high levels of political will

<p>EARLY CHANGES TO SYSTEMS CHANGES</p>	<p>The early changes (legislative champions/political will, allies, deepened relationships/trust, and public engagement) together led to the adoption and implementation of legislation and legislatively mandated implementation/oversight bodies.</p>
<p>SYSTEMS CHANGES TO POPULATIONS CHANGES</p>	<p>More aligned policies and practices within partner agencies/organizations have produced more targeted and higher quality services to homeless clients and increased housing placements for homeless veterans and the chronically homeless.</p>
<p>OVERALL THEORY OF CHANGE HYPOTHESIS</p>	<p>The extent of river clean-up and the changed relationship of the community to the water would not have occurred without the initiative.</p>

In addition, the study allowed for hypotheses that did not fit within these linear categories. Frequencies and cross-tabs were used to identify cross-site themes and patterns. Statistical analyses were completed to compare differences in strength of collective impact implementation and differences in achievement of early and system changes between site visit sites, other sites with population change, and other sites without population change.

Thematic Analysis

Some of the data fell outside the rubrics and process tracing and helped to answer other key questions, such as “What are the challenges facing collective impact initiatives?” The data coded into categorical codes were explored using quantitative techniques (chi-square tests and k-means cluster analysis) to identify patterns in relationships (or themes) across study sites. The study team reviewed the patterns, assessed whether they collectively responded to the set of study questions, and selected a set of 22 patterns for deeper dive analysis. The team also prioritized analysis of the descriptions of each condition and principle of collective impact.

Analysts were assigned patterns to investigate, which included identifying sites that exemplified the patterns of focus. The full qualitative dataset was used to examine the patterns, allowing analysts to draw on many different types of data to understand the nature of each relationship. For example, the theme related to systems changes in sites with an infrastructure focus included a review of site descriptive data, strategies, early outcomes, and systems changes in order to understand patterns beyond simply listing types of relevant systems changes. During this analytical process, two themes were rejected as having insufficient qualitative data to assess its meaningfulness. Analysts generated summaries of the analysis related to each theme, including specific examples and evidence suggesting competing or contrary themes. The data from the equity deep dive sites were included in this overall thematic analysis as well as analyzed as a distinct set to surface themes unique to the experiences of the three sites.

The lead analyst reviewed all the thematic summaries and, when needed, investigated further, then integrated the insights from the thematic analyses into the overall findings.



SUMMARY OF SITES

Table 8 below summarizes key site characteristics, scoring on the rubrics and the prevalence of difference types of early outcomes and systems changes across the study sites.

Table A8| Site Characteristics, Implementation, and Outcomes, Collective Impact Study, 2018

	Study Sites (n=25)	Study Sites without site visits or equity deep dive inquiry (n=14)	Site Visit Sites (n=8)	Equity Deep- Dive Sites (n=3)
Site Characteristics				
Year Initiated				
Before 2006	3 (12%)	0 (0%)	3 (38%)	0 (0%)
2006 – 2010	8 (32%)	3 (21%)	4 (50%)	1 (33%)
2011 – 2014	14 (56%)	11 (79%)	1 (13%)	2 (67%)
Topic¹				
Education	11 (44%)	7 (50%)	1 (13%)	3 (100%)
Health	5 (20%)	1 (7%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)
Economic	6 (24%)	5 (36%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)
Housing	3 (12%)	2 (14%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)
Environment	3 (12%)	2 (14%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)
Food	2 (8%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Justice	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)
Collective Impact Conditions				
Common Agenda: Overall (range 0-3)	2.6 (.6)	2.6 (.6)	2.8 (.4)	2.7 (.5)
Overarching vision (range 0-2)	2.0 (.2)	1.9 (.3)	2.0 (.0)	2.0 (.0)
Common understanding of the problem (range 0-2)	1.6 (.6)	1.6 (.7)	1.6 (.5)	1.5 (.5)
Articulated strategies (range 0-2)	1.9 (.3)	1.9 (.3)	1.8 (.4)	2.0 (.0)
Partner buy-in (range 0-2)	1.6 (.5)	1.6 (.5)	1.6 (.5)	2.0 (.0)
Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Overall (range 0-3)	2.5 (.5)	2.6 (.5)	2.6 (.5)	2.0 (.0)
Collective plan of action (range 0-1)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)
Implementing strategies (range 0-2)	1.8 (.4)	1.9 (.3)	1.6 (.5)	1.7 (.5)
Collaborative structures (range 0-1)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)
Accountability mechanisms (range 0-2)	1.6 (.5)	1.6 (.5)	1.8 (.4)	1.3 (.5)
Shared Measurement System: Overall (range 0-3)	2.3 (.6)	2.3 (.7)	2.4 (.5)	2.0 (.0)
Common indicators (range 0-1)	0.9 (.3)	0.8 (.4)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)
Approach and system (range 0-2)	1.6 (.6)	1.6 (.6)	1.8 (.4)	1.3 (.5)
Actionable data (range 0-2)	1.3 (.5)	1.2 (.5)	1.4 (.5)	1.5 (.5)
Continuous Communication: Overall (range 0-3)	2.2 (.5)	2.2 (.4)	2.3 (.7)	2.3 (.5)
Internal structures and processes (range 0-2)	1.8 (.4)	1.8 (.4)	1.9 (.3)	2.0 (.0)
Quality of internal communication (range 0-2)	1.6 (.5)	1.7 (.5)	1.5 (.5)	1.5 (.5)
External structures and processes (range 0-2)	1.5 (.5)	1.4 (.5)	1.6 (.5)	1.7 (.5)
Quality of external communication (range 0-2)	1.3 (.6)	1.1 (.5)	1.5 (.5)	1.7 (.5)
Backbone Infrastructure: Overall (range 0-3)	2.8 (.3)	2.7 (.5)	2.9 (.3)	2.7 (.5)
Dedicated organization (range 0-1)	1.0 (.2)	0.9 (.3)	1.0 (.0)	1.0 (.0)
Steering committee or leadership structure (range 0-2)	1.8 (.4)	1.9 (.3)	1.8 (.4)	1.7 (.5)
Backbone supports (range 0-2)	1.9 (.3)	1.9 (.3)	1.9 (.3)	2.0 (.0)
Backbone skills and credibility (range 0-2)	1.8 (.4)	1.6 (.5)	1.9 (.3)	2.0 (.0)

	Study Sites (n=25)	Study Sites without site visits or equity deep dive inquiry (n=14)	Site Visit Sites (n=8)	Equity Deep- Dive Sites (n=3)
Equity				
Capacity for Equity: Overall (range 0-3)	1.7 (1.0)	1.8 (1.0)	1.3 (.8)	2.7 (.5)
Equity lens (range 0-2)	1.3 (.7)	1.3 (.7)	1.0 (.7)	2.0 (.0)
Backbone readiness (range 0-2)	1.2 (.8)	1.2 (.8)	1.0 (.7)	1.7 (.5)
Shared definition and approach (range 0-2)	1.1 (.7)	1.6 (.5)*	0.6 (.5)	1.3 (.5)
Leader credibility and trust (range 0-2)	1.4 (.5)	1.0 (.0)*	1.2 (.4)	2.0 (.0)
Equity Actions: Overall (range 0-3)	2.1 (.7)	2.1 (.5)	1.8 (.8)	3.0 (.0)
Locally relevant and disaggregated data (range 0-2)	1.5 (.7)	1.4 (.7)	1.4 (.7)	2.0 (.0)
Strategies to address disparities (range 0-2)	1.7 (.6)	1.9 (.3)	1.3 (.8)	2.0 (.0)
Build on community assets (range 0-2)	1.4 (.6)	1.4 (.5)	1.2 (.7)	1.7 (.5)
Analysis of structural inequities (range 0-2)	1.2 (.6)	1.3 (.6)	1.0 (.7)	1.3 (.5)
Representation and Inclusion: Overall (range 0-3)	1.6 (.7)	1.4 (.7)	1.6 (.5)	2.7 (.5)
Representative leaders and influencers (range 0-2)	1.1 (.5)	1.0 (.5)	1.0 (.0)	1.7 (.5)
Engage and empower community (range 0-2)	1.1 (.6)	0.9 (.5)	1.3 (.4)	1.7 (.5)
Engage non-joiners (range 0-2)	1.0 (.7)	1.1 (.7)	0.8 (.7)	1.3 (.9)
Approach				
Strategies²				
Communication	21 (84%)	12 (86%)	7 (88%)	2 (67%)
Collaboration and engagement	21 (84%)	12 (86%)	7 (88%)	2 (67%)
Data and research	20 (80%)	11 (79%)	6 (75%)	3 (100%)
Programs and services	17 (68%)	10 (71%)	5 (63%)	2 (67%)
Capacity building and workforce development	14 (56%)	9 (64%)	5 (63%)	0 (0%)
Policy and advocacy	11 (44%)	6 (43%)	3 (38%)	2 (67%)
Resource allocation and funding	10 (40%)	6 (43%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)
Equity, community feedback and empowerment	9 (36%)	5 (36%)	2 (25%)	2 (67%)
Infrastructure development	4 (16%)	3 (21%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)
Outcomes				
Early Changes: Type³				
Visibility, framing or norms	21 (84%)	13 (93%)	7 (88%)	1 (33%)
Partnership quality	21 (84%)	10 (71%)	8 (100%)	3 (100%)
Collaboration	23 (92%)	13 (93%)	7 (88%)	3 (100%)
Data availability or use	20 (80%)	12 (86%)	6 (75%)	2 (67%)
Capacity	16 (64%)	8 (57%)	5 (63%)	3 (100%)
Political will	12 (48%)	5 (36%)	6 (75%)	1 (33%)
Public will or engagement	10 (40%)	3 (21%)	4 (50%)	3 (100%)
Communication	8 (32%)	4 (29%)	2 (25%)	2 (67%)
Systems Changes: Type³				
New or expanded services	24 (96%)	13 (93%)	8 (100%)	3 (100%)
Practice improvements	19 (76%)	10 (71%)	7 (88%)	2 (67%)
New or revised policies	15 (60%)	6 (43%)	7 (88%)	2 (67%)
Workforce development	14 (56%)	6 (43%)	6 (75%)	2 (67%)
Data use	13 (52%)	8 (57%)	4 (50%)	1 (33%)
Infrastructure	8 (32%)	5 (36%)	2 (25%)	1 (33%)
Communications	7 (28%)	3 (21%)	3 (38%)	1 (33%)

	Study Sites (n=25)	Study Sites without site visits or equity deep dive inquiry (n=14)	Site Visit Sites (n=8)	Equity Deep- Dive Sites (n=3)
Systems Changes: Equity Intent				
Some systems changes have equity intent (up to 50%)	14 (56%)	8 (57%)	6 (75%)	0 (%)
Majority of systems changes have equity intent (>50%)	9 (36%)	5 (36%)	1 (13%)	3 (100%)
Population Change				
Population change present in one or more indicator	20 (80%)	10 (71%)	8 (100%)	2 (67%)
Equity-focused population change present in one or more indicator	12 (48%)	8 (57%)	2 (25%)	2 (67%)

¹ 6 initiatives addressed more than one topic area.

² At least one of the initiative’s strategies was categorized in this bucket. Strategies could be categorized in more than one bucket.

³ At least one of the initiative’s changes was categorized in this bucket. Changes could be categorized in more than one bucket.

*Data available for ≤50% of sites within category.



APPENDIX B: COLLECTIVE IMPACT STUDY SITES

Site/Initiative Name	Location	Issue Area	Site Visit Site	Equity Deep-Dive Site
Alignment Nashville	Nashville, TN	Education – Multi-Issue	✓	
Anchorage Realizing Indigenous Student Excellence (ARISE)	Anchorage, AK	Education for Indigenous Students		✓
Aspen Community Foundation's Cradle to Career Initiative	Aspen, Basalt CO	Cradle to Career – Education		
Coalition for New Britain's Youth	New Britain, CT	Cradle to Career – Education, Early Learning		
Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention	Colorado	Substance Abuse	✓	
Communities that Care Coalition: Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region	Franklin County, MA	Education – Reducing Teen Social Risk Factors	✓	
Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance	Bridgeport, CT	Juvenile Justice	✓	
Elizabeth River Project	Portsmouth, VA	Environmental	✓	
Green Umbrella	Greater Cincinnati, OH Area	Food Systems; Environmental Sustainability		

Site/Initiative Name	Location	Issue Area	Site Visit Site	Equity Deep-Dive Site
Home For Good	Los Angeles, CA	Homelessness	✓	
KConnect	Kent, MI	Cradle to Career – Education		
Living SJ	Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada	Poverty Reduction		
Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless	Omaha, NE	Homelessness		
Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative	Milwaukee, WI	Teen Pregnancy	✓	
Mission: Graduate	Central New Mexico	Cradle to Career – Education		
Opening Doors Fairfield County	Fairfield County, CT	Homelessness		
The Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative - Growing Up Great	Ottawa, Canada	Cradle to Career – Education, Early Learning		
Project U-Turn	Philadelphia, PA	Opportunity Youth		
Promesa Boyle Heights	Los Angeles, CA	Cradle to Career – Education		✓
RGV Focus	Rio Grande Valley, TX	Cradle to Career – Education		✓
San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative	San Diego, CA	Health – Childhood Obesity	✓	


Site/Initiative Name	Location	Issue Area	Site Visit Site	Equity Deep-Dive Site
Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership	Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada	Poverty Reduction		
Shaping our Appalachian Region (SOAR)	Southeast Kentucky	Economic Development		
South Platte Urban Waters Partnership	Golden, CO	Environmental		
Vermont Farm to Plate	Vermont	Food Systems		



APPENDIX C: ADVISORY COMMITTEE LIST

Name	Organization	Advisory Committee	Steering Team
Sheri Brady	Aspen Forum for Community Solutions	✓	
Ken Thompson	Aspen Forum for Community Solutions	✓	✓
LiLi Liu/Fannie Tseng	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	✓	
Jennifer Splansky Juster/ Robert Albright	Collective Impact Forum	✓	✓
Fay Hanleybrown	FSG	✓	✓
Hallie Preskill	FSG	✓	✓
Emily Wexler	GEO	✓	
Junious Williams	Junious Williams Consulting	✓	✓
JaNay Queen	Living Cities	✓	
Rebekah Levin	Robert R. McCormick Foundation	✓	✓
Alonzo Plough	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	✓	
Margaret Tait	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	✓	✓
Liz Weaver	Tamarack Institute	✓	✓
Merita Irby	The Forum for Youth Investment	✓	
Matt Aliberti	United Way Worldwide	✓	
Luis Velez	W.K. Kellogg Foundation	✓	

APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES' STRENGTH

 <p><i>Level of Inferential Strength of Hypothesis</i></p>	<p><i>Strength of Evidence</i></p>	<p>Conditions to Early Changes N=14</p>	<p>Early Changes to Systems Changes N=10</p>	<p>Systems Changes to Population Changes N=8</p>	<p>Other Hypotheses N=16</p>	<p>Overall Theory of Change Strength N=8</p>
<p>The hypothesis is plausible but is neither proven or disproven.</p>	<p>We find evidence that is suggestive of a relationship, but that is insufficient to draw a definitive conclusion as to the contribution to the outcome relative to other rival explanations [Straw in the Wind]</p>			<p>1</p>	<p>2</p>	
<p>The hypothesis is certain but not unique.</p>	<p>We find evidence that is sufficient to conclude that a relationship exists, but not to rule out the possibility that the outcome would have also occurred due to rival explanations [Hoop]</p>		<p>1</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>
<p>The hypothesis is plausible and unable to be explained by a rival explanation.</p>	<p>We find evidence that is sufficient to conclude that a relationship exists and that the outcome would not have occurred due to rival explanations [Smoking Gun]</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The hypothesis is deemed to be “doubly decisive.”</p>	<p>We find evidence that provides high certainty of contribution and that there is no alternative explanation [Doubly Decisive]</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>	



APPENDIX E: CHANGES IN EDUCATION AND HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES

Due to the similarity in the focus of a few types of study sites (education-, homelessness-, and infrastructure-focused initiatives) some patterns can be found around specific changes relevant to a given problem. Findings that build a better understanding of what types of changes are relevant to education problems and tackling homelessness are summarized below (those relevant to sites focused infrastructure are included in the body of the report).



PHASE I: SYSTEMS CHANGES IN EDUCATION STUDY SITES

The study surfaced a set of common themes related to systems changes across eight of the eleven study sites with a general focus on education. All eight had outcomes with a multi-age focus, though some were heavier on the early childhood side and others focused more on career readiness and transitions out of secondary school. Their systems changes were varied, but heavily focused on expanding or improving services. Across the eight study sites, 36 different systems changes targeted services, most of which had some alignment with increasing equity. The services ranged from large-scale redesigns (e.g. a new approach to how high schools are structured in the district) to expansions of key roles in schools (e.g. counselors, career coaches, truancy coaches) to programs meeting specific student needs (e.g. job training, apprenticeships, summer school, wellness services, behavioral health services, social emotional learning services, diverse programs, assistance in filing out FAFSA paperwork). A couple outliers that engaged a transportation element included expanding bus services and creating mobile preschools.

Some of these service changes were explicitly multi-sector in focus. This included integrated services that went beyond education, including: wellness, health, and preventive care; business involvement in apprenticeship, trainings, career development, and job training; and college involvement in developing college pathway programs with schools, college prep courses, FAFSA applications, etc.

These initiatives also advanced other types of systems changes, including changes intended to strengthen the workforce, with some examples including mandatory trainings or adoption of formal curriculum, while others were more one-time trainings. Most workforce development work explicitly involved more than one organization's workforce and some engaged schools alongside non-profits or business partners.

Initiatives engaged in policy change focused largely on just one organization. The policy changes included such things as: government investment of new funding (long-term or for a defined period) to address specific needs; changes to FAFSA, discipline policies, maternity policies, and metrics used to measure school success; and earmarking existing funds for wellness services. There was also an example of a meaningful but much

smaller scale policy change influenced by The Coalition for New Britain's Youth, where they put into the school district improvement plan a requirement for administrators to attend coalition meetings to understand how the community works with the school. There was an interesting policy change strategy around delinquency facilities and schools and a couple examples of expanded financial commitments by government to work with other sectors or in communities where these changes went beyond one organization.

Interestingly, only four of the study sites had data-related systems changes, with only five changes total across these four study sites. One of these changes was also quite informal, testing out the use of pre-post test tools. Examples of more formal changes included MOUs for data sharing, use of assessment tools to track progress, and how data from such tools was being used and by whom.



PHASE I: SYSTEMS CHANGES IN HOMELESSNESS STUDY SITES

The three study sites that had a focus on ending homelessness each brought together many of the agencies directly responsible for implementing programs to address homelessness, along with some of their key funders and even some leaders with political clout. Consistent across all three was the accomplishment of systemic changes that primarily focused on coordinated entry and service systems, aligning and expanding funding, and significant shifts in how data was used, in real time decision making, not just to understand the problem.

Overall, the initiatives demonstrated how current players in the system can come together to use their data, funding, and current resources to more intentionally and effectively serve the people in need. One initiative also pushed further into preventing the problem through policy changes to expand affordable housing options. In general, these study sites were not as heavily invested in policy advocacy strategies (particularly influencing state/federal policy), attempting to address upstream structural issues that drive homelessness or using an equity lens to inform the definition of the problem and solutions. While some of the study sites did work to increase the representativeness of their stakeholder groups, the work was generally not seen as highly successful. In fact, it would be fair to say all three homelessness study sites have had an impact on equity by the nature of the issue itself rather than specific strategies designed to address inequities.





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