



LIVING CITIES

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Four Components of a Shared Result That Creates Enduring Change

Living Cities believes that collective impact presents one of the most promising models for achieving dramatically better results for communities, faster.

The presence of a shared result is part of what distinguishes [collective impact](#) from other forms of collaboration. A shared result can be called different things in different initiatives—“common agenda” or “shared goal” or “shared outcome”—but whatever it’s called, a collective impact initiative should agree to it as a guiding force of their collaborative work. Through our work with over 70 different collective impact initiatives across the country, Living Cities has seen that agreement on a specific, measurable shared result is essential to the success of a collective impact initiative.

Living Cities has identified four components of effective shared results that unify a collective impact initiative and drive it towards success. This two-page resource provides background on those four components, in the hopes that you can benefit from our experiences to create a shared result to achieve enduring change in your community. These components can help you in any stage of collective impact—whether your initiative is just starting out or has been around for years.

1. Have a **population-level** focus. The collective impact framework [was designed to solve the complex and seemingly intractable problems](#) facing low-income communities and communities of color. To reflect the scope of this undertaking, the shared result of any collective impact initiative should be tied to achieving what a “population-level” result. A “population-level” focus means the result isn’t specifically tied to one program. For example, “increase job referrals through our program” wouldn’t be considered a population-level shared result, because success only depends on the efforts of one organization leading one program (even if that program involves multiple stakeholders). In contrast, “reduce unemployment in our city” is a population-level shared result because it depends on the efforts of many actors, and achieving it will have an impact on an entire population of people. (Note: It’s ok to have a geographic scope to your shared result, such as a city or region, as long as it’s not too narrowly defined to constrain the impact of your collective impact initiative.)

One thing to consider for your collective impact initiative is whether or not you need just one shared result, or multiple shared results that tie in to a broader mission or vision. We have seen initiatives approach this question in both ways. What makes sense depends on the local context of your work.

2. Make it **SMART**. That is, the shared result needs to be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound. This means your initiative’s shared result needs to have some sort of metric attached to it, and an element of time. For example: “Reduce unemployment in Anytown, USA by 50% over ten years.” This has a specific focus (unemployment in a specific city); it is measurable (50% decrease); attainable (it may seem like a big undertaking, but is possible); it is relevant to the work of collective impact; and time-bound (ten years). Making a shared result SMART helps collective impact initiatives narrow in on *exactly* what they want to achieve with their work. Once this specificity is set, it becomes easier to figure out how to get the work done and who needs to be involved.

In our work, we've found that collective impact initiatives often conflate *specific* with *program-focused*. Making a shared result specific does not require focusing on a specific program or service. Collective impact initiatives, as described above, should be focused on population-level results. A shared result of "increasing job referrals by 15% in five years through our program" fails the test of "Relevant" in SMART, because it doesn't have a population-level result.

3. Ensure all partners **agree and share accountability**. Making a shared result SMART may seem straight forward, but the challenge comes when partners have to commit to hold themselves accountable to achieving that result. For example, one collective impact initiative we support undertook an intensive planning process with the members of their cross-sector partnership. They thought they had come to an agreement on a shared result, but when they moved into implementing their strategies, they realized that their partners were not fully committed. They had to go back and revise their shared result to ensure their partners had fully committed themselves to the initiative.

One method for successful planning is [Results Based Accountability \(RBA\)](#). RBA helps partners work through differences of opinion and analyze assumptions. But there are many methods to settle on a shared result and your initiative should settle on one that works best for you.

4. Ground the shared result in **local context**. You need to engage organizational partners in defining the shared result, and you also need to think about the needs of your community when creating the shared result. Collective impact initiatives can sometimes agree to shared results that are not in sync with community needs. You may think unemployment is the major issue in your community, but it could actually be a lack of public transportation connecting people to places of work. Or, collective impact initiatives may be required to design a shared result in a specific way because of outside funders or other requirements. [StriveTogether](#), a network of education-focused collective impact initiatives, has developed a series of outcomes that members engaged in their network track, though different communities have SMART measures that are reflective of local conditions. This flexibility has expanded their network to over 60 communities that are all tracking similar outcomes, such as early grade reading, with shared results that are adapted for their local context.

One way to ensure your shared result responds to community needs is to actively engage community members in the planning process, or have community groups included as full partners of the initiative. For more on engaging community in collective impact, sign up for Living Cities' [free e-course on the topic](#).

Once you set your shared result with your partners, the next step is to set up a series of outcomes and indicators (make sure they're all **SMART!**) to track progress towards the result.

We are experimenting with different ways to build out these outcomes and indicators, and we are currently using the [Results Based Accountability](#) framework to do this with the members of [The Integration Initiative](#). Be sure to follow [LivingCities.org](#) to get updates on what we are learning.

Do these components of a shared result resonate with your work on collective impact? Which parts are most helpful, and which aren't? Let us know and help us improve this resource by taking our feedback survey: <https://livingcities.typeform.com/to/uZdLfq>.

