

WHEN COLLECTIVE IMPACT HAS AN IMPACT

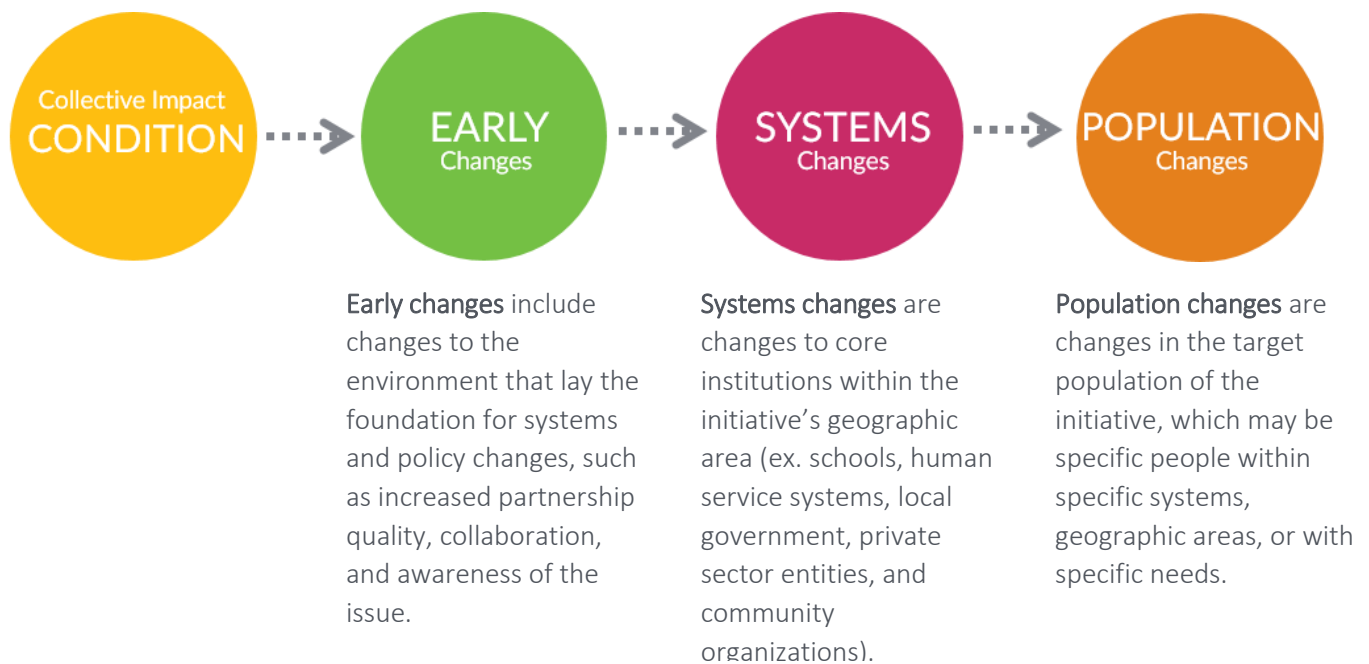
A CROSS-SITE STUDY OF 25 COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVES



Overview

Twenty-five collective impact sites participated in a just released study from ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute “When Collective Impact has an Impact.” The study was philanthropically funded by multiple foundations based in the U.S. and commissioned by the Collective Impact Forum to provide a balanced, independent assessment of whether and how collective impact is contributing to population- and systems-level outcomes. The full report is available for download at: bit.ly/collectiveimpactstudy.

Types of Changes Explored and Identified



STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

For all 8 site visit sites, collective impact undoubtedly contributed to the desired population change.



Overall, 20 of the 25 sites showed evidence of population change.

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



Barriers to population change include, establishing a Common Agenda, measuring impacts, and other internal/external challenges such as staffing, leadership, competing initiatives, and political constraints.

Implications

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. There are specific steps initiatives can take up front to increase their likelihood of success over the long-term including:

- Recognizing it is worth the time upfront to clearly define the problem and target population.
- Not rushing to get the five conditions in place, but rather first investing thoughtfully in the two that are most foundational: backbone and common agenda.

Systems changes take many forms; be iterative and intentional

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).

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.).

Equity is achieved through different routes; be aware, intentional, and adaptable

Stronger implementation of equity intent and actions seems to lead to some achievement of equitable systems and population changes, with stronger results among those with the strongest equity focus. Not surprisingly, those with no focus typically see no equity outcomes. There are a few exceptions among a few sites with narrowly defined populations that are considered “high risk,” such as veteran and chronic homelessness. However, equity, as defined for this study, goes beyond simply achieving outcomes for particular groups. Equity implies other outcomes are equally as important, such as shifting the power dynamic and empowering communities to make decisions.

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

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.

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 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.