

United Way of Lancaster County Collective Impact Initiative

Year Three Evaluation Report
Executive Summary

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Center for

OPINION RESEARCH



Executive Summary

Evaluating a complex, multi-organizational initiative designed to solve complex community-level problems is not simple; it falls outside of commonly recognized evaluation processes. Projects designed to reimagine the delivery of services that address complex problems with multiple causes require a different set of analytic tools and expectations. After three years of the United Way's Collective Impact (CI) work, what framework should be used to measure our progress, understand our failings, and direct us toward the future?

This overall summary relies on a CI evaluation framework used to study the efficacy of CI initiatives across the United States.¹ This framework uses process tracing to make links between CI activities and specific changes these activities induce among partner organizations, local service structure, local and state policies, and ultimately among entire populations. The simplified framework used in that study looks like this:



Prior evaluation reports have attempted to understand broadly how well the CI initiative is supporting the five **conditions** that support CI: 1) a commitment to shared measurement; 2) the pursuit of a common agenda; 3) the deployment of mutually reinforcing activities; 4) continuous communication; and 5) reliable backbone support.

We find that the conditions necessary for CI are firmly established and have substantially improved since 2015 (see Evaluation Outcomes-Collaborative Assessment Tool). The most significant changes have taken place in the adoption of mutually reinforcing activities: more partnerships now have clear strategies to meet goals and objectives, have defined ways of resolving conflict, and can change policies as necessary to meet their collective priorities. Communications among partnerships have also improved with more partnerships saying their communications promote transfer of essential information, open discussion of issues, and frequent, formal communication. Growth in pursuit of a common agenda means that more members now understand the role of their partners and that more members trust one another. United Way, as the backbone organization, has improved how it addresses conflict, how it encourages members to honor their commitments, how it builds support for partnerships, and the amount and adequacy of the in-kind support it provides. Finally, the partnerships believe shared measurement practices are now established.

Prior evaluation reports have also noted some of the **early changes** that have taken place.² The changes to the conditions necessary for CI described above qualify as early changes. Prior and current analyses of network connections reveal that the connectivity of community organizations within the CI framework has improved greatly during the first three years of CI work. Connections are the essential glue in a decentralized network like that being created by the CI

¹ Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact. (2018). When CI Has an Impact: A cross-site study of 25 CI initiatives. Denver, CO.

² 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." Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact (2018), p. 18.

initiative. Networks bring people together to find common cause, and it is important to know if deliberate efforts to weave network members' ties to each other are resulting in efficient and effective pathways for shared learning and action. Network connectivity has two dimensions: (a) membership, or the people and organizations that participate in a network and (b) structure, or how connections between members are structured and what flows through those connections. The United Way CI initiative has been purposely designed to connect the resources and expertise of diverse community organizations to more effectively address community problems as identified by the four bold goals. This requires the development of an efficient network structure that facilitates communication and cooperation between organizations, ultimately creating a more effective and efficient way to reach their shared goals.

Our analysis of network connections reveals that the connectivity of community organizations within the CI framework has improved greatly during the first three years of CI work (see Evaluation Outcomes-Network Analysis). When United Way began this work in 2015, there were essentially 11 different network groups engaged in this work. Our most recent analysis shows those groups have consolidated into 6. This is clear evidence that there is much more cohesiveness, more communication, more cooperation, and fewer silos among the health and social service providers involved in this work.

Prior evaluation reports have occasionally discussed **systemic changes** taking place within the community, but this report acknowledges how those systems changes have increased in ways that are likely to permanently change how partnership groups think about and do their work.³ . The most significant systems change is likely the creation of geographic hubs that increase the effective delivery of services and supports within the county's outlying communities. These providers and geographies were clearly underserved prior to 2015 and their increasingly important roles in service delivery, collaboration, and idea generation are evident in the connections that these organizations now have across the county.

It is clear there has been substantial progress in changing the underlying systems related to the four bold goals (see Evaluation Outcomes-Systemic Change Discussion Group Summary). The connectedness and collaboration that has evolved among community partnerships, as described above, clearly positions these collaboratives for success. Across the County, there has been significant progress in data tracking and sharing [(e.g., depression screening, Kindergarten screening, Empower Lancaster (formerly CaseWorthy), Self Sufficiency Matrix)], expanded resources and capacity, and greater collaboration both across and within sectors. In addition, most organizations involved in this work have exhibited significant internal changes as a product of this initiative; philosophically, many organizations and their leaders came to understand and embrace the CI approach, which led to operational changes (e.g., policies and procedures, more innovative approaches, and improved efficiency). The collaboration among partners has led to trust-building, resource-sharing, standardization of best practices, sustainability, and a shared language. We have already seen this lead to an expanded scope of services, an increase in the number of individuals served, increased awareness about CI, and legislative advocacy work. It is likely that these systems level changes will lead to a positive impact on the residents of Lancaster County in the long term.

³ Systems Changes are defined as, "changes to the 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 can also be broken down to formalized/likely to sustain or more informal experiments (e.g., one-time training with staff in multiple programs=informal shift in practice, but new policy requiring competencies for staff=formalized system change)." Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact (2018), p. 18.

The goal of the CI initiative is to change the county in four specific ways. How long should we expect this process to take before we see **population-level** change in the county?⁴ The evaluation framework used here replicates a national study that includes population change as a measurable outcome. United Way has three years of work to overlay onto this identified process, but the national research looked at CI efforts that were operating for an average of ten years. In our judgment it is too soon to expect significant change at the county level, although it is possible to assess population change among those served by specific partnerships.

Our review of the individual partnerships finds (see Appendix D-Collective Impact Process Tracing Framework):

- More people with a medical home
- More people receiving integrated behavioral and physical health services
- Improved access to behavioral health services
- More people connected to behavioral health providers
- Better coordination between behavioral and physical health providers
- Better treatment and outcomes among super-utilizers of health services
- Better access to social services throughout the county
- Better integration of refugees and immigrants into the workforce and community
- Fewer chronically homeless
- Homelessness is a less significant barrier to family reunification
- More families in permanent, stable housing
- Parents better understand their role as their child's first teachers
- Higher quality in-home childcare

This initiative has progressed meaningfully in supporting the conditions needed for CI, has encouraged early changes, and has helped catalyze systemic changes, which will ultimately support population-level change. Presented below are tentative conclusions we can draw about progress toward the four bold goals.

BOLD GOAL 1: 100% of our children will enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Kindergarten readiness data from IU13 shows that Lancaster County has moved in the desired direction in percentage of students ready for kindergarten, with specific school districts targeted and served by the partnerships showing even greater gains.

BOLD GOAL 2: 100% of students and adults will have post-secondary credentials.

Overall there seems to be a gap in strategies and activities that directly lead to post-secondary credential attainment. Progress toward this bold goal has been markedly slower and weaker.

BOLD GOAL 3: Decrease individuals and families living in poverty by 50%.

There is not enough data to rate progress on this bold goal overall. This is primarily due to the length of time it took to develop and implement a county-wide data tracking tool (the Self Sufficiency Matrix). However, there is evidence that related indicators such as homelessness are trending in the right direction County-wide, although poverty rates are unchanged.

BOLD GOAL 4: 100% of individuals, children, and families will have a medical home.

Given the significant partnership and collaboration that has evolved over the years, it is possible to affect change to healthcare access; however, it is too soon to evaluate actual health outcomes.

⁴ Population Changes are defined as, "changes in the target population of the initiative, which may be specific people within specific systems or geographic areas or with specific needs." Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact (2018), p. 18.