

# ***Collective Impact***

## **What are the five core characteristics of Collective Impact initiatives?**

There are five characteristics that typically exist across Collective Impact<sup>1</sup> projects. These five characteristics build off each other to create direction, alignment, and commitment with collaborating stakeholders.

### **1. Common Agenda**

The common agenda is a mutually accepted vision for change, which helps create objectives and targets and aligns the entities involved. Each participating organization spanning the public, private, and non-profit sectors, must see itself contributing in a positive way.

### **2. Shared Measurement System**

A shared measurement system provides a framework from which to track the project's progress and success. Participating organizations agree upon common indicators, which maximize transparency, accountability, and commitment. These indicators must be reassessed as the project unfolds to allow for corrective action, and allow the indicators to be changed or project to be tweaked if necessary.

### **3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities**

One of the unique approaches of Collective Impact is that of mutually reinforcing activities. It allows each participating organization to employ its strengths while sharing resources with others. This means that each organization's activity may be distinct, but the partners work together to address the same agreed upon problem, letting cross-sector collaboration flourish into a strong framework with a coordinated plan of action.

### **4. Continuous Communication**

Due to the array of partners, continuous communication is essential to developing trust across the sectors. Regular meetings, among other forms of interaction, allow each organization to feel that their interests are being heard, and provide opportunities to report upon metrics identified in the shared measurement system.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.fsg.org](http://www.fsg.org)

## 5. Backbone Support Organization

The backbone support organization is the one that advocates for the cause, coordinates between partners—both in terms of funding and activity—and makes sure that all those involved are actively pursuing the strategy. The size of the backbone organization can vary depending on the scope of the project, and could be a completely independent organization that focuses solely on collective impact initiatives. This organization, independent or not, is essential to helping this complex framework of cross-sector partners positively and effectively interact and reinforce each other's strengths.

## What are the preconditions for Collective Impact?

It may be hard to know when to try to apply Collective Impact. How do you know if your project is a viable candidate for this approach? There tend to be three preconditions that are present for most Collective Impact projects. They are:

- **Urgency for Change.** Is there a situation that has reached a point where organizations are willing to try something new, anything that may make a difference on an environmental problem that seems insurmountable? Or, perhaps all other attempts have yielded lackluster results? This urgency for change creates the environment that allows organizations to work together and becomes the catalyst for cooperation and joint solution development.
- **An Influential Champion.** Is there a visionary or small group of dedicated, passionate people aimed at solving the problem at hand? This visionary or champion believes in the mission of the project and conveys enthusiasm, encourages belief in the possibility for change, and enhances momentum for the project as it unfolds.
- **Adequate Financial Resources.** Collective Impact projects are sometimes more 'expensive' due to needing more time and resources to set up the project's infrastructure and planning activities. Multi-year funding is more difficult to obtain through grants alone, and so a cross-sector funding strategy is also encouraged (funding from not only non-profits, but also from public and private organizations).

## What phases will our project go through? How do we get started?

Research shows that there are three phases the project will go through to get the effort underway and establish the collective impacts outlined above.

## **1. Initiate Action**

This first step focuses on heightening awareness of the projects underway, including key partners and organizations, which are already working on solving the issue you want to tackle.

## **2. Organize for Impact**

The second step looks at how all these previously identified stakeholders can effectively collaborate to establish a common agenda, and a shared measurement system, and in turn implement mutually-reinforcing activities to solve the problem at large.

## **3. Sustain Action and Impact**

This third and final phase is an ongoing one and is represented by three words - monitor, report and adapt. Once the project has been implemented, the targeted indicators are reviewed and corrective actions are taken accordingly.