

Collective Impact & The Role of the Backbone Organization

1. What is Collective Impact?

Collective impact describes a highly structured collaborative effort undertaken to achieve change on a large scale. Successful collective impact efforts are dependent upon five key conditions:

Common Agenda

- All participants have a shared vision for change, common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions

Shared Measurement

- Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants to ensure efforts are aligned and participants hold one another accountable

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

- Participant activities are differentiated while still coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action

Continuous Communication

- Consistent and open communication is maintained across the collaborative to build trust, assure mutual objectives, appreciate common motivation and share lessons learned

Backbone Support

- Responsible for providing support that helps mobilize, coordinate and facilitate collective impact towards the identified key outcome (e.g. infant mortality)

2. What is a backbone organization?

A backbone organization is a critical component of a collective impact effort. The backbone organization mobilizes, coordinates and facilitates the process of collective impact. Key functions include: Guiding vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement systems, building public will and mobilizing funding to support the initiative.

3. What are some specific activities of a backbone organization?

- Convening partners and community members to strategize and coordinate around the goal of reducing infant mortality
- Facilitating effective dialogues across the collaborative effort
- Managing data collection and analysis and utilizing evaluation as a tool for learning and progress across the collaborative
- Supporting community engagement to increase buy-in and public will; ensuring community members are active participants throughout the initiative; supporting increased capacity among community members to address infant mortality
- Developing effective communications to ensure lessons learned are communicated across the collaborative in a timely manner to ensure course correction where necessary
- Advancing policy by advocating for an aligned policy agenda when appropriate and necessary for sustainable change
- Mobilizing and aligning public and private funding to support collective impact efforts
- Ability to be flexible, optimistic and think long-term about the initiative and, likewise, develop and nurture this mindset among all partners

Collective Impact & The Role of the Backbone Organization

4. What are key phases and components of collective impact?

Phases of Collective Impact			
Components for Success	PHASE I Initiate Action	PHASE II Organize for Impact	PHASE III Sustain Action and Impact
<i>Governance and Infrastructure</i>	Identify champions and form cross-sector group	Create infrastructure (backbone and processes)	Facilitate and refine
<i>Strategic Planning</i>	Map the landscape and use data to make case	Create common agenda (goals and strategy)	Support implementation (alignment to goals and strategies)
<i>Community Involvement</i>	Facilitate community outreach	Engage community and build public will	Continue engagement and conduct advocacy
<i>Evaluation and Improvement</i>	Analyze baseline data to identify key issues and gaps	Establish shared metrics (indicators, measurement, and approach)	Collect, track, and report progress (process to learn and improve)

5. What are some characteristics of a successful backbone organization?

- High level of credibility in the community; serves as a neutral convener; has a dedicated staff; builds key relationships across members of the initiative; focuses people’s attention and creates a sense of urgency; frame issues to present opportunities and difficulties; use evaluation as a tool for learning and progress; stay “behind the scenes” to establish collective ownership

6. How can success for a backbone organization be measured?

Activity	Short-term Outcomes (Illustrative)	Intermediate Outcomes (Illustrative)
1. Guide vision and strategy	Partners share a common understanding of the need and desired result	Partners’ individual work is increasingly aligned with the initiative’s common agenda
2. Support aligned activities	Partners increasingly communicate and coordinate their activities toward common goals	Partners collaboratively develop new approaches to advance the initiative
3. Establish shared measurement practices	Partners understand the value of sharing data	Partners increasingly use data to adapt and refine their strategies
4. Build public will	Community members are increasingly aware of the issue(s)	More community members feel empowered to take action on the issue(s)
5. Advance policy	Policymakers are more aware and supportive of the initiative’s policy agenda	Policy changes increasingly occur in line with initiative goals
6. Mobilize funding	Funding is secured to support initiative activities	Philanthropic and public funds are increasingly aligned with initiative goals