
INNOWEAVE AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT: COLLABORATION IS JUST THE BEGINNING

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SUMMARY

INNOWEAVE, AN AWARD WINNING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM designed and delivered by J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, SiG, and over 150 partners from all sectors across Canada, has added new workshops and resources to help groups of community organizations develop Collective Impact initiatives. Drawing from this experience, the authors describe why Innoweave added a Collective Impact module and what it hopes to achieve, citing examples of organizations that are successfully using Collective Impact to tackle complex problems.

Many organizations understand the importance of collaborating with others to reach better outcomes, but can “collaboration” alone tackle these big, complex issues? A new Innoweave module is helping organizations take collaboration further by engaging in Collective Impact.

If you’ve ever driven a vehicle with a child in the back asking, “Are we there yet?” over and over, you’re familiar with how painstakingly slow progress on complex issues like poverty, crime reduction, or obesity can be.

Collective Impact is gaining significant traction as an approach that helps communities go beyond basic communication and information sharing to address these big challenges. Innoweave, a new initiative of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, in collaboration with Social Innovation Generation (SiG) and 150 partners from across all sectors, is working with community organizations that want to use new approaches to enhance their impact and tackle big challenges. Collective Impact is one of nine approaches that Innoweave currently supports. Innoweave has carefully designed a process to help organizations from the moment they decide to work together, straight through to the implementation of their Collective Impact action plan.

“Our partners all have a shared history of centering our work on youth and recognizing the many assets they bring with them,” says Skye Louis, coordinator of AVNU (pronounced “avenue”), an open-learning platform where young people aged 13 to 29 can access workshops, mentorship, and networks. “At the same time, we are keenly aware of the complexity of barriers that youth are facing and the way these barriers are integrated into existing social and institutional structures. For years, our work has been focused on building capacity for youth to overcome these barriers; it’s a great approach but it can be frustrating to see that the larger patterns remain the same. Collective Impact represents

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a promising way to address some of these systemic issues directly. That way we can shift some of the responsibility for change from the shoulders of individual youth and bring some focus on the larger systems that are creating barriers in the first place.”

Many organizations who have traditionally tried to tackle these issues on their own and have moved towards using the Collective Impact approach find the experience daunting. The sheer complexity, time, and resource commitment required for a successful Collective Impact initiative can feel overwhelming, but most find the experience well worth it.

“We came away from the workshop with more questions than we started with, which is a good thing,” reports Louis. “The workshops have helped us define where we are at in the process, identify where our existing strengths lie, and understand which areas we need to develop in order to move forward successfully.”

WHAT IS INNOWEAVE AND HOW DOES IT HELP NONPROFITS?

Last summer Innoweave partnered with Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement to launch a new Collective Impact module that includes webinars, workshops, coaching, and grants. The Innoweave platform, which includes eight other modules, helps passionate leaders of successful community organizations learn about, assess, and implement these new approaches to effect large-scale change.

In Canada, community organizations are facing a new set of challenges that are changing the landscape of the sector. These challenges include the current slow growth economy as well as an aging population, which is resulting in a declining ratio of working populations to retirees. Meanwhile, federal and provincial governments are struggling with large deficits, resulting in smaller investments in the community sector and limiting the funding available for new programs, which in turn contributes to a highly competitive fundraising environment. All this is happening at a time when many groups are seeing limited growth in their charitable donor base, and new attitudes and expectations are developing among donors about what they fund, how they fund it, and how the recipients spend these contributions.

Fortunately, there is a range of new approaches available to community nonprofit organizations to address and manage these challenges and generate greater results, including impact and strategic clarity, scaling impact, social enterprise, social finance, outcomes finance, developmental evaluation, cloud computing, and constructive engagement.¹ Through its program, Innoweave helps community organizations learn about and implement these new strategies.

HOW INNOWEAVE HELPS NONPROFITS ENGAGE IN COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Through Innoweave, we tend to focus a lot on moving organizations from thinking to doing. The process has been designed to help organizations take concrete steps to achieve their goals and to generate more population-level results.

First, we offer information, resources, and videos on Collective Impact through our website, along with free Collective Impact webinars. The webinars are designed to

help organizations understand the approach and begin thinking about how it applies to their particular situation. We then have an online self-assessment tool² that allows organizations to determine if they have a clear understanding of the issue they wish to address, clear goals, buy-in from other organizations, and the necessary resources.

Once organizations have gone through all of the relevant materials and have participated in an “Introduction to Collective Impact” webinar, they can apply to participate in two workshops that are usually scheduled five to six months apart. “Developing two hands-on workshops for Innoweave that help collaborative partners put the conditions of Collective Impact into practice has been inspiring,” explains Liz Weaver, a Vice President at Tamarack. “Community change efforts usually happen in isolation and few people, except those at the table, know about the effort it takes to get change to happen. By working with different groups on different types of problems, we can learn from each other and identify common challenges and opportunities, allowing us to improve together.”

WORKSHOP 1

In the first stages of a Collective Impact initiative, we help groups work together to move directly towards an actionable plan by:

- clarifying the population-level outcomes that they want to generate,
- exploring the community system in which they operate,
- starting to build a common agenda, and
- developing a short-term plan, including a community engagement strategy.

WORKSHOP 2

Once groups have clarified their outcome goals, we have found that it is then important to help them develop a more robust plan. This includes:

- reflecting on emerging insights from their community engagement process,
- developing an initial theory of change for their Collective Impact initiative,
- determining the essential governance and backbone infrastructure required, and
- building a longer term plan for their Collective Impact initiative.

ONGOING SUPPORT

Providing these groups with access to coaching and support from experienced experts in the field of Collective Impact has been essential for the ongoing success and resiliency of the initiatives. By offering modest implementation grants, we have tried to ensure that organizations have this ongoing expertise and support as they develop and launch their initiative. Without this ongoing support, we have found that Collective Impact initiatives often lose momentum and get bogged down by a number of common barriers.

WHY INNOWEAVE SUPPORTS COLLECTIVE IMPACT

When Innoweave began discussing which approaches and tools should be included among its offerings, it became clear that the Collective Impact framework had the potential to greatly increase the impact of a community sector group and thus generate population-level outcomes. It was this focus on outcomes for a whole population or system that was a key selling point.

Too often, people think Collective Impact is merely about collaboration between multiple stakeholders or across sectors. While collaboration is important, Collective Impact goes far deeper, establishing common goals and shared measurements, identifying activities that will lead to change and impact, and putting in place a backbone support system to ensure that all the partners in the process have ready access to the information and support they need to successfully execute their pieces of the plan.

It is also important to define what population-level outcomes mean in a Collective Impact context. To take an example from Tamarack's Vibrant Communities work on poverty alleviation, their goal was to reduce the number of people living in poverty. In other words, they didn't want to just deliver better services and support to their targeted population of 5000 and have them remain poor (though with better services) at the end of the impact period; they wanted to have 5000 people lifted out of poverty.

This is a very key distinction. And this is where it gets really exciting. Because it is in having clear impact goals that we can begin to answer that nagging question, "Are we there yet?"

The ability to better engage a range of partners has also been a key motivation. Governments are increasingly looking at Collective Impact approaches and corporate partners see its value as well. "PwC believes in the value of Collective Impact," explains James Temple, Director, Corporate Responsibility, PwC. "It enables leadership teams from across sectors to work together to strengthen organizational effectiveness while solving important community issues."

Collaboration across sectors will be required to address our toughest problems, and we now know that each sector can make an important contribution to this process. When tackling an issue like poverty, for example, the corporate sector can create entry level jobs or pay a living wage, governments can improve access to programs or services, community organizations can deliver services in priority neighbourhoods, and citizens with lived experience can talk about the barriers they face. These kinds of investments can make a big difference in creating community-wide change but often occur only when all of the right people are at the table.

MOVING OUT OF THEORY AND INTO ACTION

During the last year, 37 groups with members from 180 organizations attended Innoweave Collective Impact workshops in Calgary, Toronto, Victoria, Burlington, Montréal, and Winnipeg. The workshop model has also been successfully replicated for teams in Australia (by Collective Impact Australia) and the United States (by Tamarack) as well.

Collective Impact is a framework that can be applied to a wide variety of challenges. Examples of some of the issues being addressed by participating organizations include newcomer integration, economic development, food security and distribution, education, domestic violence, early child development, and active living/wellness.

“My biggest ‘aha’ at the Innoweave workshop was that in order to use the Collective Impact process, we needed to focus on what we want to increase or decrease by ten percent,” says Amy Palmer, executive director at Lenawee United Way in Adrian, Michigan, which is committed to improving the lives of the Lenawee community through education, income, and health. Palmer recently traveled to a workshop in Toronto. “Not every community problem or issue is suitable for a Collective Impact process,” she adds. “Also, we really need to focus, focus, focus!”

Skye Louis, coordinator of AVNU, adds: “The Innoweave process has really helped us gain clarity around where our strengths lie and where we need to focus our energy next. When we started mapping out our existing and potential supporters into four major quadrants, we saw clearly that we needed to develop more contacts in the business sector. Identifying and building connections with new sectors is a challenge for grassroots Collective Impact initiatives.”

Workshop 1, which is focused on helping teams of organizations start the conversation about what they want to achieve and who else they need to engage, will be run again in Toronto in June 2014. And there are many more workshops in the works for different regions, as well as a new series of webinars (which are accessible worldwide) for organizations wanting to find out more about Collective Impact and Innoweave resources.

Eleven teams from more than 50 organizations have also recently completed Workshop 2 following their five to six months of community engagement. The teams used this workshop to clarify their impact goals and metrics of success and to build greater alignment around the range of conditions and activities that need to be in place in order to move the needle on their specific issue. They all came out of the workshop with concrete next steps for immediate implementation.

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT COLLECTIVE IMPACT

We are excited at Innoweave to see Collective Impact helping groups of organizations work together to address major challenges and change outcomes for whole communities. It is powerful to see leaders of organizations “thinking big” about solving complex challenges such as poverty and enabling substantial societal shifts, such as changing our food systems. And it is heartening to see so many of these dedicated activists unshackled from the constraints of activity outputs and short-term individual goals.

Keeping an eye on big impact goals and what’s needed to achieve them is critical. After all, employment training or transitional housing programs are only gateways to ending poverty rather than ends in and of themselves. Common agendas are most powerful when they foster alignment on measurable population-level impact goals and suggest a clear and shared model of mutually reinforcing activities for achieving those goals.

Infrastructure resources and communications strategies are most powerful when they can be linked directly to supporting these goals and enabling them to be realized.

It is the potential for such significant population-level outcomes that first attracted Innoweave to Collective Impact. Our goal has always been to help community sector organizations generate greater impact, and Collective Impact fits well with this toolbox of approaches. As we continue to support organizations through this process, we are continually trying to assess what works and what doesn't. Although we have found that there are significant hurdles and challenges to success in this approach, in our experience the benefits and outcomes from successful Collective Impact initiatives are certainly worth the effort.

CASE STUDIES: HOW PEOPLE ARE USING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The possibilities for using Collective Impact are endless. As we have already seen from the significant number of groups coming together to create Collective Impact initiatives, there are a great number of applications that can benefit from this type of approach. Following are three case studies that we prepared with Tamarack to more fully describe the process and effectiveness of using the Collective Impact framework. All three projects started prior to the launch of Innoweave.

REACH EDMONTON

In 2008, it became clear to many in Edmonton that the efforts by different groups to tackle issues of community safety were not having the intended impact they had hoped for. As a result, the Edmonton City Council decided to convene key stakeholders to develop a Collective Impact initiative that would focus on coordinating and integrating all of the city and community efforts dealing with community safety. From this call to action, the REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities was born, bringing together the City of Edmonton, community groups, businesses, organizations, and individual residents. These groups came together to develop a plan and approach that has led to broad system-level change, and is a great example of what can happen when a group of organizations and individuals go beyond collaborating and instead embrace real Collective Impact.

The Reach Edmonton Case Study is available at: http://innoweave.ca/assets/Resources%20Library/Case%20Studies/Collective%20Impact/Reach%20Edmonton%20Council_Collective%20Impact%20Approach.pdf.

THE DIVERSECITY PROJECT

The DiverseCity Project arose out of recognition by the Maytree Foundation and the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance that a more diverse leadership was required to create a stronger and more prosperous city and region. They understood that to create the conditions for substantive change in diversity, they required the buy-in and participation of organizations, governments, businesses, and individuals from across the city. To empower this change they created a series of action-oriented leadership development initiatives enabling hundreds of new leaders to emerge across the public, corporate, and non-profit sectors. Guiding these initiatives were four key goals: strengthen institutions,

expand networks, advance knowledge, and track progress. Using the Collective Impact approach, the DiverseCity initiative demonstrated the power of this type of intervention and underlined its potential to significantly enhance the representation of visible minorities and marginalized groups as experts, leaders, board members, and elected officials.

The DiverseCity Case Study is available at: http://innoweave.ca/assets/Resources%20Library/Case%20Studies/Collective%20Impact/Diversity%20Project_Collective%20Impact%20Approach.pdf.

THE HAMILTON ROUNDTABLE FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was formed to address the city's high levels of poverty. Created in 2005, the Roundtable recognized that even with the significant amount of investment currently being made by the community to reduce high poverty rates, real progress would only occur if they changed the way the entire community approached the issue. They needed commitment to a collective, community-wide effort. The Roundtable brought together leaders from business, non-profit sectors, government, education, and faith communities, as well as individuals who experienced poverty on a daily basis. The initiative coalesced around a single goal: "To reduce and eliminate poverty through the aspiration of *Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child.*"

The Hamilton Roundtable Case Study is available at: <http://innoweave.ca/assets/Resources%20Library/Case%20Studies/Collective%20Impact/Collective%20Impact-Hamilton%20Roundtable%20Case%20Study.pdf>.

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NOTES

1. See Innoweave Modules at <http://www.innoweave.ca/en/modules>.
2. Collective Impact Self-Assessment Tool at <http://www.innoweave.ca/en/tools/51c86c50-78c4-405b-8396-3351adec2bf2>.

ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES

AVNU provides coordinated access to workshops, mentorship & networks for young people creating positive change: <http://avnu.ca/>.

Innoweave is an initiative of Social Innovation Generation and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program: <http://innoweave.ca/> .

The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation – The J.W. McConnell Foundation was established in 1937 by John Wilson McConnell (1877–1963). Renamed The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation following his death, the core purpose of the Foundation has remained constant since its founding. Its mission is to engage Canadians in building a society that is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient: <http://mcconnellfoundation.ca/en> .

Lenawee United Way is based in Adrian, Michigan, and serves the residents of Lenawee County: <http://www.lenaweeunitedway.org/> .

Social Innovation Generation (SiG) is a collaborative partnership of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, MaRS Discovery District, SiG West, and the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR): <http://www.sigeneration.ca/> .

Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement is a charity that develops and supports learning communities that help people to collaborate, co-generate knowledge, and achieve Collective Impact on complex community issues. Its vision is to build a connected force for community change: <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/> .