

# COLLECTIVE IMPACT

A Literature Review

December 2017



**NINTI** • STRONGER  
**ONE** • COMMUNITIES  
OF CHILDREN



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This literature review has been conducted by Community Works to inform the strategic framework that is being developed by Ninti One to design and implement the Stronger Communities for Children (SCfC) program in ten remote communities in the Northern Territory from 2018.

An evaluation conducted in 2017 found that the concept of collective impact was both appropriate and useful for shaping design and delivery of SCfC:

*The place based economic development and the development of social capital creating stronger, cohesive communities supported collective impact as appropriate elements of the SCfC to make it work. (p. 18)*

Specifically, the evaluation recommended that Local Community Boards (LCBs):

*Focus on the concept of collective impact and draw in as much advice and guidance from as many sources as possible to make informed decisions on “how” it will be done to best achieve better outcomes (p. 27).*

The purpose of this literature review is to assist Ninti One in considering how the Collective Impact (CI) framework can best be used in their work with remote communities. In particular, the literature review aims to help Ninti One learn from the experience of other organisations that have applied this framework to programs directed towards giving children the best start in life.

To this purpose, the review presents:

- » An overview of CI, including definitions of key terms and concepts (Section 2)
- » A set of ‘key ingredients’ essential to effective application of the framework (Section 3)
- » Examples and case studies of how CI has been used by other organisations (Section 4)
- » A summary of key learning points that can be drawn from the case studies (Section 5)
- » Discussion of how these key learning points may apply to the contexts of SCfC in remote communities (Section 6)

It is important to note the extensive literature that exists on CI, and the limitations of this review. Every effort has been made to present a thorough and concise summary of the framework and its application in the time available, with a focus on the most recent and relevant publications. A list of further materials is provided as an Appendix for future use if and when Ninti One moves forward with further activities to develop professional knowledge around CI.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE IMPACT: KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Collective Impact is a **systematic approach to addressing complex or ‘wicked’<sup>1</sup> problems at the systems-level**. It provides a framework for collaboration between communities and organisations across sectors to achieve systems change for a common purpose.

Community development practitioners describe CI as:

*Diverse organisations coming together to solve a complex social problem (FSG Consulting)*

*Organisations coming together to break down silos, work across sectors, and align resources (United Way)*

*The commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem at scale (Community Toolbox)*

*A group working toward the same outcome, looking at the same data to continuously improve practices over time (Ten20)*

CI is specifically tailored to address **complex problems**, understood as situations in which:

- » No one actor alone can remedy the situation
- » There are gaps and silos in the system
- » There is lack of coordination among actors
- » New policies or significant policy change are needed
- » Innovation or new solutions are required (adapted from [FSG 2015](#))

**Five conditions** distinguish the CI framework from other approaches to collaboration:

### Common Agenda

- » Vision for change shared by all participants
- » Common understanding of the problem
- » Joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions

### Shared Measurement

- » All participating organisations agree on how success will be measured and reported
- » Short list of common indicators used for learning and improvement

### Mutually reinforcing activities

- » Plan of action coordinated by a diverse set of cross-sector stakeholders
- » Activities differentiated so that each actor’s role reinforces the others

### Continuous communication

- » Frequent, structured, open communication between all actors
- » Builds trust, assures mutual objectives, generates common motivation

### Backbone Support

- » Independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative
- » Provides ongoing support to nurture the common agenda

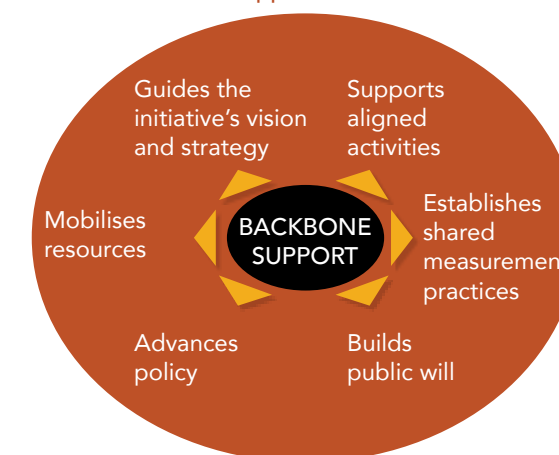
The existence of a ‘**backbone**’ is seen as a major advantage of the CI approach. This element of the framework has helped cross-sectoral actors recognise that dedicated staff are needed to maintain the focus of collaborative efforts, and keep the momentum strong (Cabaj & Weaver 2016). Early practitioners of CI explain that:

*Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.*

*The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. (Kania & Kramer 2011, p. 40)*

While early literature on CI seem to suggest that one single organisation must assume the role of backbone (Kania & Kramer 2011), later publications present the option of sharing the role between two or more organisations (Cabaj & Weaver 2016; Gwynne & Cairnduff 2017). In either circumstance, it is crucial that the backbone consists of a team of staff dedicated to supporting the collaboration. The forms of support typically provided by a backbone are outlined in the figure below.

### Role of Backbone Support



<sup>1</sup> In this context, the word wicked refers to problems that are highly-resistant to resolution

### The case for Collective Impact

The concept of CI gained international attention in 2011 with the publication of a landmark article by consultants from FSG, a US firm that has been instrumental in developing the framework (Kania & Kramer 2011). FSG reports that:

*The article struck a deep chord for many, giving a common language and framework to people all over the world who wanted to do, or were already doing, collaborative cross-sector work for social change.*

Leading practitioners from institutions such as the Tamarack Institute in Canada make the case for CI by explaining how it can lead to more targeted, informed, and effective collaboration:

*Organizations often go into the planning process with a bias toward predetermined solutions even when the issues are complex and no single organization can solve them alone. In fact, this situation probably describes most community development issues. A more suitable approach is to create a framework and processes where participants collaborate and work together on solutions that emerge from a group process.*

*Developing a sense of collaboration and information sharing can cause participating organizations to change their behavior in ways that ultimately lead to longer lasting solutions or better outcomes. The organizations go through a learning process when they see the overall issues from a common perspective... Continually sharing information through feedback loops increases the likelihood that strategies will bring about successful outcomes. This collective learning process can then lead to modified behaviors more likely to successfully address the issues with longer lasting outcomes.* (Walzer, Weaver & McGuire 2016, p. 161)

Some authors specifically note the potential of the CI framework in strengthening collaborations to improve outcomes for Indigenous populations (Graham & O'Neill 2014; Weaver 2016; Wilk & Cooke 2015). In Canada, for example, CI has been described as:

*Increasingly attractive as a direction for improving the health of Aboriginal people in Canada, particularly in urban areas* (Wilk & Cooke 2015, p. 8)

Weaver (2016) comments, however, that this great potential will need to be backed up with research exploring how to best apply the framework across different cultural contexts. Most of the research found on this topic during the present review comes in the form of case studies. While these produce some lessons relating to specific local contexts, they offer no broader guidelines nor proven models for adapting CI to new cultural settings. No literature was found that spoke directly about how to apply CI in remote communities.

Despite this gap in the literature, there is a strong case for CI as a potentially useful framework for addressing the types of problems that commonly affect people living in remote Indigenous communities in Australia. As a systems-level approach, CI is fundamentally based on the notion that complex or 'wicked' problems will be unmoved by singular interventions. They require, instead, a coordinated effort by multiple actors, and collaborative frameworks such as CI. Aboriginal public health practitioners in Canada remark that:

*These approaches have the potential advantage of addressing problems at different socio-ecological levels, rather than focusing on individual behaviour change, and hopefully result in increased community capacity that is maintained after the end of the program'* (Wilk & Cooke 2015, p. 8).

It should be noted that these practitioners operate in urban settings, which clearly makes for a vastly different landscape compared with the SCfC communities. The potential benefit of generating sustainable increased community capacity, however, is just as important – if not more so – in remote communities. A strong advantage to the CI framework, therefore, is its alignment with the goal of building local capacity in the form of stronger relationships, better communication, and adaptive leadership skills (Cabaj & Weaver 2016).

In Australia, growing interest in CI has led to much discussion and application of the framework in many different community contexts across the nation. In a publication credited with bringing the framework 'down under', Kerry Graham and Dawn O'Neill (2014) list 'Indigenous disadvantage' as one of four complex social problems that require a fundamental change of approach to cross-sectoral collaboration. (The other three problems listed are socio-economic disadvantage, mental illness, and homelessness, all of which impact Indigenous communities as well.) CI is being rapidly embraced as a way of addressing wicked problems in Australia, with institutions such as the [Centre for Social Impact](#) and [Collaboration for Impact](#) supporting further examination of how the framework can be used in Australian contexts.

### Critical perspectives on Collective Impact

Concerns raised by critics and practitioners of CI largely centre around an overly technical application of the original framework at the expense of crucial principles such as:

- » Meaningful engagement
- » Community-driven development
- » Deep relationship-building
- » Collective learning
- » Democratic decision-making
- » Acknowledgement of contextual factors such as political and social justice issues (Cabaj & Weaver 2016; Wolff 2016).

These concerns have given rise to an updated '3.0' version of the framework by the Tamarack Institute (Cabaj & Weaver 2016). The 3.0 framework aims to reorient the leadership paradigm underlying CI from 'management' to 'movement building'. The table below outlines the meaning of this shift in terms of the five conditions of CI.

| From                            | To                               |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>The Leadership Paradigm</b>  |                                  |
| Management                      | » Movement Building              |
| <b>Five Conditions</b>          |                                  |
| Common Agenda                   | » Community Aspiration           |
| Shared Measurement              | » Strategic Learning             |
| Mutually Reinforcing Activities | » High Leverage Activities       |
| Continuous Communication        | » Inclusive Community Engagement |
| Backbone                        | » Containers for Change          |

(Cabaj & Weaver 2016, p. 3)

This updated version of CI incorporates a stronger emphasis on community engagement by stipulating that the common agenda should be community-driven, and that communication should be inclusive of a broad spectrum of community members. It also shifts the focus from collective measurement to collective learning, and rejects 'mutually reinforcing activities' in favour of an approach that gives organisations greater flexibility to determine the nature of relationships needed to produce high-leverage collaboration. Finally, CI 3.0 reframes the backbone organisation as a 'container for change', meaning that it provides a safe space for social innovators to learn from each other and transform their way of thinking about and acting upon the issue.

FSG has also responded to criticism of their initial framework, by producing a set of principles to guide the practice of CI (Brady & Juster 2016). The authors explain that:

*'... while the five conditions Kania and Kramer initially identified are necessary, they are not sufficient to achieve impact at the population level. Informed by lessons shared among those who are implementing the approach in the field, this document outlines additional principles of practice that we believe can guide practitioners about how to successfully put collective impact into action. While many of these principles are not unique to collective impact, we have seen that the combination of the five conditions and these practices contributes to meaningful population-level change.'* (Brady & Juster 2016, p. 2).

### Collective Impact Principles of Practice

- » Design and implement the initiative with a priority placed on equity.
- » Include community members in the collaborative.
- » Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners.
- » Use data to continuously learn, adapt and improve.
- » Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills.
- » Focus on program and system strategies.
- » Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust and respect across participants.
- » Customise for local context.

(Brady & Juster 2016)

These updates to the CI framework have better aligned this approach with key principles of participatory community development. As such, the CI framework has received growing international attention, with volumes of literature produced on the topic. This includes a special issue of the journal *Community Development* dedicated to CI, the editors of which note that:

*CI is not a specific technique or tool used in working with community leaders on a specific local issue. Rather, it is a systematic framework that strategically engages diverse segments within a community interested in triggering long-term adjustments over several years. In this regard, it is not a one size fits all approach; rather, it must be tailored to meet specific needs and desired long-term outcomes* (Walzer, Weaver & McGuire 2016, p. 157, emphasis mine).

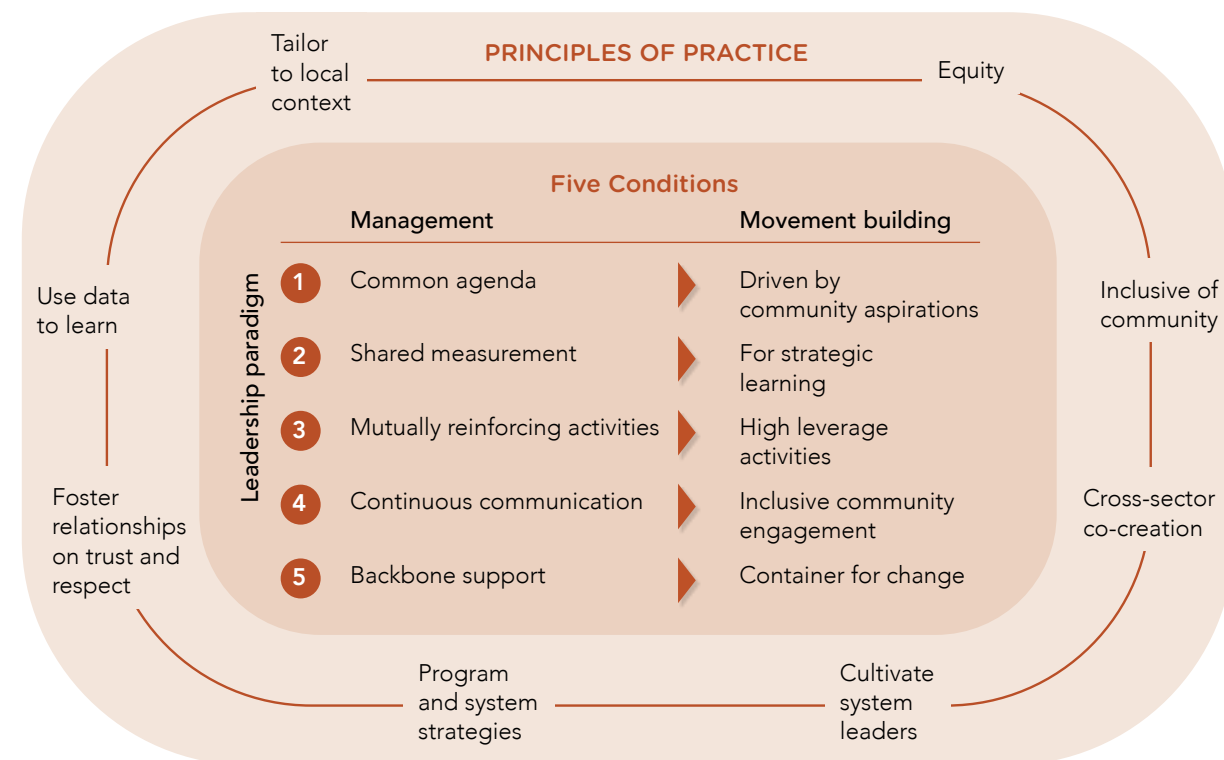
This underscores the importance of adapting the CI approach to suit the specific contexts of communities engaging in the collaborative initiatives.

The following sections of this literature review aim to assist with this task by identifying factors that are critical to successful application of the CI framework, and then moving to examine different ways these have been translated into practice.

### 3. APPLYING THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT FRAMEWORK: KEY INGREDIENTS

The overview in Section 2 presented five original conditions of CI, subsequently updated in 'CI 3.0', and eight principles to guide practical application of the framework. These are summarised in the figure below. This section draws heavily from these conditions and principles to discuss key ingredients emerging from the literature as critical to the success of CI initiatives.

#### Putting Collective Impact into Practice



#### Equity

In order to produce sustainable results for communities affected by complex, 'wicked' problems, equity must be prioritised (Brady & Juster 2016). This requires CI initiatives to acknowledge structural barriers presented by social, political, and economic issues and to address them head-on (Wolff 2016).

In order to do this, partners must be willing to:

- » Look through an **'equity lens'** at all stages of the initiative from design, to implementation and evaluation (Brady & Juster 2016)
- » **Embed community members' understandings** and experiences of social justice issues into all stages of the initiative (Wolff 2016)
- » Ensure that **governance of the collaborative group reflects equity**, with those most affected sharing leadership and decision-making (Brady & Juster 2016; Wolff 2016).

Safe spaces for open and honest communication are crucial to achieving this:

*CI partners must be comfortable with the discomfort raised in equity conversations in order to surface the structural and systemic racism that exists in communities and systems.* (Weaver 2016, p. 282 with reference to Kania & Kramer 2015)

This is especially pertinent where issues of **race and class** arise, as these often bring up topics of conversation that are both uncomfortable and essential to address (Brady & Juster 2016). Creating a collaborative environment that allows for frank discussions of these issues also requires attention to relationship-building, discussed below.

#### Durable relationships

A lack of focus on relationships has been recognised as a weakness in the framework's original five conditions, with later works by FSG and the Tamarack Institute aiming to remedy this (Cabaj & Weaver 2016; Gillam, Counts & Garstka 2016; Kania, Hanleybrown & Juster 2014). FSG's Principles of Practice, for example, specify the importance of **fostering trust and respect** between partners, and also place heavier emphasis on **co-creation of the shared agenda** and **meaningful participation by community members** affected most by the issues the agenda seeks to address (Brady & Juster 2016).

In broadening the original condition of 'mutually reinforcing activities' to 'high-leverage activities', Cabaj and Weaver (2016) also incorporate important observations on the **nature of relationships**. Attempts to push participating organisations into closer relationships, they explain, can sometimes lead to misguided efforts that fail to produce the systemic changes needed to improve outcomes. For example, efforts to relocate services into one building may miss the greater need to devolve responsibility to local organisations to allow them to take more important steps (such as designing more flexible and comprehensive services).

Moreover, they point out that sometimes different and even competing pathways taken by different organisations can be essential for success. For example, they write:

*In the case of Tillamook County, Oregon... health organizations, education groups, and faith-based organizations settled on a common aspiration to eliminate teen pregnancy. But they could not agree on a common strategy. As a result, each pursued its own unique path. Public health advocates promoted safe sex. Educators focused on increasing literacy on sexuality. Faith-based organizations preached abstinence. The cumulative result of their efforts was a 75 percent reduction in teen pregnancy in 10 years. Why? Because different strategies triggered different outcomes for different groups of vulnerable families and teens.* (Cabaj & Weaver 2016, p. 9).

Rather than forcing organisations to form a relationship based on mutually reinforcing activities, Cabaj and Weaver conclude that it is essential to give organisations **permission to determine how tightly or loosely they will work together**. The nature of the relationship, they argue, should be based on what the situation requires to **focus on high-leverage activities** that are agreed upon to generate systemic change for better results.

A quasi-experimental study of critical success factors for CI in early childhood interventions across three US states found **informal relationships** between actors to be crucial:

*Specifically, established informal relationships/links was the only variable that predicted collaboration...*

*These informal relationships enable participants to have difficult conversations, create a sense of shared purpose, and help collaboratives weather the storm in the face of uncertainty. This finding is especially relevant when collaboration is mandated and relationships are not established, yet shared vision and action are desired. Current results suggest the need for a hybrid approach that blends the key components of the CI framework with an emphasis on building informal relationships... In many circumstances, procedural factors such as requirements, attendance, and co-located staff may drive the work without actually adding value. Rather, informal relationships and associated variables may be more effective* (Gillam, Counts & Garstka 2016, p. 220-221).

These findings point out that meetings and mandates are not necessarily helpful to building relationships, and indicate the importance of 'softer' aspects involved in establishing strong links between actors. Other practitioners underscore these findings by discussing more **personal elements of relationship-building** that they have found key to success, such as trust, respect, and engaging one's own spirituality (Brady & Juster 2016; Hoskin 2013; Wolff 2016). Communication, discussed further below, is also understood as a crucial mediator of strong relationships.

#### Constructive communication

Relevant across all the other critical success factors, systems for quality communication are essential to CI. Communication should be **regular, systematic, open, and professional** (Keleher Consulting 2016, Phillips & Juster 2014). In order to foster both strong relationships and equity, CI partners must aim for constructive communication that walks the fine line between treating people with **sensitivity**, yet being **willing to address tricky issues** head-on (Kania & Kramer 2015; Weaver 2016).

Communication must also sometimes aim to **change the conversation** both within and beyond the organizations participating in the initiative. This may involve broadening the base of support for an idea, helping people understand how their objectives align with the initiative, or asking for new types of funding (Shore, Hammond, and Celep 2013).

Weaver proposes that frequently asking 'What's next?' is essential to keep communication focused on **continuous learning and forward motion**:

*"What's next?" enables communities to probe deeper, ask harder questions, and be ever vigilant about transformation. Communities are complex and dynamic, continually shifting and evolving; asking "What's next?" helps to surface new opportunities and challenges that may not be immediately obvious* (Weaver 2016, p. 281).

This forward-thinking approach to communication can also be a way of leveraging engagement – asking communities what should happen next clearly invites them to take an active role in planning, and opens doors for shared implementation and leadership.

## Meaningful community engagement

The critical importance of community engagement has featured heavily in recent literature on CI (Brady & Juster 2016; Cabaj & Weaver 2016; Connor 2013; Harwood 2015; Raderstrong & Boyea-Robinson 2016; Weaver 2016; Wolff 2016).

In a targeted study of why community engagement is important to CI, and how to better involve communities, the researchers argue that people must be engaged at the level of 'involve' or higher on a spectrum based on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (Raderstrong & Boyea-Robinson 2016).

| INCREASING LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT |                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                | INFORM                                                                                                                                                   | CONSULT                                                                                                                    | INVOLVE                                                                                                             | COLLABORATE                                                                                                           | CO-LEAD                                                                                                                  |
| OBJECTIVE OF THE APPROACH      | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. | To gather feedback from targeted stakeholders on the project's goals, processes, shared metrics, or strategies for change. | To work directly with stakeholders continuously to ensure that concerns are consistently understood and considered. | To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and priorities. | To place final decision making in the hands of stakeholders so that they drive decisions and implementation of the work. |
| EXAMPLES                       | Email newsletter.<br>Send press releases announcing progress milestones.                                                                                 | Ask for input on initiative strategies.<br>Invite to small group or individual presentations about initiative.             | Invite to join Working Groups or an advisory body for the initiative.<br>Partner in policy and advocacy             | Appoint to the leadership role on a Working Group to help shape strategies.                                           | Invite to join the Steering Committee and/or similar body with decision making power in the initiative.                  |

Source: Collective Impact Forum, adapted from IAP2 and Tamarack Institute.

The researchers then present strategies for achieving this according to two dimensions of engagement:

### Dimension 1 – Amplify community voice within CI initiative

Potential strategies include:

- » Asset-based community development
- » Leadership training for community members
- » Grassroots network-building
- » Investing in community groups related to core issue
- » Build public will for action based on shared aspirations.

### Dimension 2 – Incorporate voice using feedback loops

Potential strategies include:

- » Increase feedback between funders and grantees
- » Connect social sector organisations committed to making governments, NGOs, and donors more responsive to constituent needs
- » Develop better ways of planning for, measuring, and reporting social change
- » Improving systems for generating, sharing, and acting upon data.

(Raderstrong and Boyea-Robinson 2016)

Wolff (2016) adds that action arising from CI initiatives should be 'based on an understanding of the **social, political, and social justice context** in which the issues of the community are embedded, and addresses these issues head on'. This implies that involvement of a **broad spectrum of community members** is essential to ensure a shared understanding of the problem that truly reflects the lived experience of the people affected by it.

## 'Catalytic' Leadership

To be successful, CI initiatives require inspiring leaders who are **driven by the cause, and committed to seeing the process through inevitable struggles** (Brady & Juster 2016; Cabaj 2014; Weaver 2016). This is especially pertinent driving a sense of '**patience urgency**' when it comes to developing a shared vision, and motivating partners to stay on track and keep focused on outcomes (Keleher Consulting 2016). Some authors argue that the presence of an 'influential champion' is a prerequisite for initiating a CI approach ([Graham n.d.](#)). In applying the framework, however, it is also critical to support leadership capacity across many **participating organisations** as well as the **community being served**.

**Adaptive leadership** capacity has been identified as central to establishing a CI framework (Weaver 2016; Cabaj 2014). The need to lead a change in mindset is described by [Collaboration for Impact](#) in the table below.

| From                                                                                         | To                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Believing that isolated impact alone can solve 'wicked' problems                             | » Accepting that we must work collectively to achieve impact                              |
| Have difficulty grappling with complex issues – want simple and quick solutions              | » Can weigh things up, hold lots of different views simultaneously and take a longer view |
| Have views shaped by narrow concerns                                                         | » Have an ability to consider all perspectives                                            |
| Take a self interested perspective – always have a personal (or organisation centric) agenda | » Are committed to a broader agenda to make a difference even if others get the credit    |
| Resistant to change – difficulty being objective                                             | » Taking smart risks                                                                      |
| Need to 'own', and control attribution to self or organisation                               | » Willing to give up autonomy and share attribution                                       |

Weaver (2016) discusses the need for **systems leaders** who 'have the capacity to both see and understand the complex problem from micro and macro perspectives. They bring a relentless focus to the health of the whole system' (2016, p. 275). Systems leaders possess the core capabilities and characteristics listed below.

System leadership characteristics:

- » System leaders are not singular heroic figures but those who facilitate the conditions that enable others to make progress toward social change.
- » Any individual in any organization, across sectors and formal levels of authority, can be a system leader.
- » The core capabilities necessary for system leadership are being able to see the larger system, fostering reflection and more generative conversations, and shifting the collective focus from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future. (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015)

(Weaver 2016)

Core capabilities of system leaders:

- » Help people see the system and it's complexity
- » Foster deeper dialogue to get greater clarity
- » Understand and build shared meaning
- » Have the confidence to ask tough questions
- » Shift collective focus from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future
- » Engage in multiple and diverse system leaders and live the dynamic tension of ego and shared leadership.

(Senge et al. 2015)

### Commitment to shared vision

It is crucial that CI initiatives achieve a truly shared vision that entails community voice and aligns with the objectives of participating organisations (Brady & Juster; Cabaj & Weaver 2016; Kania & Kramer 2011). Success of the initiative will depend on the level of buy-in and commitment by all actors, as well as their acceptance of their own accountability for results (Keleher Consulting 2016).

For an understanding of what this means in practice, it is useful to refer to Weaver's (2016) discussion of how one becomes a systems leader. She explains that this requires:

- » Learning on the job by getting involved in system change efforts
- » Being outcomes focused
- » Adopting a process orientation
- » Balancing advocacy and inquiry
- » Working toward the collective agenda (which may sometimes mean letting go of your own agenda)
- » Working with other system leaders
- » Creating opportunities for self-reflection.

This list, it seems, can also be seen as a checklist for organisations that commit to leading systems change through CI initiatives.

Weaver also cautions that sustained commitment will require understanding that CI initiatives require a long-term vision for change:

*Those who think that CI can occur in a year or two are often dismayed... They grow impatient for quick results. CI is not about programmatic outcomes but rather systems, policy, and environmental shifts required to scale change. Short-term funding windows, directly jumping to outcomes without building a resilient and evidence-based framework, and ignoring the critical driver of shared measurement as a way to track and understand progress are counter-productive to CI efforts. (Weaver 2016, p. 282)*

This adds the importance of organisations buying in to a system of shared measurement and collective learning. More importantly, it speaks to the need for organisations to act on this commitment by gathering, sharing, and applying knowledge.

### Working Groups

Some practitioners argue that working groups are essential to **moving from vision to implementation**, playing a central role in ensuring sustained commitment by multiple stakeholders (Phillips & Juster 2014; Uribe, Wendel & Bockstette 2017). Working groups should include **cross-sector representation**, with members having some level of decision-making authority in their organisation.

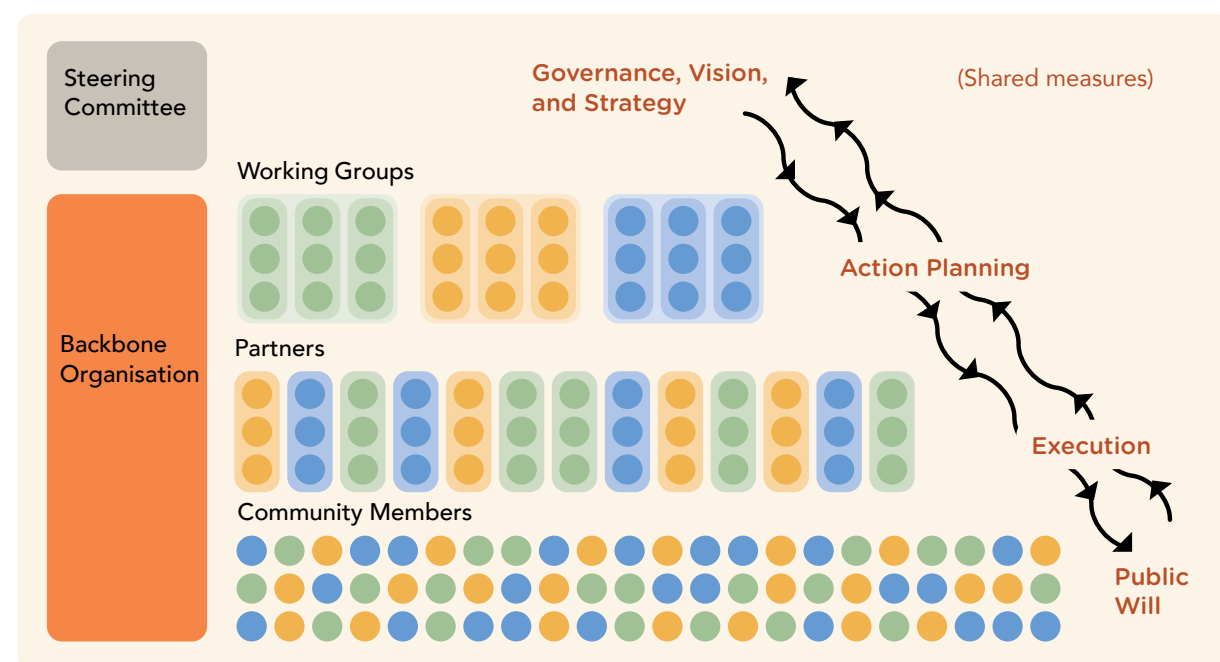
FSG consultants remark that:

*'the real work of the collective impact initiative takes place in these targeted groups through a continuous process of "planning and doing" grounded in constant evidence-based feedback around what is or is not working' (Hanleybrown, Kania & Kramer as cited in Phillips & Juster 2014, p. 12).*

In their experience, it is important to find **working group leaders** whose 'hair is on fire'. Working group leaders should possess strong passion for the issue, backed up by dedication of time and ability to persuade people to come to the table (Phillip & Juster 2014). These leaders **may require capacity support** from the backbone organisation to leverage their talent.

Working group members are responsible for:

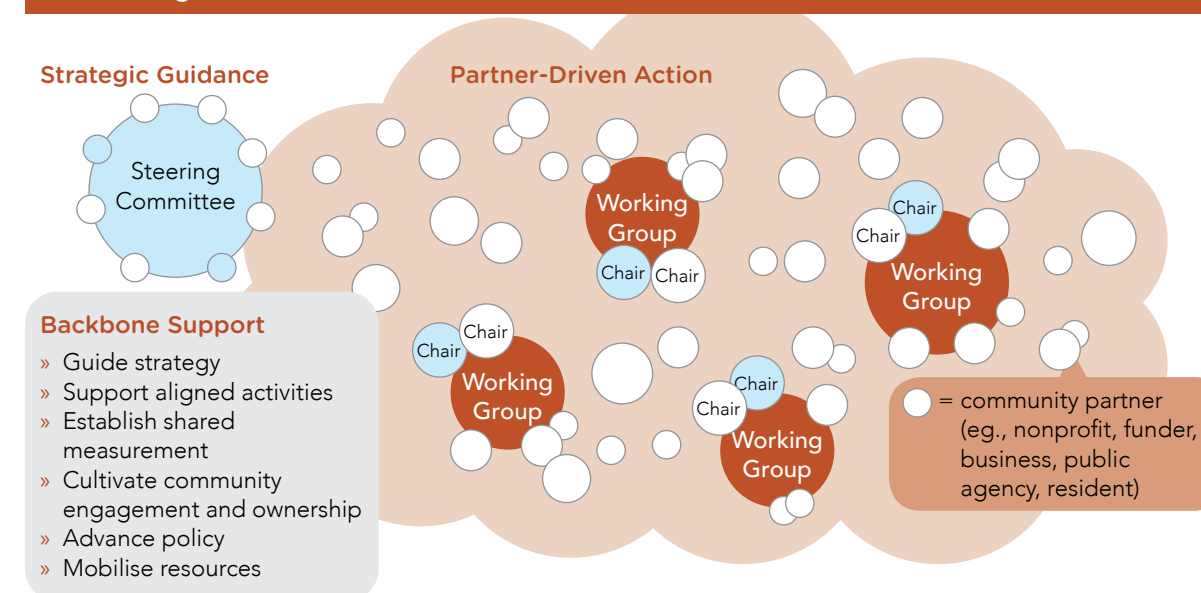
- » Forming strategies and actions plans, which are expected to be adjusted over time
- » Meeting regularly to review data and discuss progress
- » Sharing pertinent information from these meetings with steering committee, backbone, and other working groups
- » Learning from these other groups as needed



(Phillips & Juster 2014)

### Typical Collective Impact Structures

#### Common Agenda and Share Metrics



(Uribe, Wendel & Bockstette 2017, adapted from Surman & Surman 2008)

### Focus on collective learning through shared measurement

Weaver (2016) argues that focusing on data and measurement is essential to developing effective strategies for transformative community change. She further points out that evidence of progress can be a powerful factor in motivating community collectives to continue working collaboratively. Wolff (2016) points out the importance of emphasising the experiences of individuals within the context of their local system, which suggests that measurement should find ways of drawing links between local systems, the actions of organisations, and the lived experiences of local people.

CI initiatives require the capacity to develop:

- » A set of realistic, achievable **common indicators** to measure progress (Weaver 2016)
- » **Methods for gathering information** speaking to these indicators (Keleher Consulting 2016)
- » **Systems for collating, analysing, and learning** from this data (Cabaj 2014, Phillips & Juster 2014, Weaver 2016).

The importance of setting up data and measurement systems in a way that **emphasises collective learning** has also been stressed:

*In order for evaluation to play a productive role in a Collective Impact initiative, it must be conceived and carried out in a way that enables – rather than limits – the participants to learn from their efforts and to make shifts to their strategy. This requires them to embrace three inter-related ideas about complexity, adaptive leadership, and a developmental approach to evaluation. If they do not, traditional evaluation ideas and practices will be the "tail that wags the dog" and end up weakening the work of collective impact. (Cabaj, 2014, p. 110, as cited in Weaver 2016, emphasis mine)*

This collective learning process should create a situation where actors can try out new innovative techniques for working with community, measuring and sharing their success and results with the CI collaborative. Where new techniques are found effective, the collaborative can then find ways to incorporate support for these practices into their ongoing strategy (Graham n.d.). In this way, silos between different organisations and sectors are bridged as information about effective practices becomes clear to all involved, allowing them to identify patterns and implement solutions swiftly (Kania & Kramer 2011). This collective learning process often takes place in working groups (Phillips & Juster 2014).

### Sufficient funding and resources for backbone organisations

The growing popularity of CI is seen to have spurred a growth in understanding that collaborative initiatives require staff with a specialised skill set to focus their efforts squarely on building and maintaining collective action (Cabaj & Weaver 2016). Adequate investments of time, energy, money, and other resources are crucial to the success of this support mechanism. It is, therefore, critical that the backbone organisation has **secure and sufficient funding for the life of the initiative** (Keleher Consulting 2016).

The Tamarack Institute describes the backbone organization as a 'container for change', and lists a number of important **functions** it performs that are often overlooked:

- » **Mobilization of a diverse group** of funders, backbone sponsors, and stewardship arrangements that demonstrate cross-sectoral leadership on the issue;
- » **Facilitation of the participants' inner journey of change**, including the discovery and letting go of their own mental models and cultural/emotional biases. This is required for them to be open to fundamentally new ways of doing things;
- » **Cultivation of relationships** based on trust and empathy amongst participants so they can freely share perspectives, engage in fierce conversations, and navigate differences in power;
- » **Using the many dilemmas and paradoxes** of community change – such as the need to achieve short-term wins while involved in the longer-term work of system change – as creative tensions to drive people to seek new approaches to vexing challenges without overwhelming them;
- » **Timely nudges to sustain a process** of self-refuelling change that can sustain multiple cycles of learning and periodic drops in momentum and morale.

(Excerpted and adapted from Cabaj & Weaver 2016, p. 10.)

These functions should be considered when resourcing backbone organisations for CI initiatives, along with the roles of the backbone described in Section 2.

The **capacities** needed by backbone organisations should also be taken into account. Kania and Kramer (2011) note these as:

- » **Adaptive leadership** skills
- » Ability to focus people's attention and **create a sense of urgency**
- » Skill to **apply pressure** to stakeholders without overwhelming them
- » Competence to **frame issues** in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties
- » Strength to **mediate conflict** among stakeholders.

Where these capacities are not already present in a backbone organisation, investment will be needed to develop them.

## 4. COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN ACTION: EXAMPLES AND CASE STUDIES

This section presents examples of how the CI framework has been applied to generate collaborative action in different contexts. While this review focused on identifying Australian examples, two international case studies were also included due to the useful level of detail provided about them in the literature. Any of the Australian examples, by contrast, offer little detail about how the CI framework has been applied.

The examples discussed here are:

| Initiative                                                                | Location(s)                         | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <a href="#"><i>Success by 6</i></a>                                       | USA and Canada                      | One of the most cited examples of CI, administered by United Way in multiple locations to improve educational outcomes beginning from early childhood.                                                                                  |
| <a href="#"><i>Opportunity Child</i></a>                                  | Australia                           | Also associated with United Way, this program aims to ensure that even the most vulnerable children are positioned to succeed in school. It focuses on children aged 0-8 in communities in multiple states including the NT.            |
| <a href="#"><i>The Hive</i></a><br>(Opportunity Child partner community)  | Mt Druitt, NSW                      | A detailed case study of how Opportunity Child has emerged in one partner community.                                                                                                                                                    |
| <a href="#"><i>Burnie Works</i></a>                                       | Northwest Tasmania                  | Place-based initiative in a town of 20,000 people.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <a href="#"><i>Stronger Family Alliance</i></a>                           | Blue Mountains, NSW                 | Collaboration between local service providers to better integrate emerging evidence on early childhood brain development into child and family support systems.                                                                         |
| <a href="#"><i>Boab Network</i></a>                                       | Mowanjum, WA                        | While this example doesn't use the language of Collective Impact, it does provide useful lessons about achieving deep cross-sector collaboration to improve life for Aboriginal children living in remote desert communities.           |
| Oral health initiative led by the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health      | Rural and remote communities in NSW | In this public health initiative, Poche Centre shares the role of 'backbone' with Armajun Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service in order to build long-term capacity to reduce dental disease in rural and remote communities. |
| <a href="#"><i>APONT Aboriginal Governance and Management Program</i></a> | Northern Territory                  | Collaborative initiative using CI to strengthen Aboriginal organisations across the NT in order to reduce Indigenous disadvantage.                                                                                                      |
| <a href="#"><i>Healthy Weights Connection</i></a>                         | Canada                              | Detailed case study of a public health initiative promoting healthy weights among Aboriginal children and youth living in urban Canada.                                                                                                 |

## Success by 6

Success by 6 is a United Way intervention implemented in a wide variety of different settings, including Aboriginal communities in British Columbia, Canada. Here, United Way of the Lower Mainland acts as the backbone organization for the initiative, which brings together the provincial government, the credit union movement, and Aboriginal and community leaders to create a 'province-wide vehicle for social change' to improve early childhood development (McKnight & Irvine 2014, p. 91).

Leaders of Success by 6 in BC explain that:

*'although a western construct, Collective Impact, as practised in British Columbia by Success By 6, has been complemented, shaped, and reinforced by the teachings and wisdom of Indigenous traditions' (McKnight & Irvine 2014, p. 91).*

They describe the conditions that prompted a cross-sector collaborative approach:

*The Early Years sector knew it could not just continue to talk to itself about these issues. There was an acknowledged need to include non-traditional partners, such as business and municipal leaders, in building community capacity. Furthermore, there was a very real challenge and need to engage Aboriginal communities in a way that was relevant and authentic to their experience. Not only was the harsh legacy of colonization and assimilation a significant barrier to establishing such trust and dialogue, but much of how community development was practised was not resonating with Indigenous teachings (McKnight & Irvine 2014, p. 92).*

Despite early recognition that Aboriginal participation would be essential to success, it took six years before the first Aboriginal organisation joined the structure in 2009. Since then, the partnership has expanded considerably:

*Across 20 regions in British Columbia, Success By 6 supports the development of more than 100 Early Years Councils and Aboriginal Councils that work with over 550 communities. Each council brings together a cross-section of local stakeholders from multiple sectors to research community needs, develop strategic plans, identify priority areas for funding, and collaborate on delivering programs and activities for young children and their families...*

*The vision then, as it is now, was to build the capacity of parents and communities so children could be healthy, safe, secure, socially engaged, and successful learners by the time they entered kindergarten. How would this be achieved? In true Collective Impact fashion, that would depend upon the community, its diverse needs, and its existing capacity, as each one was unique... communities collectively decide what is required and take action to make it happen (McKnight & Irvine 2014, p. 93-94).*

Examples of collaborative activities initiated by Success by 6 BC include:

- » Supporting service integration
- » Identifying barriers and gaps in Early Years service development
- » Developing public awareness campaigns
- » Holding local health fairs
- » Developing Aboriginal language and culture resources
- » Gathering local research
- » Creating a resource directory of early years services
- » Planning Aboriginal cultural events
- » Developing new playgrounds or community early years service hubs.

(Success by 6 BC website)

In discussing lessons learned from the process of applying the CI framework to Success by 6 in BC, leaders from the United Way highlight the importance of embracing diversity:

*Unique communities. Geographically-diverse regions. Multiple cultures. And a complex and painful history that began with European contact and still echoes the need for reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples to this day. One might well ask: How can you possibly build a common agenda from this?*

*We learned over time that it is possible if you begin with those whose lives and futures we all have a stake in – the children themselves... traditional Indigenous values and teachings believe that raising a child is everyone's responsibility in the community. Acknowledging, listening, respecting, and valuing the wisdom of this belief was the basis of Success By 6's ability to build a connection with Aboriginal leaders and elders. If we wanted the initiative to be relevant and authentic to Aboriginal families – whether First Nations on reserve, urban Aboriginals, or Métis – **we had to look at the situation in new ways.***

*The deficit-based lens by which western society perceives Aboriginal communities, and in particular, the care of children, had to be turned on its head... Whether hurtful stereotype or researched statistic, the daunting list of challenges – family breakdown, youth graduation rates, poverty, and substance abuse – is well known to Indigenous peoples themselves. That's why building capacity to support Aboriginal children and families must come from cultivating the many strengths found in cultural identity, self-respect, spiritual traditions, and belonging. **It is this assets-based perspective that holds the key** (McKnight & Irvine 2014, p. 95).*

*Success By 6 also had to make room and space for different meanings of community capacity-building. Self-determination, self-government, the role of elders, and equity for Indigenous knowledge and processes – all these are critically important to the resilience of Aboriginal communities. This might run counter to capacity-building norms in non-Aboriginal rural and urban communities, but if the Collective Impact approach to Success By 6 is to succeed, we need to embrace a "Big Tent" approach and **be responsive to cultural context and meaning** (McKnight & Irvine 2014, p. 95).*

A study of Success by 6 in a very different context in the US examines the role of working groups in transforming vision into a common agenda for action. Jina Bohl of Western Brown Local Schools in Ohio, participates in a Success by 6 working group focused on improving school readiness. She tells the following story about how working groups collaboration produced rapid outcomes (Phillips & Juster 2016, p. 17):

*"When we started with this goal of improving school readiness, the first thing we did was bring together principals, Head Start teachers, and kindergarten and pre-K teachers to look at the kindergarten readiness scores for incoming students in our district. What we found was that incoming kindergarteners scored low in a number of important areas – rhyming, alliteration, letter identification – but this didn't tell us what we should do about the problem.*

*As a group, we decided that we needed more information, so we agreed to begin administering a survey to the parents of incoming kindergarteners, asking where their child had attended a program or received care prior to entering school... With this information, we could look at the differences in readiness scores for the kids coming from different programs. What we found was that the children who had attended local daycare centers lagged significantly behind their peers in their readiness scores. But the daycare teachers hadn't been invited to the table to help us think about how to improve school readiness. We hadn't considered how important they were to this equation.*

*So, we made up for lost time and invited the daycare teachers to join us in our efforts to improve school readiness. We were careful when sharing the readiness data not to be accusatory or to blame anyone for lower scores but to approach our examination of the data with an attitude of curiosity and interest, engaging the daycares as partners. And it was really interesting – **the daycare teachers said, "We never thought of ourselves as being all that important to academic success."** It boosted their morale to have the district inviting them to this effort as an equal partner and they were receptive to trying to make things better.*

*Together, our expanded group determined that we needed training in targeted areas to help us improve students' readiness. With the help of our backbone organization, we identified pro bono training support and arranged a one-day session devoted just to rhyming. After the session, we continued a community of practice among the daycare, Head Start, and pre-K teachers to discuss how they were applying what they had learned.*

*That's all we did. And guess what? **The following year's readiness scores in the area of rhyming went through the roof.***

*So we repeated the process for the area of alliteration and again the following year, **the students' alliteration scores came up dramatically.** More and more teachers are coming to our meetings and trainings and are empowered to make change. We've got strong partnerships between the schools and the daycares. And most importantly – we're making a difference for the kids in our community. This was my 'a-ha' moment about collective impact."*

Opportunity Child

Opportunity Child is an early childhood support intervention in Australia that, like Success by 6, has been developed in partnership with United Way. The Opportunity Child initiative is described on its website as follows:

Aged from 0 to 8, the children we work with are ‘developmentally vulnerable’. They are experiencing health, learning and developmental delays, which will have a serious impact on their lives as they grow up...

Opportunity Child is a coordinating body focused on helping communities work better together, while also supporting policy shifts and systems change in the early childhood space.

Our aim is to enable intergenerational, population-level change for vulnerable children, families and communities at both a national and a local level, starting with early childhood.

While the initiative is still in its early days, Opportunity Child has created a national ‘engine room’ for change that supports locally-led community solutions. We provide a platform for the members of our initiative to work as an integrated and accountable system, instead of in individual, disconnected silos. In our way of working, collaboration with and working alongside communities becomes a central capability.

We build a safe environment where we can discuss, experiment and innovate for systems change – where all participants can get on with the inner game of change, but with enough protection and safety, as well as enough pressure and friction, to successfully engage with the work.

This is far more than a simple planning exercise. To foster collaboration with communities and others, we use a new, high-potential ‘collective impact’ approach to addressing intergenerational disadvantage, that begins with early childhood...

Through our collective impact approach, we create and catalyse the capacity for collaboration, both within individual communities and nationally across our entire collective. We create alignment and shared understanding between communities, partner organisations and government, enabling deep and durable change in early childhood development in Australia, by:

Supporting communities and national organisations to move from a managerial to a movement-building mindset;

Enabling shared aspirations, both within individual communities and across the collective, leveraging these for national impact at a systems and policy level;

Developing strategic learning opportunities and shared measurement systems – our partners save time and effort by building alignment, holding each other accountable and learning from each other’s successes and failures;

Driving authentic, inclusive community engagement within and across partner communities and national organisations;

Supporting participants to see ‘high-leverage’ opportunities for change; and

Creating the national ‘container’ for change – the resources, skills and knowledge to serve as a backbone for all of our partners across our entire initiative.

[Collective Impact] enables organisations from different sectors to innovate together, solving social problems by aligning the way they work and using common measures for success.

A key part of collective impact work is establishing strong local and national coordination teams – this is called a ‘backbone team’. The backbone team work together to build new conditions in local communities for the system to work in a new – and much better – way.

At Opportunity Child, collective impact gives structure and accountability to how we collaborate with people, communities and our partner organisations. It helps us to work together towards a shared purpose instead of competing with each other or duplicating our efforts. This means we can pool the resources we have to innovate, learn and improve across the system...

One partner of Opportunity Child is the NT Collective, which is made up of the Sanderson Alliance in Darwin and Strong Kids, Strong Centre (formerly Pre-birth to 4) in Alice Springs. Further resources available on the Strong Kids, Strong Centre website provide a more detailed look at how the collective communicates with its partners and other stakeholders. (See, for example, <http://www.strongkidsstrongcentre.com/resources/>)

Opportunity Child also shares knowledge with a wider community of people interested in improving outcomes for children using collective impact. Ninti One may want to consider connecting with OC in this way: ‘Our wider learning network includes communities across Australia where many children are developmentally vulnerable and where collective impact work is growing strongly. This learning network is open to others to join, and also includes our partner organisations. [Join here.]’

(Opportunity Child website)



Source: Opportunity Child

### 'The Hive' Mt Druitt, NSW

The Hive is the CI initiative resulting from Mt Druitt's partnership with Opportunity Child. Collaborative Impact describes it as follows:

*The Hive is the resulting Collective Impact initiative, spanning child, family, community and system level work to ensure all children in the 2770 postcode are supported to start school positioned for success. It has been co-designed as a:*

- » **Place** to host collaborative work at 24 Anderson Ave, Blackett NSW
- » **Process** for working together
- » **Team** to project manage the work
- » **Network** of individuals and organisations committed to achieving change.

David Lilley of United Way Australia was instrumental in launching the Hive in 2015, and documents four key lessons he learned in the process in the adapted excerpt below:

#### 1. Developing the right governance structure

The Hive Mt Druitt was initiated by funders rather than local community stakeholders. While in this context it was natural that they would form a Governance Group, to set strategic direction and provide oversight of the work, it also presented a number of challenges. State and national managers would meet in the centre of Sydney, approximately 45km from Mt Druitt, to make decisions about a community they were not part of. It became clear that this would not foster the local ownership and commitment needed to drive real community change in the Mt Druitt postcode.

How did we respond to this learning? We held a full day leadership and governance workshop with stakeholders including community members, service providers, government agencies, business and philanthropy, to explore what governance structures and processes we needed to achieve our ambitions. This resulted in the formation of a local Leadership Group to collectively own The Hive's Five Year Strategy and provide oversight of implementation. Meanwhile, the Governance Group morphed into an Ambassador Group, focused on supporting the local Leadership Group. When the Leadership Group hits a policy, funding, political or other barrier, it can now call on the Ambassador Group to troubleshoot resolution to these more 'systems level' challenges.

#### 2. Defining who we mean by 'the community'

While most recent writing on Collective Impact emphasises the need for deep engagement with community, its often not clear who this is. The Hive covers a postcode of 60,000 people, of diverse backgrounds and experiences, spread across 12 suburbs. We simply cannot engage everyone. We debated trying to involve representatives from different geographic locations and populations, but only a small percentage of the population could realistically be involved. Who really speaks on behalf of their whole community, or specific sub-community?

Our approach evolved to work at two levels simultaneously. One, involving small numbers of community representatives, works to deliver system oriented work across the postcode. For example, we currently have a working group developing a plan to improve participation in, and the quality of, education across 46 preschools.

In parallel, we ask the community – with an invitation open to anyone and everyone – what is important to them. This enables us to focus on identifying and responding to local priorities in individual suburbs, with high levels of involvement from those living in the suburb. This also provides a mechanism for identifying community representatives and leaders for involvement in our postcode level work.

#### 3. Enabling a neutral backbone organisation

The core role of a backbone organisation is to facilitate, coordinate and project manage a Collective Impact initiative on behalf of, and with accountability to, local stakeholders. To be effective this requires genuine neutrality, such that all stakeholders trust the backbone to act based on collective will, in the best interests of the community, rather than pushing particular issues or funding agendas. In many scenarios this leads to the creation of a new, small incorporated body, that lacks staffing depth, diversity and capability, and requires extensive administrative burdens to establish.

#### 4. Ensuring the core capabilities to enable Collective Impact

United Way has identified nine capabilities that are central to the provision of backbone support, based on our experience in Mt Druitt. It is not essential that one person possess all these capabilities, but they should be available within the backbone team and broader leadership and governance structure.

**Community mobilisation** – ensures alignment of the work with the aspirations of community, and builds a broad movement for change in the community.

**Collaboration** – While almost every stakeholder in Mt Druitt says they believe in collaboration and the importance of this for achieving better outcomes for children, this enthusiasm can wain quickly when the need for compromise and change is realised. The influencing factors here are the depth and breadth of collaboration. **If stakeholders are simply expected to collaborate on specific initiatives that the backbone has identified, they are likely to push back hard unless there is a robust basis for seeking collective commitments and collective action.** To foster shared ownership and commitment across all elements and phases of the work, The Hive has drawn on co-design methods that facilitate collaborative learning, planning, decision making and action.

**Design** – We need to consciously design our meetings (including the agenda, room layout and facilitation), documents, services and indeed all that we do in Collective Impact, to ensure it facilitates progress towards attaining our shared aspirations. This can only happen when we give primacy to stakeholder needs, rather than a backbone's own administrative priorities.

**Innovation** – As Albert Einstein wrote, "we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them". If we aim to create lasting positive change in communities, we need to think and act differently. The Hive uses a basic innovation model that helps us to agree on priorities, incubate (prototype, test and improve) solutions on a small scale, and then spread these across the postcode.

**Measurement and evaluation** – Two key elements of Collective Impact are shared measurement and evaluation for continuous learning and improvement. Both can be conducted with either a technical and/or a pragmatic bias. Shared measurement must be simple enough that stakeholders from different backgrounds understand it, and rigorous enough that they see value in it, and its ability to track progress. Evaluation should help all those involved in Collective Impact to understand how the initiative is progressing, and how those involved can continuously improve our efforts.

**Mindset and culture** – Collective Impact requires us to stay focused on the attainment of our shared aspirations. For The Hive, structures, processes, tools, plans and activities are subservient to our shared goal(s); they are a means to an end rather than the end itself. When something does not work, we stop it or change it. When something works, we look at how to leverage this to extend the benefits. This is not the norm when it comes to community services, where the default mindset is business as usual (language, meetings, programs, competition for funding etc). Collective Impact **aims to disrupt the status quo, without confusing people.** This requires modelling a different culture and mindset, one that challenges, is focused on outcomes, and defaults to the collaborative development of solutions to shared challenges.

**Resource mobilisation** – One of the biggest challenges Collective Impact initiatives face is the need for continuity of resources, in an environment well known for short term funding cycles and regular changes to funding guidelines. This work requires seeking multiple types of resources, from various sources, on different cycles – cash funding, pro bono support, and volunteer time, from three levels of government, as well as the local community, business, philanthropy and social services.

**Systems thinking** – The social challenges Australia faces are complex. The variables involved are numerous, interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The traditional way of dealing with them is to identify a small number of bite size chunks to respond to with standard programs. We know that this approach often does not lead to long term change for individuals at scale and communities as a whole. Systems thinking can help us to see the bigger picture, and design our initiatives to respond to underlying issues and causes, by taking into account system dynamics.

**Adaptive leadership** – If the service system in Mt Druitt (or any location where complex issues underlie community disadvantage) worked well, and the needs of children and families were being met, there would be no need for Collective Impact. Using this approach is a response to the failure of 'business as usual'. It requires a different kind of leadership – an adaptive leadership, that brings together the above capabilities in a way that fulfils a famous quote by Lau Tzu: "When the best leader's work is done the people say, 'We did it ourselves'."

(Lilley 2016, p. 1-2)

## Burnie Works

Kerry Graham and Nick Elliot of Social Ventures Australia describe the experience of applying the CI framework in Burnie, Tasmania:

Burnie Works is a community-wide collaborative initiative in North West Tasmania that is applying the collective impact framework to **address the complex problem of low school retention and high youth unemployment**. Their generous learning spirit allows us to critically review how Burnie Works has interpreted and applied the collective impact framework and examine what is working well and what could work better.

Burnie is a beautiful deep-water port town of **20,000 people**, historically prosperous through manufacturing heavy machinery and shipping mineral, forest and agricultural resources to the world. Upheavals in mining, manufacturing and forestry; climate change and the global financial crisis – forces beyond the control of the community – resulted in major corporations closing their operations over a couple of decades of decline. By 2011, Burnie had one of the lowest rates of post-year 10 retention and highest rates of youth unemployment in Australia.

In 2010 the local community came together and developed the Making Burnie 2030 Community Plan. Through engagement and consultation facilitated by the local council, the community identified the key challenges to its preferred future: education, youth employment and socio-economic inclusion were seen as critical factors in helping the entire community become prosperous and healthy.

The original mechanism that introduced collaboration to the leaders in Burnie was a Federal Government initiative with a place-based approach called Better Futures, Local Solutions (BFLS), however funding was withdrawn following the 2013 Federal election.

During this time the Burnie community had become aware of the collective impact framework and, like many collaborations, felt it had been written about them – or, at least, what they were aspiring to become. They recognised many of the elements of this framework were already present in both Making Burnie 2030 and the BFLS initiative. As one Burnie business leader said: ‘it was a moment of enlightenment’. **The framework gave shape and a narrative to what Burnie was doing.**

As a result, BFLS was reframed in 2014. **A new governance group – the Local Enabling Group – was formed within the collective impact framework and under a common agenda called ‘Burnie Works’.**

In March 2015, Burnie Works was recognised by [The Search](#) as Australia’s most promising early stage collective impact initiative, winning financial and in-kind resources to assist Burnie to strengthen its collective impact effort.

## How does Burnie Works work?

As an early stage collective impact initiative, the focus of the work is to develop a common agenda with the community. Doing this with a diverse range of stakeholders takes time and requires a process. Typically, the core elements of creating a common agenda are to:

1. Strengthen and deepen the community aspiration for change
2. Build a shared understanding of the challenge
3. Build your collaborative principles and capabilities
4. Create a shared approach to achieving large scale change.

... they convened them [stakeholders] in small projects that sought to create immediate, measureable outcomes...

Many, if not most, collective impact initiatives start the process by focusing more on points 2 and 4 above. They build a shared understanding of the challenge by collecting baseline data, mapping the service system and capturing community perspectives. Some initiatives then work these inputs through regular meetings of cross-sector leaders and community engagement processes. Others bring these inputs into large convenings of 70-150 people designed to accelerate learning, engagement and the development of the common agenda.

Burnie Works did not tread this path; they focused on points 1 and 3. The priorities and direction articulated in Making Burnie 2030 provided a starting point through a collective focus and a shared sense of energy. The work was to harness that. Instead of engaging stakeholders in detailed agenda setting, they convened them in small projects that sought to create immediate, measureable outcomes for children and young people through collaboration. Since 2014 Burnie Works has convened six such projects. Here two are unpacked.

## 10 families

**Design:** The Burnie Works backbone team convened 20 government and non-government service providers to work collaboratively with 10 families whose children were experiencing difficulty staying connected to education. Families volunteered and worked with a key contact or service to identify and achieve their goals.

The **purpose** was two-fold:

- » That all children within the 10 families attend school at above average rates.
- » That the participating services build the conditions and systems for collaborating to achieve that outcome.

Reflecting the purpose, the **impact** was also two-fold:

- » After 18 months, all children from within seven of the 10 families were attending school at above average rates. For many families the support they needed to achieve their stated goals was complex, requiring many agencies to play a role over a sustained period of time. For one family, a parent was supported to undergo significant dental surgery to become less reliant on her school-aged children for in-home support.
- » The participating services built the conditions and systems required to collectively achieve that outcome. Tangibly, they:
  - » Learnt how to share data and information
  - » Developed the agreements needed to support collaborative practice (MOUs, data sharing protocols, etc)
  - » Learnt what responsive and flexible service delivery meant in practice.

Less tangibly, they worked through:

- » The mindset shift from ‘isolated’ impact to ‘collective’ impact
- » Sharing power, decision-making and credit
- » What it meant to work together closely when organisations have differing values, philosophies and models
- » How to deal with the ‘loss’ inherent in collaboration, for example loss of control or attribution.

**Dialling up what works:** Through 10 Families Burnie Works learnt that stronger, more sustainable school engagement outcomes were achieved with younger children. They re-oriented the project, renaming it to ‘Everyday Counts’, and are currently scaling to work with 50 families with primary school aged children.

## Dream Big

**Design:** Working with three primary schools and a large number of businesses, Dream Big sought to connect all year 5 students to their most desired workplace for the day. Students were awarded certificates and souvenirs from their visit. Also, business and community leaders were invited into the schools to speak about their personal journeys from school into their chosen careers.

The **purpose** was three fold:

1. To lift the career aspirations of primary school students so they value education enough to remain engaged in education up to or beyond year 10
2. To ‘change the conversation around the dinner table’, especially in families who, for many reasons, have been unable to participate in a work environment and where conversations and references to the world of work are not commonplace
3. To connect the education and business sectors to elevate the importance of education in the community.

**Impact:** While insufficient time has elapsed to know whether Dream Big is impacting on year 10 retention rates, the activity-based data shows that schools, children and businesses are strongly engaging with the project. Children share stories about having the importance of education brought to life and their horizons broadened in terms of career options.

**The impact regarding the connection between education and the community is more readily observable.** As Rodney Greene, Burnie Works backbone leader, describes it: “Through Dream Big, education is now owned by the whole community, as evidenced by the involvement of so many businesses, and the administrative support of a school program by external agencies.

“One school principal had a light bulb moment when he realised 50 of his students were involved in a significant program that he had not had to worry about organising.”

**Dialling up what works:** : Based on the learnings, anecdotal data and level of engagement, Dream Big has been expanded to seven primary schools, involving over 150 Grade 5 students and more than 80 businesses.

### What can we learn from Burnie Works?

Burnie Works is an ever-changing example of collaboration and the use of emergence as a way to set strategy to address a complex challenge.

In complexity theory, emergence is defined as ‘coherent structures [that] coalesce through interactions among the diverse entities of a system’.[3] In Burnie this means learning what works by experimenting – learning by doing. They learn by facilitating small ‘experiments’, watching them closely for intended and unintended consequences, adjusting as they go and dialling up what works.

For Greene, the best way to describe emergence as a way to set strategy is ‘building a plane in the air’. “This captures the risk and chaos but also the excitement and achievement as a new thing is formed to achieve a preferred future.”

This is a very different approach to the current way we conceive of place-based reform – which is usually about integrating services or introducing a set of interventions that worked elsewhere. It is also fundamentally different from the way strategy is traditionally delivered, where the intended impact is determined and interventions selected which are then delivered consistently and unchangingly over time.

So what has it taken for many actors in Burnie’s system to get comfortable with emergence? It has taken a lot of letting go. Of many things.

“We have discovered that innovation within complex systems often uncovers issues, challenges and opportunities that would never have been identified through a detached analysis or a standard theory of change,” says Greene. “The reality is ‘we don’t know what we don’t know’.”

His words reflect the ability for social change leaders to let go of being the expert – of believing that their role in the system is to know the answers. Greene and his team have worked extensively, but gently, with leaders – one by one – helping them shift from isolated impact (ego leadership) to collective impact (ecosystem leadership). This work is time-consuming and inherently personal.

“Early on, the most significant challenge for a number of services was to move beyond thinking of their own organisation (their profile, service models, philosophy) to work together as a collaboration,” says Greene. “In a competitive environment where NGOs are seeking to differentiate and raise their profiles to gain funding support, this is a critical and challenging issue.”

Commenting on the kind of relationships that collective impact requires, Greene says: “They need to be deep enough to create the trust to transcend (or replace) legal and contractual arrangements as these can never deal with every potential challenge and possibility arising from emergent solutions.”

The work of emergence has technical dimensions also. Easily the biggest one is how to share data. Greene says that in 10 Families, “we have had to develop processes for sharing information across up to 20 organisations where no contractual relationships existed.”

Above all, what we can learn from Burnie Works is that using emergence to develop strategies is effective. It is also measurable. The experiments of 10 Families and Dream Big (and others) create **observable and measureable changes in the way people work together – higher levels of trust, alignment of leaders to the vision of Burnie Works, greater power sharing, information flowing more freely, resources being better targeted to needs**. These changes in dynamics and behaviour are the drivers of the systems change Burnie is seeking to make.

(Graham & Elliot 2016)

### Blue Mountains Stronger Families Alliance

A case study featured on the Collaboration for Impact website provides this overview the Stronger Families Alliance (SFA):

The Stronger Families Alliance is a unique network that fosters collaboration between Blue Mountains organisations and networks to better support children, their families and their communities. By promoting new evidence about brain development, the need for early intervention and better coordination to prevent problems attributed to poor early childhood experiences, the Alliance has engaged local service providers in collectively planning a response. It has created sustainable networks of organisations, groups and individuals that are committed to a new service system structure, based on collaboration and prevention. In late 2010 the Alliance launched its Child and Family Plan, a 10-year road map for coordinated action by child, family and community organisations to improve support and services for children and families in the Blue Mountains region...

The Alliance evolved in response to growing international research about children’s brain development from conception to age three. In 2006, the City Council, with Families NSW and the Mountains Community Resource Network, convened a meeting to consider this neurobiological evidence and research supporting new ways in which communities, government and business could work together to counter seemingly intractable problems – such as rising rates of child abuse, social isolation and the literacy divide – which often are attributed to poor early childhood experiences.

In 2006 the Alliance began a five year process of multi-organisation strategic partnering and planning: scoping needs and opportunities to work collaboratively, and using an ‘appreciative inquiry’ process (described below) to engage and consult with key stakeholders. The outcome was the launch in late 2010 of the Stronger Families Alliance’s Child and Family Plan, a 10-year roadmap for the coordinated development of government, community and voluntary organisations working with children and families in the Blue Mountains...

The Stronger Families Alliance used the ‘appreciative inquiry’ process to engage stakeholders across the community and agree on priorities and directions. The initial leaders of the Alliance (the Council, Mountains Community Resource Network and Families NSW) convened a series of appreciative inquiry workshops to emphasise the importance of each stakeholder’s potential contribution and explain the Alliance’s mission from each stakeholder’s point of view. They observed that **potential members need to take time to absorb the history of the Alliance to develop an understanding of what is possible and consider the potential impact of participating on their practice and organisation**.

The Alliance worked to include the largest possible range of stakeholders, identifying all organisations and networks that contribute, directly and indirectly, to raising a child from the prenatal stage to age 12.

The stakeholder groups involved in, and contributing to the Alliance include:

- » **Departmental officers**, from departments of education, communities and health and the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Centrelink – provide strategic planning expertise and staff for projects academics – provide international neurobiological research, inspiration and facilitative processes
- » **Service providers** – provide strategic planning expertise and multi-service, multidisciplinary teams
- » **Interagency networks** – provide coordination across contracted community services
- » **Early childhood educators, school principals, teachers, support staff** – provide facilities and forge links across the early years and primary system
- » **Parent associations** – provide links with families and schools
- » **Civic associations** – provide resources through links with business leaders and community fundraising
- » **Business organisations** – provide support to Part C of the Child and Family Plan: Creating Child-friendly Communities.

(Ovens 2011, p. 2-5)

The case study identifies the following factors as key to SFA’s success:

One key to success is having **compelling evidence for change** presented by experts who continue to inspire participants. Alliance members attribute some of the success of the Alliance to the leadership and support of the academics: their new research informed a cohesive message that grabbed stakeholders’ attention and prompted action.

Another contributor to the collaboration’s success is **the way that ‘appreciative inquiry’ as a facilitation methodology created layers of consensus, commitment to change and willingness to take risks**.

Another is the **willingness of stakeholders to commit** to the Alliance’s vision and Plan: individual organisations seeing that through collaboration their programs can be more effective... a Plan of such vast dimensions has evolved and is much more realistic because of **the time committed to bringing stakeholders on the journey together**.

(Ovens 2011, p. 8)

A subsequent briefing paper from the Stronger Families Alliance also discusses the initiatives key drivers for change:

Collective impact is put into practice using positive organizational development to unite members from disparate organisations. **Strengths-based theory** and other large-group processes are used to deepen understanding and create robust relationships.

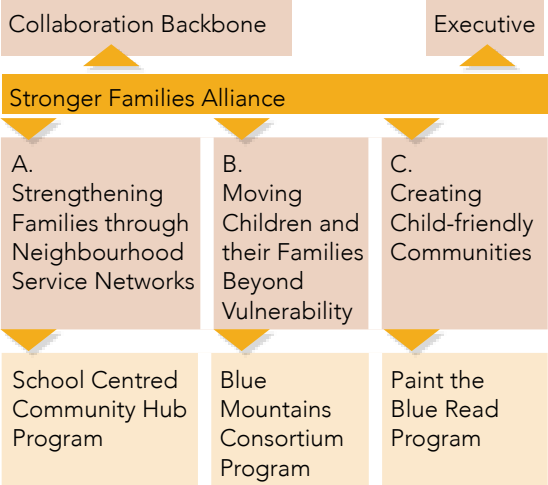
**Appreciative inquiry** cements new professional affiliations, taking into account each person’s outlook, skills and knowledge, as well as the group’s need for a common culture and structure. The Alliance uses appreciative inquiry to explore the strengths of members and build momentum for change.

**Leadership** is also essential to change, especially in networks that become more complex over time. Because networks lack a hierarchy, new methods of leadership are needed. Facilitative leadership moves the Alliance partners forward, and collaborative leadership generates strong bonds and shared attitudes between people from diverse organisations. Adaptive leadership promotes flexible thinking to achieve fast, lasting results.

An important shift came with the **move from consensus to governance**. At first, decision-making occurred through network relationships. However, Alliance leaders recognized the need for greater resilience and designed a network structure with formal responsibilities.

(SFA briefing paper, n.d.)

Stronger Families Alliance governance model



- Key**
- Multi-service collaborative groups focused on service system change and new program development.
  - New multi-service, virtual and interdisciplinary programs governed by the Stronger Families Alliance.
- (SFA briefing paper, n.d.)

The Boab Network

An article about the Boab Network in Mowanjum, Western Australia appeared in our search for Collective Impact case studies (Hoskin 2013). The Boab Network website provides a brief history of the initiative:

*The Boab Network is a not-for-profit organisation which is 100 percent volunteer run. The Network was formed as the response to a suicide crisis in the small Kimberley community of Mowanjum in 2007. After consulting with the community, the Network decided to run school holiday programs for the young aboriginal people in the community. From there, the role of the Network has expanded to support and work with the community in other areas. The Boab Network operates on the value of relationships and two-way learning. They act as partners working with the Mowanjum aboriginal people to help them achieve their goals of economic independence and social sustainability.*

Upon reviewing the article, we found that the intervention does not appear to use the CI framework specifically, but nonetheless represents a cross-sector collaboration that aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children in a remote community.

Moreover, the Boab Network example demonstrates a dimension of collaboration that may add value when adapting the CI framework to the particular contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia – appreciation of place-based relationships and spirituality:

*To collaboratively engage on traditional lands is to literally and metaphorically make a crossing into a shared space where two groups with radically different cultural and spiritual backgrounds have the opportunity to undertake the work of being together on country. (Hoskin 2013, p. 13)*

A relationship and place centred approach to collaboration



The cycle may repeat itself through many collaborative journeys with changes in our values impacting the way we approach collaborations.

Oral Health Initiative: Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and Armajun Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service

A very recent study examines how the CI framework is being used for three public health initiatives, including a collaboration to improve dental health in rural and remote communities in NSW (Gwynne & Cairnduff 2017).

The following excerpt has been adapted to provide a brief overview of the initiative, drawing attention to its unique approach to shared responsibility for 'backbone support':

*[CI was used] to design and deliver the best available evidence to reduce dental disease and promote oral health in Aboriginal people. This study began with two communities and has since expanded to a further nine. The communities identified oral health as a thirty-year problem and were seeking local solutions (Gwynne et al, 2015). The oral health of the Aboriginal communities was significantly poorer than Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia, and non-Aboriginal people locally and elsewhere (Gwynne et al., 2016). Governments had attempted to provide oral health services to these communities, however, an effective response had not been delivered (Gwynne et al, 2015; Gwynne et al, 2016). The Poche Centre for Indigenous Health was invited in 2013 to assist the communities in developing solutions to improve oral health and utilize a collective impact approach to achieve this (Gwynne et al., 2015).*

*Local community organizations, schools, health care workers, community members, elders and other leaders came together to discuss and agree the common agenda and measures of success. They also agreed how and what resources would be pooled and what decision-making and communication processes would be followed. The measures themselves were discussed at length, as well as the process of collection, storage, reporting and access. During these early discussions, a temporary emergency dental service was established using a dental van at each of the two initial communities. This helped to build trust and also provided employment for local Aboriginal people as Trainee Dental Assistants (i.e., it is possible to work as a Trainee Dental Assistant without a qualification in Australia. Once qualified, Dental Assistants have increased remuneration).*

*As the diagram illustrates, we move from a work focus where we might be in control to being in relationship. This includes both knowing and being, and in a sense is paradoxical because we are completely in the hands of our hosts in order to understand where and how to begin in this strange land. We engage in a period of learning, in which we are further taught the complexities of living with the community as the people relate to their land. Finally, we reflect on this relationship leading to a change in our own values and approach to future actions within an ethical framework.*

*Collaboration is a part of this relationship. We may work or labour together, but our relationship incorporates other dimensions, including an ethical stance. I and other non-Indigenous participants were learning how to respect the land with its extraordinary history of Aboriginal occupation, just as I was learning to be with both land and people in new ways, including those ancient rituals such as the smoking ceremony and calling out to the Wandjina associated with the visits to the caves. [Affirmation can be seen] as the birth and restoration of collaboration. As we affirm another, we pave the way for new possibilities in a collaborative relationship.*

*As explained above, we affirmed Eddie as our host, and in doing so, enabled him to come home to his own land in a remarkable way that countered that collaboration forced on him and others by a colonialist intervention. This return to land, and another trip since then, has reinforced my understanding that our Western comprehension of collaboration is limited, focussing on shared work or activity.*

*When the focus is on the work, relationship then becomes secondary. In shared journeys to land, relationship is primary and the trip becomes an opportunity for healing and restoration of past injustice. (Hoskin 2013, p. 12)*

This example points out important elements of collaboration that may be challenging for partners coming from outside the community – especially those working for organisations where non-Indigenous paradigms dominate the way they do business. It also indicates, however, the potential power of collaboration in transforming past injustices.

Once the common agenda and measurement had been agreed, the **services were established at existing community facilities** (schools, pre-schools and community health centers) and began the mutually reinforcing activities. In addition to being known and safe places, the community facilities provided reception, cleaning, power, waiting areas and other ancillary support which enabled the services to operate effectively. **Local employment and skills development were part of the common agenda** and as such all Trainee Dental Assistant positions were filled by local Aboriginal people who were also assisted to complete Dental Assistant qualifications. The service is coordinated and delivered by local Aboriginal people with the support of clinicians who live and work locally. The services have been operating for three years utilizing a collective impact approach as detailed in the table below.

Elements of collective impact to improve Aboriginal oral health

| Common agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Shared measurement                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Mutually reinforcing activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Continuous communication                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Backbone Support                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preconditions for collective impact have been met: local Aboriginal leaders and elders are champions and decision makers in the project; high rates of oral disease are impacting on nutrition, overall health and self-esteem of Aboriginal people and is an urgent priority for the community; and we understand why previously existing services were ineffective. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Improving oral health by providing comprehensive oral health services as close as possible to where people live and developing the local Aboriginal oral health workforce.                                                                                                                                                                                            | Patient data held by local Aboriginal organisations and shared with stakeholders on request.<br><br>Joint research project with local services and university investigators.<br><br>Joint analysis and publication of results. | Shared equipment and training; shared supervision by senior clinicians; and shared employment of staff.<br><br>Regional employment within existing health care services.<br><br>Assisting local Aboriginal people to complete qualifications in oral health with a view to local backbone/management over time. | Formal meetings weekly with the joint teams.<br><br>Quarterly meetings with community members and stakeholders organisations about service outcomes and issues.<br><br>Annual research reports to communities.<br><br>Informal communication daily about service outcomes and issues. | Shared between the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and Armajun Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service.<br><br>Both hold acquit funding, Armajun produces reports, shared training, each responsible for clinical governance at half of the sites.<br><br>Supply technology and other equipment. |

**Shared aspects of control:** local people from each site are on the decision-making team, local dental assistants and coordinators manage and deliver the services from existing community facilities, data held and owned locally and shared on request, identifying findings. A joint owned document details roles and responsibilities within the project and is regularly reviewed by the decision-making group.

The findings of this study to date have been promising. Two published studies by Irving et al report positively on the experience of the service from the community perspective (Irving et al, 2016a) and the clinicians living in the communities (Irving et al, 2016b). In addition, a paper comparing this model of oral health care with a visiting service model over two years (2014 and 2015) found that this service model delivered 47% more treatment at 25.2% of the cost of a visiting service (Gwynne et al, 2016)...

... the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health at the University of Sydney provides the backbone... in partnership with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service. Whilst there is an intention to transition the backbone role to community control over time, this currently is a limitation of our approach. It is our hope that as the approach becomes well understood, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations will initiate and lead collective impact projects.

The case studies in this paper demonstrate promising progress and the next steps will be to cycle through the phases of collective impact, increase local sustainability and measure impact over time. **The capacity to transition the backbone to local organizations and sustain the programs will be key markers of the efficacy of collective impact as a tool for tackling wicked problems in Aboriginal health.**

(Gwynne & Cairnduff 2017, p. 123-125)

APONT Aboriginal Governance and Management Program

APONT is an intriguing example of how CI has been applied to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in the NT. The AGMP website describes the initiative as follows:

The APONT Aboriginal Governance and Management Program strengthens Aboriginal organisations according to their self-determined needs.... The AGMP is Territory-wide, with a focus on remote community organisations.



There are hundreds of Aboriginal organisations across the NT delivering essential services, running enterprises and employing thousands of Aboriginal people. They foster local economies, self-reliance and self-determination. They are the heart and soul of remote NT communities and are vital to reducing Indigenous disadvantage.

This Program was developed to build strength and resilience in NT Aboriginal organisations. It is based on recommendations from APONT's [Strong Aboriginal Governance Summit](#) held in Tennant Creek in April 2013. Over 300 Aboriginal people from across the NT attended this event. Their strong message was that Aboriginal organisations need ongoing governance and management support.

- The AGMP has a strengths-based, collaborative, action-research approach, meaning it:
- » Works with NT Aboriginal organisations to **build on their strengths, without ignoring their limitations**
  - » Works closely with other agencies for collective positive impact
  - » Assists Aboriginal organisations while **learning** about their governance and management strengths, structures, challenges, needs and successes

## Healthy Weights Connection, Canada

Healthy Weights Connection (HWC) is a public health initiative in Canada that aims 'to improve and coordinate existing community resources, and access new resources, to achieve and maintain healthy weights among Aboriginal children and youth' (HWC website).

Wilk & Cooke (2015) describe two key challenges faced by the initiative:

### Challenge 1 – Contextual barriers to collaboration

*The development of successful collaborations is difficult in any context, and needs to overcome different organizational cultures, mandates, entrenched interests, and other barriers to concerted action... Aspects of the context that might matter include the characteristics of stakeholders, the range and capacity of institutional actors, the presence of “champions” or leadership groups, and the funding environment.*

*There are unique aspects to urban Aboriginal communities that might affect the success of collaborative systems intervention, and which require efforts to overcome. The complexity of relationships within mixed urban Aboriginal communities, including cultural differences and political histories, may present barriers to concerted efforts by the local community. Colonial history has also resulted in what can be deep mistrust of universal organizations by Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal organizations.*

*“Collaboration” with universal organizations may be seen by Aboriginal organizations as attempts to control, and they may feel that self-determination and autonomy are threatened... Projects attempting to improve collaboration within this system should begin by accepting that the existing set of relationships have been shaped by broader political and social forces, acknowledging that this is the context in which they are trying to promote new collaborations.*

## Challenge 2 – Measuring effectiveness

*The second challenge is measuring effectiveness of these projects, and setting reasonable expectations of program outcomes. Merzel and D’Affitti (2003) have pointed out that community-based public health promotion programs have often had poor results, partly due to an inability of their evaluation designs to detect changes. Part of this problem is identifying the level at which we expect the change to occur, as many have focussed their evaluations at the level of individual behaviours, rather than at aspects of the systems. Although most or all of these collaborative programs, such as the Healthy Weights Connection or the various components of Ontario’s AHWS are expected to ultimately result in reduced risk among individuals, collecting data with sufficient power and controls to identify these changes is difficult and expensive, and those changes may take a long time to manifest (Merzel & D’Afflitti, 2003).*

*In addition to these “ultimate” individual-level outcomes of reduced health risks, we propose that it is important for an evaluation of a systems-level program to identify systems-level change. These could include measures of community capacity or the presence of infrastructure, as well as changes to organizational policies or behaviour. It is these changes that are generally hypothesized to be the intermediate mechanisms that will ultimately affect individual health behaviour and health outcomes, so attention to these levels is important, and such change may be more likely to be seen within the length of a typical evaluation project.*

*Finally, we suggest that the evaluation of these projects should focus as much on understanding what works to promote collaboration and in what circumstances, as on ultimate outcomes. The complexity of local health systems serving Aboriginal peoples indicates to us that there is unlikely to be any single best approach to improving collaboration among system actors... Dimensions of difference include community size and the resources and capacity of local organizations, but also may include the unique histories of these communities, including the outcomes of previous collaborations and local politics. Understanding what these factors are and how they might be implicated in program effectiveness is an important evaluation research goal.*

(Excerpted and adapted from Wilk & Cooke 2015, p. 9-10.)

## 5. LESSONS FROM PRACTICE OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT: KEY LEARNING POINTS

This section draws from the case studies in Section 4 to present a set of lessons learned from applying the CI framework in specific contexts.

### Diverse viewpoints enrich CI initiatives

This was apparent from many of the examples discussed above. The case of Success by 6 BC, especially, reflects the importance of embracing diversity, learning to look at problems and their solutions in new ways, and incorporating different concepts of community capacity-building. Reflection on The Hive in Mt. Druitt, meanwhile, emphasises the importance of innovation, which depends upon people’s ability to voice and embrace new ideas.

### Asset-based approaches can be transformational

Many of the examples studied here demonstrated the power of using group processes that build from already existing strengths in the community. In Success by 6 BC, they found it necessary to acknowledge that the damage done by deficit-based views of Indigenous people and determined that an asset-based approach to collaboration was key to success.

The Stronger Families Alliance specified that appreciative inquiry, strengths-based group processes, and adaptive leadership to facilitate these processes was key to transforming cross-sectoral relationships and making them more constructive.

### Co-design is instrumental in sustaining stakeholder commitment over time

Many of the case studies above provide examples of how multiple stakeholders have worked together to create a common agenda for systems change. At the Hive in Mt. Druitt, co-design methods facilitated ‘collaborative learning, planning, decision-making and action’. This approach was seen as crucial to achieving sustained commitment to collaboration over time (Lilley 2016).

### CI working groups can empower participants to take innovative, rapid action

This point is illustrated especially well by the story of Success by 6 in Ohio, where inviting daycare providers to take part as equal participants in working groups boosted their morale, and led to swift and effective action.

It also points out how important it is to pay careful attention to creating the conditions that foster this, including sensitive communication and equal status of working group members.

The Stronger Families Alliance example provides an example of working group structures, and the role they have played in governance of the initiative.

### Evidence should be used for collective learning that motivates action

The story from the Success by 6 working group in Ohio demonstrates particularly well how this can be done incrementally over time.

First, the working group first gathered evidence to better understand the nature of the problem, which in this case involved measuring achievement differences between students coming from different forms of early childhood learning. Only when they saw this evidence – that children coming from daycare centres were achieving less than other children – did they realise that daycare educators were missing from the table. So they invited them to participate, careful to present the evidence in a way that promoted cooperation and engagement (and avoided insult and blame).

Together, based on this evidence, they tried something new – the daycare providers engaged in training to develop particular skills. Then they measured the results. When the results showed improvements for children, it became clear to all involved that repeating the process for another learning outcome was worthwhile. So they did, and measured again, and got similar results. Now they have a proven model that they can confidently apply to other learning outcomes, and also try out in other communities.

The Stronger Families Alliance also points to the power of compelling evidence in securing the commitment of stakeholders over time.

### Collective Impact takes time

This point was repeated over and over again in the literature. For example, Success by 6 was in operation for six years before an Aboriginal partner even joined the structure. Once this breakthrough occurred, however, the progress moved forward more rapidly in terms of increased collaboration, better service provision, and outcomes for children.

This may be partially because, as observed by the Stronger Family Alliance in the Blue Mountains, potential partners require time to absorb:

- » The structure and history of the initiative
- » The motivation for and potential of collaborative action
- » The implications for their current work.

For SFA, the time invested in bringing stakeholders ‘along for the journey’ was seen by partners as key to the initiative’s success.

The process of building trust is one that also takes time, particularly in post-colonial contexts.

### Early impact should be measured in terms of systems change

This was highlighted especially in the Healthy Weights Connection example, where measuring effectiveness was initially a challenge (Wilk & Cooke 2015). The case study of this initiative concluded that ‘understanding what works to promote collaboration and in what circumstances’ should be an important focus of evaluations of CI initiatives.

The Burnie Works case suggests finding ways to assess, for example:

- » How service providers work together
- » The formation and nature of relationships
- » Connection of community with cross-sector actors
- » Access to services

These outcomes are highly relevant to measuring systems-level impact of the initiative, and will be recognisable and measurable long before sustainable outcomes for young children can be fully determined.

### Relationships must be built on principles of equity, self-determination and respect

This requires sensitivity and adaptive leadership. These are particularly important where intercultural relationships, power imbalances, and other contextual barriers are present, as illustrated by the example of Healthy Weights Connection.

Achieving this may require training and other forms of capacity support to:

- » Boost the ability of certain participants (such as young people) to participate as equals
- » Enable some participants (such as experienced, formally educated managers) to perceive all other participants as equals, and make space for people who have been marginalised to voice their opinions and be heard.

The Burnie Works example provides an eloquent description of the types of relationship needed for CI initiatives to be effective over time: “They need to be deep enough to create the trust to transcend (or replace) legal and contractual arrangements as these can never deal with every potential challenge and possibility arising from emergent solutions.”

### CI intentionally disrupts the status quo

The examples show how the framework does this by addressing issues of equity head-on, and challenging organisations and individuals to think and work in new ways.

In order to do this, some of the examples also show how letting go of particular perspectives and agendas may be necessary in order to embrace new perspectives. This may include letting go of:

- » Pre-conceived agendas
- » Entrenched ways of thinking
- » Old ways of doing business.

The example of the Boab Network shows that even the concept of collaboration itself may need readjusting to suit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. In this example, a non-Indigenous partner had to let go of culturally entrenched notions of collaboration as work-focused, and acknowledge the primacy of relationships, including relationship to place.

In reflecting on the experience of The Hive in Mt. Druitt, Lilley (2016) emphasises the need for CI initiatives to not just talk about, but **model** a different mindset and culture when it comes to collaboration.

## 6. COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR SCFC: IMPLICATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

The SCfC evaluation report has begun to explore the way in which a Collective Impact Framework may be applied to the context of remote NT communities. It points out, for example, that:

*To create the opportunity and motivation necessary to bring people who have never before worked together into a collective impact initiative and hold them in place until the initiative’s own momentum takes over (enabling independence) requires that three pre-conditions must be in place before launching a collective impact initiative: an influential champion (SCfC Coordinator) or a group of champions (LCB), adequate financial resources (SCfC pooled funding), and a sense of urgency for change.*

*Generally, the environment that best fosters collaboration is one where people believe that a new approach is needed (place based community controlled funding of service delivery), and local influential champions (LCBs and FPs) bring people together to pool resources and work better together.*

The current review aims to provide Ninti One with evidence they can use to further explore the development and application of a CI framework to suit the context of SCfC. The literature and case studies discussed here suggest that Ninti One consider the following points of action in doing so:

### Articulate a Common Agenda

While SCfC already entails the common goal of giving children the best start in life, it is unclear how far individual communities have come in developing this into a shared agenda for change.

In articulating this, stakeholders at each SCfC site should consider questions such as:

- » How should we go about developing a shared, inclusive vision for change?
- » How can we establish a common understanding of the problem?
- » What should be included within the scope of this problem, and where must we draw boundaries to maintain focus?
- » How can we set clear and measureable goals?
- » How should we create a strategy for reaching those goals?

The literature suggests that it is normal for this process to take many months, even in urban settings. FSG uses the term ‘patient urgency’ to describe their approach to moving this process forward without rushing it. In their experience, a well thought-out, extensively discussed, cohesive agenda is essential to bring strength and focus to working groups, and support ongoing commitment by stakeholders.

### Understanding common agenda for CI: Music as a metaphor

In helping CI partners understand what is implied by a common agenda, music might serve as a useful metaphor. If we play a recording of one drummer playing the rhythm for a much loved song, it may generate some form of impact in the room. For example, some people might enjoy the sound, smile, or even begin tapping their fingers in time.

If we play a recording of the same drummer playing the same heartfelt song with a whole troupe of musicians, however, the music is likely to generate a bigger impact in the room. For example the music might prompt more smiles, deeper experience of the song, it may even move some people to get up and dance.

Exploring this analogy might help partners develop a better understanding of how multiple players might work together to achieve a collective impact. For example, they could ask themselves:

‘What is needed for the troupe of musicians to be more effective than the drummer alone?’

- » Do all the players need to play the same instrument?
- » Do all the players need to play exactly the same notes?
- » What is the role of timing?
- » How do the players keep or change the pace?
- » How do players ensure that they don’t drown each other out?
- » How do they achieve harmony and what is the effect?
- » When and how can individual players improvise without spoiling the song?

This metaphor could take on deeper meaning in communities where traditional songs or other ways of performing together can be explored.

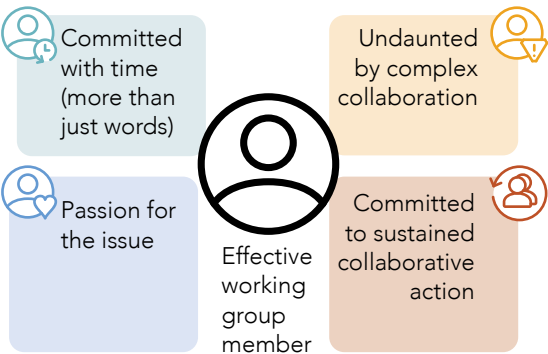
Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

The most essential role that will need clarification is the **backbone**. Key questions to consider include:

- » Who is best placed to provide the support and focus needed to facilitate collaborative action at specific SCfC sites?
- » Is a single backbone organisation called for, or would a shared arrangement between two organisations (or more) be preferable?
- » Are LCBs, FPs, Ninti One, or a shared arrangement viable possibilities?

In addition, Ninti One could begin to explore with SCfC partners whether working groups might provide a useful structure for translating vision into action. If so, these will need to be clarified at each SCfC site. The diagrams below may be helpful in thinking through how to determine the structure and members of working groups.

Identifying working group members



Determining working group structure



Phillips & Juster (2014)

Support leadership capacity

The literature stresses the importance of supporting leadership at multiple levels, including within:

- » The backbone organisation(s)
- » Working groups
- » Constituent communities.

Specific leadership capacities discussed in the literature include:

- » Adaptive leadership skills
- » Ability to prepare all partners (community, service providers, and funders) that they are in it for the long game
- » Influence to motivate sustained organisational commitment over time
- » Understanding of systems leadership.

The experiences discussed in this review suggest that support for these capacities will likely be required to effectively engage in CI at some, if not all, SCfC sites. Supporting partners located outside SCfC sites, including Ninti One, may also enhance the effectiveness of the collaborative by developing these leadership capacities.

FSG has recently developed a toolkit on 'How To Lead a Collective Action Working Group' (Uribbe, Wendall, and Bockstette 2017). This valuable resource has been listed in Appendix B to inform further professional development and capacity support for both Ninti One and specific SCfC sites. It is expected, however, that some of the materials will have to be adapted, or used as a discussion piece to develop tools and guidelines for working group leadership in remote Aboriginal contexts.

Keep indicators realistic yet ambitious

This can help generate 'patient urgency'. Celebrating short- and medium- term victories will be important, but it will also be crucial for communities to set long-term goals to help everyone focus on the ultimate outcomes, and keep momentum moving forward. Measuring systems change, as well as ultimate impacts on children and communities, is framed as important by the literature.

Measuring systems change might entail:

- » Assessing progress in coordinating services
- » Observing the quality of relationships
- » Exploring interactions between community members and partner organisations
- » Surveying changes in individuals' perceptions of issues affecting the community. These may relate to structural issues such as equity, racism, poverty, trust, engagement, power, conflict, and justice.

Pay careful attention to relationships

At its very heart, the CI framework is about building strong relationships between community, a range of cross-sector service providers, and other stakeholders to form coordinated action. This is central to generating positive systems change and improved outcomes for children and communities.

7. CONCLUSION

This review has explored the concept and practice of Collaborative Impact, with a focus on case studies that provide lessons relevant to the SCfC Program in remote NT.

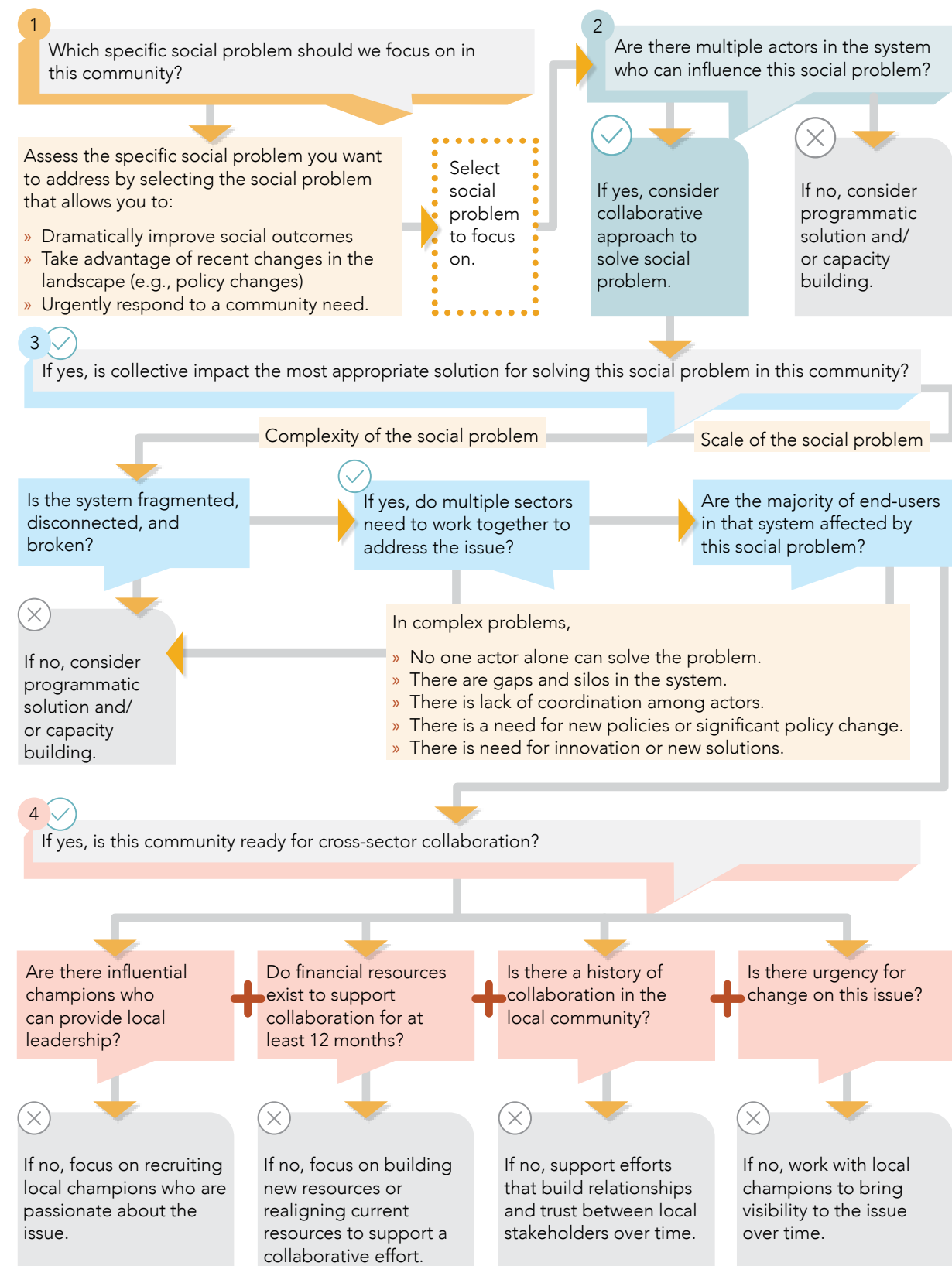
A large volume of literature on CI was identified in this review, demonstrating a strong interest in the topic that has emerged in less than a decade. We have focused on the most recent and relevant works here to provide a targeted overview of this research.

It is clear, however, that gaps in the research still exist. These include:

- » Guidelines for adapting the CI framework to suit new cultural settings
- » Proven models for using CI to generate outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia
- » Comprehensive studies of using CI to effect systems change in remote desert communities.

The growing interest in this approach both in Australia and internationally suggests strong demand for development in these areas, which Ninti One is in a unique position to provide. Community Works is keen to explore the potential of the Collective Impact framework further, and would be happy to support Ninti One in their future work with the SCfC program.

## APPENDIX A: COLLECTIVE IMPACT FEASIBILITY FRAMEWORK



(FSG 2015)

## APPENDIX B: SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

### Videos

- » Brief overview of how CI is applied in Opportunity Child – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0My4YMHKp7g>
- » Brief overview of Burnie Works (TAS) – <http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/our-community/>
- » [Panel discussion at the 2016 Collective Impact Forum](#)
  - » (From min 18:00)– Lashondra Brennan, CEO of Walnut Way (Milwaukee) advocates for (1) paying residents for their time when participating in collective impact decision-making processes, and (2) training stakeholders in how to participate in decision-making, for example the basics of being able to ‘push back’ and voice their reality when they come to the table feeling powerless. This is particularly important, she explains, for young people involved in decision-making processes to ensure that their presence is more than just a ‘token’.
  - » (From min 9:00-13:00) – Sili Savusa of the White Centre (Seattle) draws attention to the importance of ensuring that whatever impact is being sought is discussed and addressed in a way that directly relates to the priorities of particular stakeholders (including community members, different service providers, etc).

### Publications

- » Overview of CI (recommended required reading) – Weaver 2016
- » Shared Measurement (article plus webinar) – <https://www.fsg.org/publications/breakthroughs-shared-measurement>
- » Making Collective Impact work (article plus webinar) – <https://www.fsg.org/publications/channeling-change>

### Tools

- » Tamarack Institute: Agree-Disagree Tool – group exercise for sharing perspectives on collaboration, which can help embed participants’ ideas, observations, and values into collective work. – <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Agree%20Disagree%20Tool.pdf?hsCtaTracking=3ff25dd9-387e-41a6-841b-78a1bc674b5d%7C75f6540e-7758-46c5-b468-0076cb6c1415>
- » FSG: Toolkit for Leadership in Working Groups – <https://www.fsg.org/tools-and-resources/how-to-lead-collective-impact-working-groups#download-area>

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