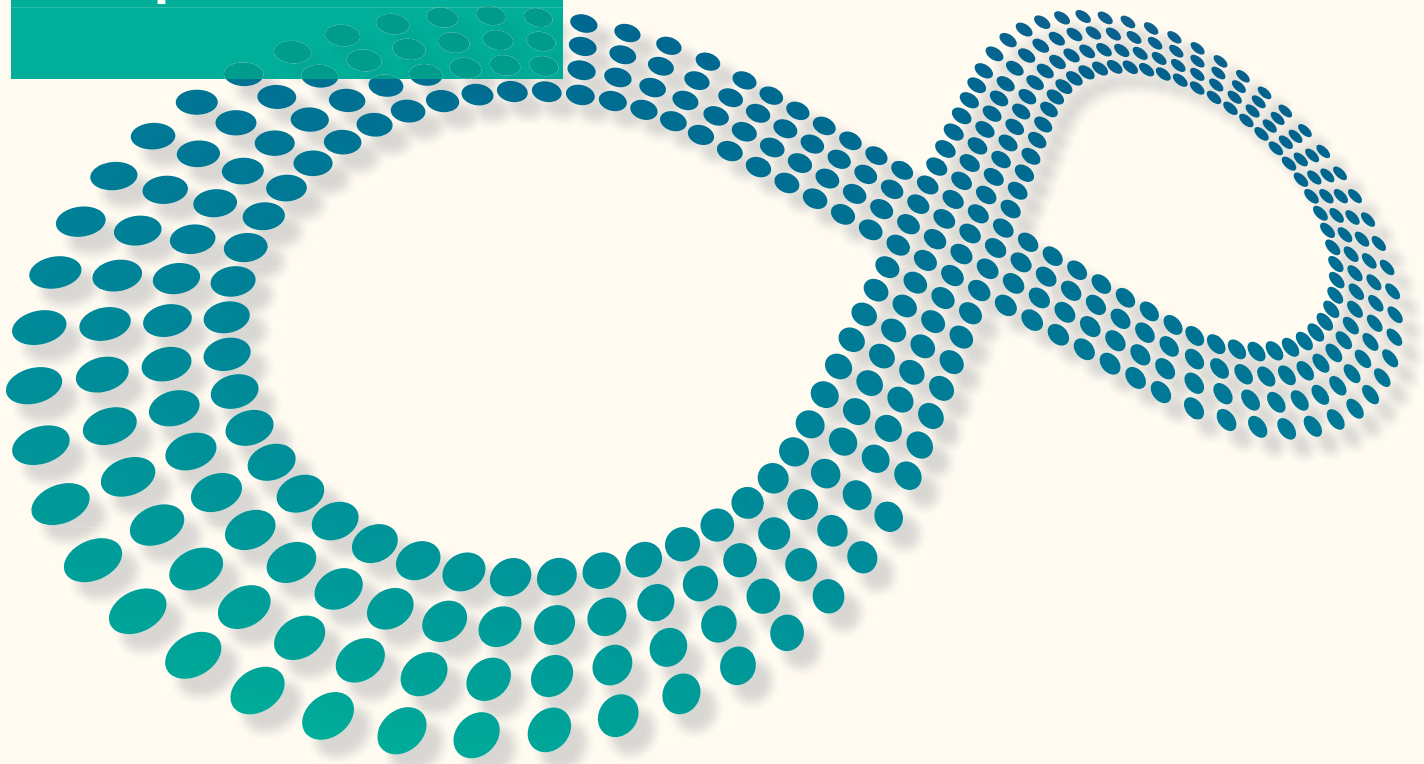


Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact

02



Assessing Progress and Impact

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**COLLECTIVE
IMPACT FORUM**





About the Collective Impact Forum

The Collective Impact Forum, an initiative of FSG and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, is a resource for people and organizations using the collective impact approach to address large-scale social and environmental problems. We aim to increase the effectiveness and adoption of collective impact by providing practitioners with access to the tools, training opportunities, and peer networks they need to be successful in their work. The Collective Impact Forum includes communities of practice, in-person convenings, and an online community and resource center launching in early 2014.

Learn more at collectiveimpactforum.org

About FSG

FSG is a nonprofit consulting firm specializing in strategy, evaluation, and research. Our international teams work across all sectors by partnering with corporations, foundations, school systems, nonprofits, and governments in every region of the globe. Our goal is to help companies and organizations—individually and collectively—achieve greater social change.

Working with many of the world's leading corporations, nonprofit organizations, and charitable foundations, FSG has completed more than 600 consulting engagements around the world, produced dozens of research reports, published influential articles in *Harvard Business Review* and *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, and has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Economist*, *Financial Times*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes*, and on NPR, amongst others. Learn more about FSG at www.fsg.org.

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Executive Summary

Overview of the Contents

As collective impact has gained traction across the globe, demand has grown for an effective approach to evaluating collective impact initiatives that meets the needs of various interested parties. Collective impact practitioners seek timely, high-quality data that enables reflection and informs strategic and tactical decision making. Funders and other supporters require an approach to performance measurement and evaluation that can offer

evidence of progress toward the initiative's goals at different points along the collective impact journey.

The *Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact* responds to these needs by offering practitioners, funders, and evaluators a way to think about, plan for, and implement different performance measurement and evaluation activities.

This guide's three goals are to:

- Discuss the role of continuous learning and adaptation in the collective impact context.
- Present a framework for how to approach performance measurement and evaluation.
- Offer practical guidance on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities at the initiative level, at different points in the initiative's lifetime.

The guide does not focus on evaluating individual organizations' programs.

Each part of the guide is available as a free download on the **Collective Impact Forum** (collectiveimpactforum.org), an online community and centralized set of resources on collective impact. We encourage all interested users to share their feedback and experiences with the guide in the Collective Impact Forum's online community. We are particularly interested in readers' reflections about how they have used

the guide, as well as their suggestions for additional questions, outcomes, or indicators that other practitioners may wish to consider. We also encourage readers to upload their own performance measurement and evaluation documents (e.g., findings, reports, presentations) to share with the field.



01

Learning and Evaluation in the Collective Impact Context

This section describes the importance of continuous learning and presents an evaluation framework to guide the design of different performance measurement, evaluation, and learning activities. The purpose of the framework is to help readers conceptualize an effective approach to performance measurement and evaluation, given their initiative's stage of development and maturity.



02

Assessing Progress and Impact

This section offers guidance on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities aimed at assessing an initiative's progress, effectiveness, and impact. It includes sample performance indicators, evaluation questions, and outcomes for collective impact initiatives in different stages of development, as well as advice on how to gather, make sense of, and use data to inform strategic decision making, how to communicate evaluation findings, how to choose and work with evaluators (when desired), and how to budget for evaluation.

This part of the guide also includes four mini-case studies.



03

Supplement: Sample Questions, Outcomes, and Indicators

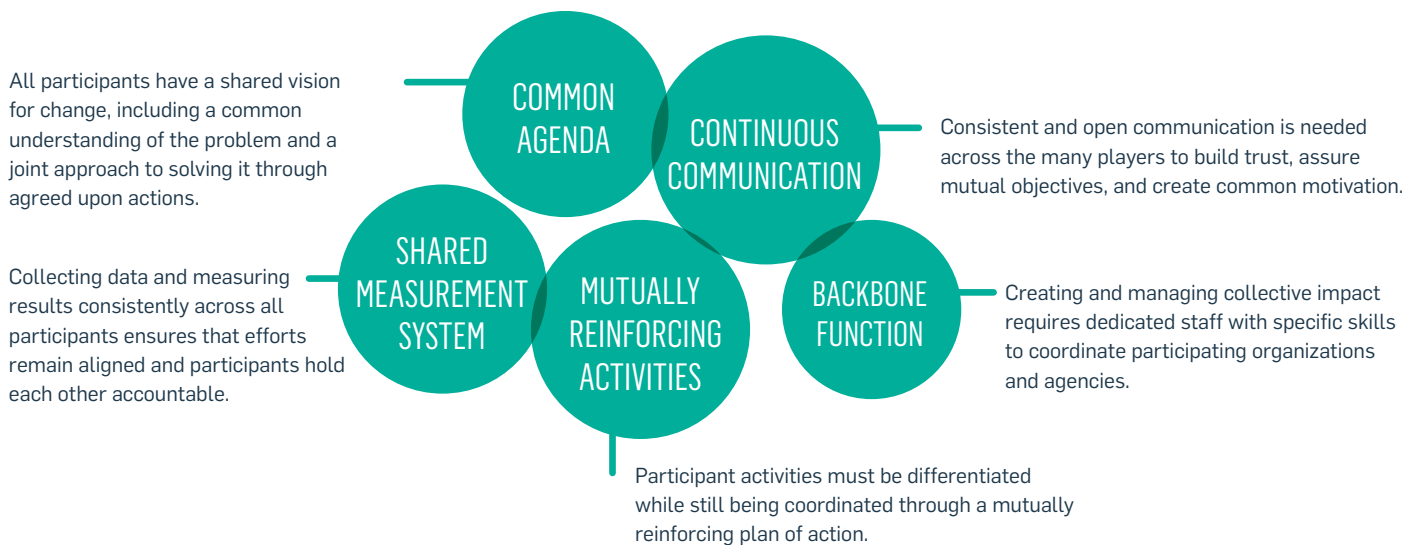
The final section includes a larger set of sample evaluation questions, outcomes, and indicators.



The guide is divided into three parts:

About Collective Impact

Collective impact (CI) occurs when a group of actors from different sectors commit to a common agenda for solving a complex social or environmental problem. More than simply a new way of collaborating, collective impact is a structured approach to problem solving that includes [five core conditions](#):



Once these conditions are in place, a CI initiative's work is organized through what we have termed "[cascading levels of collaboration](#)." As described in a recent post on the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* blog,¹ this loose structure typically includes the following:

An oversight group, often called a Steering Committee or Executive Committee, which consists of cross-sector CEO-level individuals from key organizations engaged with the issue, as well as representatives of the individuals touched by the issue. This group meets regularly to oversee the progress of the entire initiative.

Working groups focused on the initiative's primary strategies. (More complicated initiatives may have subgroups that take on specific objectives within the prioritized strategies.) Working groups typically develop their own plans for action organized around "moving the needle" on specific shared measures. Once plans are developed, the working groups come together on a regular basis to share data and stories about progress, as well as challenges and opportunities, and to communicate their activities to other partners affected by the issue, so that the circle

of alignment can grow. Although each working group meets separately, effective coordination by the backbone can ensure coordinated action among hundreds of organizations that simultaneously tackle many different dimensions of a complex issue.

The backbone function (as defined above) provides periodic and systematic assessments of progress attained by the various working groups and then synthesizes the results and presents them back to the oversight committee that carries the sustaining flame of the common agenda.

For more information about the collective impact change process, please visit the Collective Impact Forum at www.collectiveimpactforum.org.

Key Takeaways from Part Two

Part Two of the Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact offers practical advice on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities aimed at assessing an initiative's progress, effectiveness, and impact. Key takeaways from this part of the guide are:

1 Collective Impact partners should use a combination of different performance measurement and evaluation activities to assess and understand their progress as the initiative develops and matures. (Please refer to the Framework for Designing and Conducting Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts on the next page.)

In an initiative's *early years*, when partners are focused on design and implementation, the guide offers a set of sample *early performance indicators* that can help determine whether or not the initiative is on track for success. In addition, CI partners can use *developmental evaluation* to understand how the initiative is developing and adapting, what is working well, and what elements require greater attention, among other questions.

CASE STUDY: The Missouri Foundation for Health is using developmental evaluation to support the design and implementation of a new collective impact initiative focused on reducing rates of infant mortality.

In an initiative's *middle years*, when it should achieve some significant success related to its intermediate outcomes, CI partners can use data from the *shared measurement system* to determine if, where, and for whom the initiative is making progress. If CI partners wish to dig deeper into questions of how and why the initiative is making progress, they may wish to implement a *formative evaluation*. The guide offers a set of sample outcomes and indicators that CI partners may wish to use to measure their progress and evaluate their effectiveness in the middle years.

CASE STUDY: Partners for a Competitive Workforce's shared measurement system integrates data from participating providers and state workforce agencies, allowing the initiative's leaders to track progress over time, compare performance across providers, and identify opportunities for learning and continuous improvement.

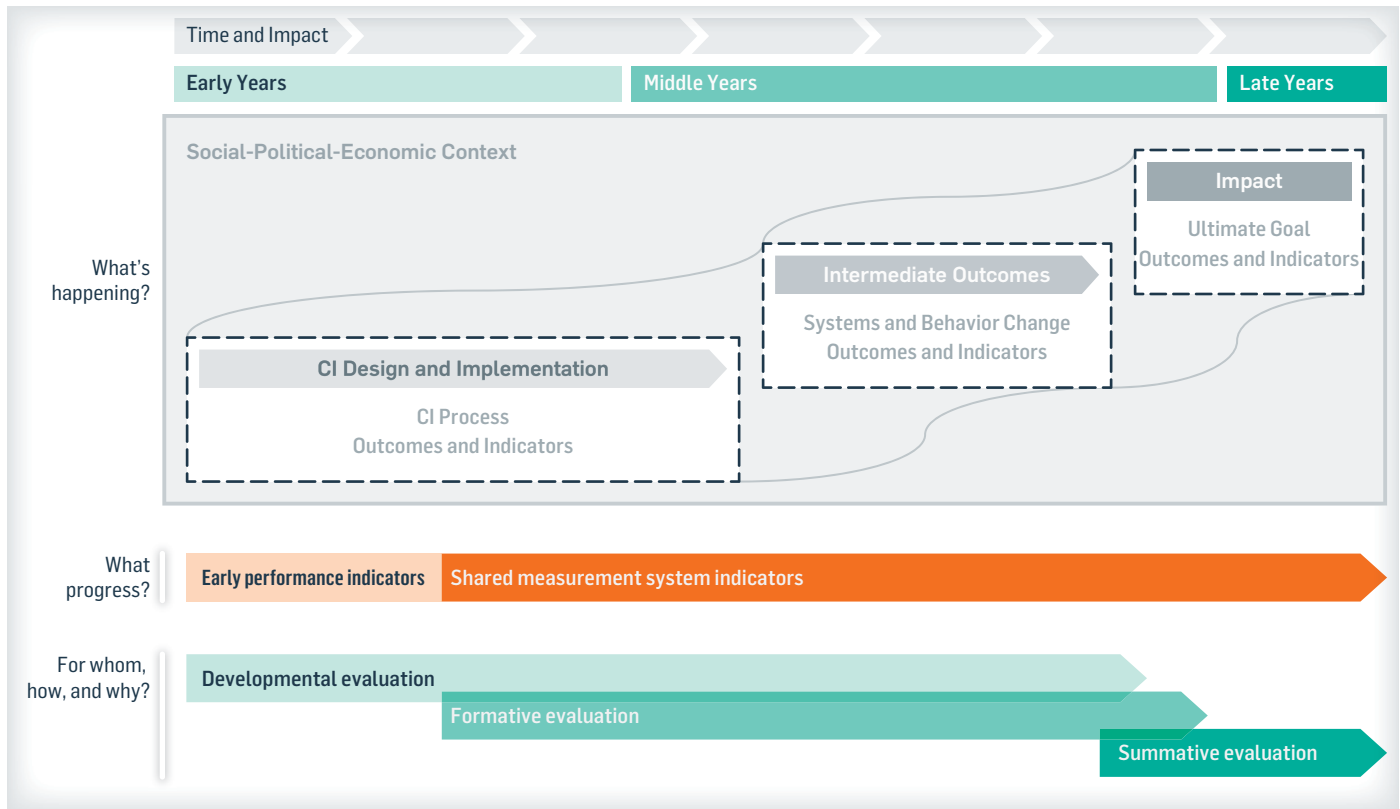
CASE STUDY: The Road Map Project in Seattle and King County, Washington, is using formative evaluation to better understand its effectiveness and impact to date, as well as to make well-informed adjustments to its strategy going forward.

In an initiative's *later years*, CI partners may seek to take stock of the initiative's accomplishments and understand its long-term impact on targeted issues or populations. Information from the *shared measurement system* can inform this learning process by contributing longitudinal data on the initiative's achievements and challenges. To better understand the extent to which and how the initiative's ultimate outcomes have been achieved, and the extent to which the CI effort contributed to these outcomes, CI partners may wish to commission a *summative evaluation*.

CASE STUDY: Vibrant Communities, a pan-Canadian collective impact initiative focused on capacity building for poverty reduction, used summative evaluation to understand its ultimate outcomes and discover lessons learned through its work.

Figure 1:

A Framework for Designing and Conducting Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts



For an expanded view of the “What’s happening?” section of the framework above, please refer to Figure 1 on page 12 of Part One of the Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact.

2. Collective Impact partners must be intentional about the process of collecting data, making sense of data, using data to inform decision making, and communicating findings.

When determining the best methods to use in gathering data (whether quantitative or qualitative) about an initiative's progress and impact, CI partners should carefully consider what they seek to learn and the extent to which each method can offer high quality, relevant data.

Once data have been collected and analyzed, CI partners should resist the urge to jump right to making recommendations. To take full advantage of the data's content, and to ensure that it contributes to real learning, CI partners

should invest sufficient time in analyzing data, interpreting it, and making judgments about it before developing recommendations.

Communicating the findings and recommendations from any learning activity requires CI partners to make several thoughtful and strategic choices, such as: what findings will be shared, with whom, when, and in what format. CI partners may find it helpful to consider these choices during the design phase of a performance measurement or evaluation activity.

3. There are many ways to manage the design and implementation of an initiative's performance measurement system and/or evaluation.

Collective impact partners can manage these processes in four ways:

- Develop an internal evaluation position (full or part-time) within the Backbone infrastructure to manage the CI initiative's performance measurement and evaluation activities (possibly including the shared measurement system).
- Rely on individuals who are part of the CI initiative to design and conduct the evaluation (internal team).

- Use an internal team but provide it with support from an external third-party evaluation consultant.
- Hire an outside, third-party evaluation consultant to design the evaluation in consultation with CI partners and then conduct the evaluation.

CI partners may also wish to combine internal and external resources by, for example, hiring a professional external evaluator to serve as a coach to an internal evaluation team.

4. Performance measurement and evaluation bring indisputable value to CI initiatives and should be given sufficient financial support.

While it is difficult to predict the size of an appropriate evaluation budget for different types of CI initiatives in different stages of development, the value these evaluations bring to CI practitioners and their funders is significant. We strongly encourage CI partners to carefully plan for how performance measurement and evaluation can support their work, and we urge all funders to embed support for evaluation into every CI initiative's budget from the very beginning.

Part Two:

Assessing Progress and Impact

- THIS SECTION:**
1. Presents a more detailed evaluation framework focused on the use of different approaches to performance measurement and evaluation at different points in a CI initiative's lifetime.
 2. Shares four mini-case studies of how CI initiatives have used performance measurement and evaluation to assess progress, inform decision making, and evaluate impact.
 3. Offers practical guidance on how to plan for and implement a CI evaluation, including how to gather, make sense of, and use data to inform decision making, how to communicate findings, how to choose and work with evaluators, and how to budget for evaluation.
-

Introduction

Part One of this guide introduced the reader to the three phases of a CI initiative's change process and explored the ways in which performance measurement, evaluation, and learning activities can support CI partners in making decisions throughout an initiative's lifetime. The purpose of Part Two of the guide is to offer CI practitioners, funders, and evaluators detailed guidance on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities. This section of the guide aims to answer such questions as:

- How can I know if the initiative is making good progress, especially if it has not yet begun to achieve its interim or ultimate outcomes?
 - What outcomes and indicators should I consider using to track the initiative's progress or evaluate its effectiveness at different points in time?
 - How can I better understand why some of the indicators in our shared measurement system are or are not moving?
 - What resources (human, financial, or other) does the initiative need to ensure high-quality performance measurement and evaluation?
- and indicators for CI initiatives in different stages of development, as well as mini-case studies that illustrate how four diverse CI initiatives have used performance measurement and evaluation to support their work. Finally, this part of the guide offers advice on how to gather, make sense of, and use data to inform strategic decision making, how to communicate evaluation findings, how to choose and work with evaluators (when desired), and how to budget for evaluation.

To answer these questions, Part Two of the guide includes sample evaluation questions, outcomes,

Collective Impact Initiatives Often Require Multiple Approaches to Performance Measurement and Evaluation

The question of how to assess the progress and impact of a CI initiative is inextricably linked to data availability and to the question of what information CI partners need to make good decisions. Of course, there are many important decisions to be made over the lifetime of a CI initiative—for example, decisions regarding the initiative’s structure or strategic direction, resource allocation and communications, and specific tactics and activities, among others. As a result, a CI initiative’s approach to using various performance measurement and evaluation activities will likely evolve over its lifetime.

Figure 1, the Framework for Designing and Conducting Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts, illustrates at a conceptual level several different approaches to performance measurement and evaluation that may be relevant at different stages of an initiative’s development.

The orange and teal bars running along the bottom of the graphic reference **two approaches to performance measurement**: early indicators of progress and the initiative’s shared measurement system. Both of these approaches offer CI partners useful data on the initiative’s progress. The **shared measurement system**, as described in Part One of this guide, uses a set of common indicators to track an initiative’s progress toward its desired outcomes. This information becomes invaluable to CI partners once the core conditions of their initiative are in place and practitioners have begun to implement their programs and strategies—in other words, when CI partners can reasonably expect to see progress toward intermediate or ultimate outcomes.

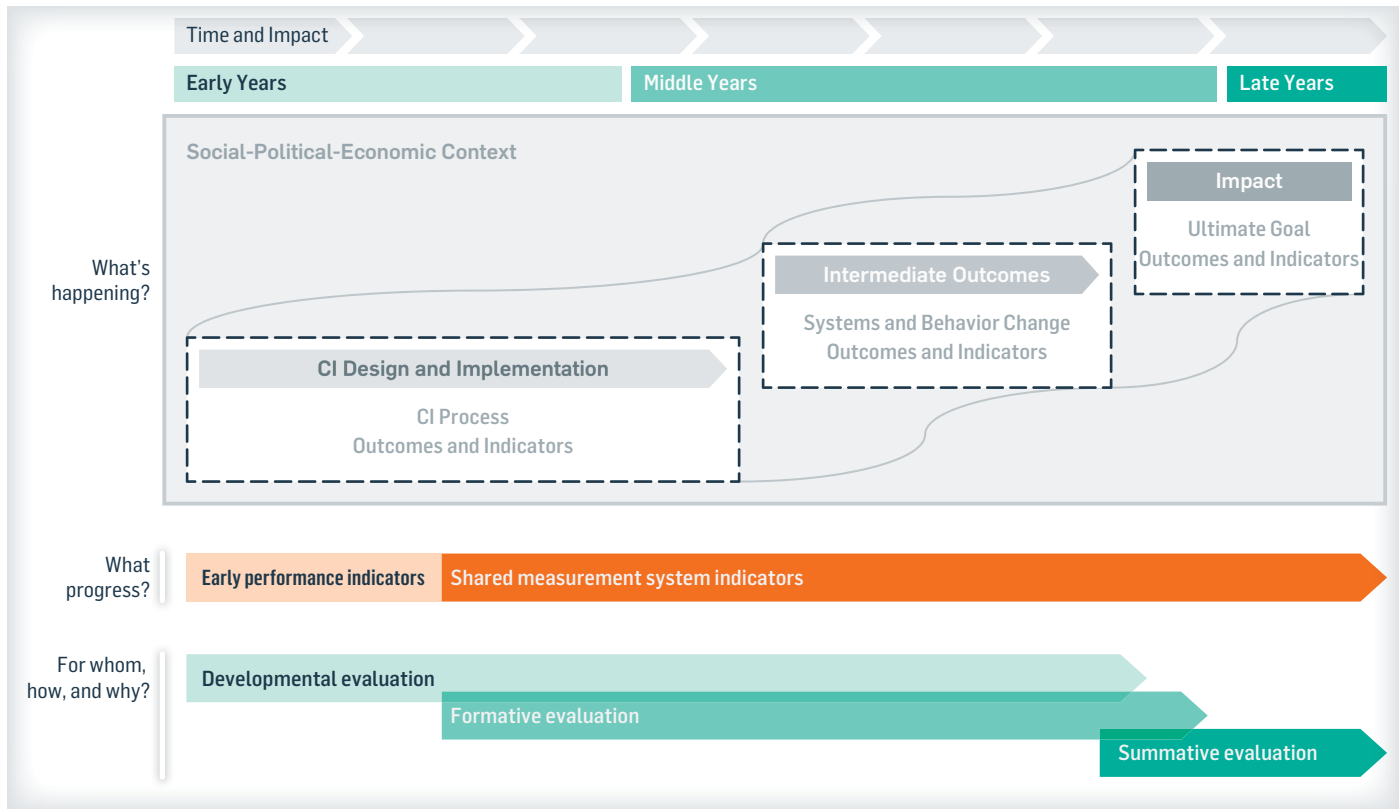
In the initiative’s first two or three years, though, it is often unreasonable to expect to see progress against the indicators featured in the shared measurement system. During this time, CI partners are focused internally on building

relationships and designing, developing, and implementing the initiative’s infrastructure (e.g., strategic action plans, working group structures, even the shared measurement system itself). To aid partners in assessing their initiative’s progress during these early years, this guide offers some **sample early performance indicators** focused on the quality of an initiative’s design and implementation.

The question of how to assess the progress and impact of a CI initiative is inextricably linked to the question of what information CI partners need to make good decisions.

Figure 1:

A Framework for Designing and Conducting Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts



For an expanded view of the “What’s happening?” section of the framework above, please refer to Figure 1 on page 12 of Part One of the Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact.

A strong performance measurement system offers CI partners access to timely data about if, where, and for whom a CI initiative is making progress. While these data are invaluable to CI practitioners and funders, most CI partners will also need to know how, to what extent, and why the initiative is or isn't progressing. By providing data that helps answer those critical questions, **evaluation serves as an important complement to performance measurement.** Depending on an initiative's stage of development, CI partners may wish to use different approaches to evaluation, including developmental evaluation, formative evaluation, or summative evaluation (see Table 1). Each of these approaches can help frame and focus an evaluation.

The three evaluation approaches are not mutually exclusive. Given the non-linear nature of the CI change process, it is likely, perhaps even inevitable, that certain aspects of an initiative will warrant a developmental evaluation at the same time that other aspects warrant a formative evaluation. For example, an initiative in its middle years may be ready for a formative evaluation of one or more of its intermediate outcome areas, while its relatively new shared measurement system is better suited to a developmental evaluation.

Therefore, at any given time, an evaluation could include both developmental and formative evaluation activities.

	Developmental Evaluation EARLY – MIDDLE YEARS	Formative Evaluation MIDDLE YEARS	Summative Evaluation LATE YEARS	Table 1: Three Approaches to Evaluation
Stage of CI Development	CI initiative is exploring and in development	CI initiative is evolving and being refined	CI initiative is stable and well-established	
What's Happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CI partners are assembling the key elements of their initiative, developing action plans, and exploring different strategies and activities There is a degree of uncertainty about what will work and how New questions, challenges, and opportunities are emerging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The initiative's key elements are in place and partners are implementing agreed upon strategies and activities Outcomes are becoming more predictable The initiative's context is increasingly well-known and understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The initiative's activities are well established and are not changing Implementers have significant experience and an increasing amount of certainty about "what works" The initiative is ready for a determination of impact, merit, value, or significance 	
Key Strategic Question	What needs to happen?	How well is it working?	What difference did it make?	

Selecting Evaluation Questions

While the *type of evaluation* chosen for a CI initiative is influenced mainly by the initiative's stage of development, the *scope and focus* of the evaluation are determined by partners' most pressing information needs and questions. A good evaluation will provide detailed answers to these critical questions when they matter most. Focusing evaluation in this way requires discipline: partners should remember that more is not always better. By concentrating on "need to know" questions versus those that are just "nice to know," partners can ensure that their evaluation will provide the actionable guidance they need to make tangible improvements in their work. (It is worth keeping in mind that the time and resources required to complete an evaluation grow in proportion to the number of questions that are posed.)

Good evaluation questions are typically open-ended, allowing evaluators to explore a wide range of potential factors, influences, and drivers. And just as any strategy includes both high-level goals and more specific objectives, evaluations often include both strategic questions, which reflect the evaluation's purpose and scope, and more precise, targeted questions, which are linked to specific outcomes and measurable indicators.

Collective impact evaluations focus on different strategic questions depending on the initiative's stage of development. More advanced CI initiatives, which typically include multiple working groups and coordinated streams of activity, may find it useful to explore all three types of questions, while CI initiatives that are just starting out may choose to focus on contextual and/or implementation questions.

Once CI partners have identified the high-level, overarching questions that will guide their evaluation, the **next step** is to determine the **outcomes and associated indicators** that will be used to evaluate progress. These outcomes and indicators are tied to specific learning questions, as the Supplement shows.

Good evaluation questions are typically open-ended, allowing evaluators to explore a wide range of potential factors, influences, and drivers.

Table 2:
Sample Strategic Questions

1. Questions about a collective impact initiative's context explore how external conditions or factors influence a CI initiative's design or progress.

Sample questions in this category include:

- To what extent is there a sense of urgency around the issue, champions who are willing to make a commitment to addressing the issue through a collective impact approach, and funding to support the work?
- To what extent and in what ways does the CI initiative tap into the strengths and assets of the community(ies)?
- What cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors influence the design and implementation of the CI initiative? How and why do these factors influence the progress of the CI initiative?

2. Questions about a collective impact initiative's design and implementation are more specific and zero in on the effectiveness of key elements in the CI change process.

Sample questions include:

- To what extent and in what ways is the CI initiative designed to incorporate all five of the core conditions?
- Which of the conditions are gaining the most momentum, and where is the initiative experiencing significant challenges?
- To what extent and in what ways does the CI initiative evolve in response to progress or challenges in achieving outcomes? Why does it respond and adapt in specific ways?

3. Questions about the collective impact initiative's outcomes and impact explore the extent to which and the ways in which a CI initiative has achieved its goals and affected people and systems in its target geography.

Sample questions in this category include:

- To what extent and in what ways do the various systems (e.g., education, health) make different decisions about policies, programs, and the use of resources as they relate to the goals of the CI initiative?
- To what extent has the CI initiative achieved its ultimate outcomes? How and why have these occurred?
- What aspects of the collective impact work had the greatest impact on the initiative's success (or failure)?
- What difference has the CI initiative made on its stakeholders and their capacity to address complex problems?

Additional sample strategic questions are included in the Supplement.

Assessing Progress Throughout an Initiative's Lifetime

Early Years

The early years of a CI initiative—which may span one, two, or even three years—are often characterized by a high degree of energy, an emphasis on relationship building, and a focus on establishing the initiative’s core structure and processes. During this time, it can be challenging for CI practitioners and funders alike to know if they are “on track” for success—in other words, if their initiative’s design and early implementation are likely to lead to progress on their desired outcomes.

Our work with dozens of CI initiatives across the country suggests that there are some important **early performance indicators** that CI partners can track during this start-up phase. These early

indicators track a number of “success factors” related to the design and implementation of the CI initiative. Table 2 offers a few sample indicators across the various elements of the CI design and implementation process, focused on areas where the CI initiative should see some evidence of progress in its first **12 to 18 months**. (The Supplement includes a longer list of sample early performance indicators.) Note that unlike most indicators in an initiative’s shared measurement system, the majority of the indicators below are qualitative and will require interviews, surveys, focus groups, or other qualitative data gathering methods.

Table 3:
Sample Early Performance Indicators of Effective Design and Implementation

CI ELEMENT	INDICATORS
Common Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative’s Steering Committee (or other leadership structure) includes voices from all relevant sectors and constituencies • Members of the target population help shape the common agenda • Partners and the broader community understand and can articulate the problem • Geographical boundaries and population targets are clear for all partners • Partners use data (qualitative and quantitative) to inform selection of strategies and actions
Backbone Infrastructure (BBI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative’s Steering Committee (SC) or other leadership structure includes a diverse set of voices and perspectives from multiple, relevant sectors and constituencies • Backbone staff (BB staff) are respected by important partners and external stakeholders • Partners look to the BBI and SC for initiative support, strategic guidance, and leadership • BBI provides project management support, including monitoring progress toward goals and connecting partners to discuss opportunities, challenges, gaps, and overlaps • BBI convenes partners and key external stakeholders to ensure the alignment of activities and pursue new opportunities • SC regularly reviews SMS data on progress toward goals and uses it to inform strategic decision making

CI ELEMENT	INDICATORS
Shared Measurement System (SMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners understand the value of the shared measurement system Partners understand how they will participate in the shared measurement system A participatory process is used to determine a common set of indicators and data collection methods Partners agree to a data sharing agreement that supports ongoing collaboration The system includes a common set of indicators and data collection methods that can provide timely evidence of (a lack of) progress toward the CI initiative's outcomes Partners commit to collecting the data as defined in the data plan Partners know how to use the SMS Partners contribute high-quality data on a common set of indicators in a timely and consistent manner
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An action plan clearly specifies the activities that different partners have committed to implementing Working groups (or other collaborative structures) coordinate activities in alignment with the plan of action Partners have clear approaches/goals for their own contribution to their working group Partners understand the roles of other working groups and how these support the common agenda Partners' activities change to better align with the plan of action
Continuous Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working groups (or other collaborative structures) have regular meetings Members of working groups or other collaborative structures attend and participate actively in meetings Partners communicate and coordinate efforts regularly (with and independently of backbone staff) The CI initiative engages external stakeholders in regular meetings and integrates their feedback into the overall strategy
Initiative Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient operating support is available to enable the initiative's backbone infrastructure to fulfill its responsibilities CI initiative has influencers and champions that command the respect of a broader set of stakeholders and can bring stakeholders to the table CI initiative has supporters who can champion the strategy with the broader community Leadership of the CI initiative comes from multiple sectors that are able to shift both public and private funds
Learning Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning structures and processes are embedded in the work of the CI initiative Decision-making processes are open and transparent Partners feel included in major decision-making processes Partners regularly seek feedback and advice from one another Partners trust each other People of different cultures and backgrounds feel respected and heard within the CI initiative

Table 3:
Sample Early Performance Indicators of Effective Design and Implementation
 (continued)

Guidance on Selecting Outcomes and Indicators

Determining the outcomes and indicators an evaluation will focus on is one of the most important steps in the evaluation design process. Typically, each outcome is linked to multiple indicators, providing evaluators with the flexibility to choose the most relevant and cost-effective indicators and enabling CI partners to develop a robust understanding of their progress toward achieving each outcome.

This guide offers many sample outcomes and indicators that CI partners can use to assess their progress, effectiveness, and impact (see Tables 2 and 3A-3E, and the Supplement). We do not advise CI partners to attempt to track *all* of the outcomes and indicators identified in this document. Partners should seek to evaluate only those outcomes and indicators that will provide actionable information about the initiative's progress and boost partners' confidence in moving the initiative forward. (It is worth keeping in mind that the time and resources required to complete an evaluation grow in proportion to the number of outcomes and indicators that are explored.)

The following criteria may help narrow down the list of outcomes and indicators to focus on:

1. **Timing**—Is this the right time to measure this outcome/indicator? Is it likely that we will learn something about this at this stage of the CI initiative?
2. **Feasibility**—How easy will it be to collect data on this outcome/indicator? Are the data sources accessible?
3. **Capacity**—Do we have the personnel and financial resources to commit to collecting data on this outcome/indicator?

The data gathered on these early performance indicators can help CI partners understand the progress they have made toward the creation of a high-performing CI initiative. To complement this data and provide deeper insight into the quality and effectiveness of the initiative's early efforts, CI partners may wish to undertake a developmental evaluation.² This type of evaluation can help CI partners explore the following types of questions:

1. What is developing or emerging as the CI initiative takes shape?
2. What about the CI process merits more attention or changes?
3. How should the CI initiative adapt in response to changing circumstances?
4. What seems to be working well and where is there early progress?
5. How are relationships developing among CI partners?
6. How are various parts of the system (different partners) or the larger environment responding to the collective impact initiative?
7. What have emerged as some unintended effects or consequences of the CI initiative?

Answers to these high-level questions can provide information to help partners learn and make decisions in the very early stages of their CI work. Developmental evaluation requires a very hands-on approach; working closely with those who are designing and implementing the CI effort, developmental evaluators are responsible for collecting data through informal and formal means, quickly analyzing it, and sharing the results with stakeholders. The best developmental evaluators are flexible and responsive “critical friends” who help CI implementers discern what they need to learn more about, collect that information, and facilitate learning from the findings in “real-time.” This process can offer funders and other CI partners important insights into an initiative's responsiveness to changing conditions, the speed with which the effort is gaining traction, and CI partners' success in learning from their practice.

How Developmental Evaluation Is Supporting the Launch of a Collective Impact Initiative to Address Infant Mortality

Every year in the state of Missouri, approximately 600 infants do not live to see their 365th day.³ Infant mortality is a particularly significant challenge among the state's large African American population, where the rate of infant mortality (11.8 per 1,000 live births) is double the rate among non-Hispanic white infants (5.9).⁴ Two areas of the state that have disproportionately high concentrations of African American residents thus account for one third of all infant deaths. These areas are the city of St. Louis and an area called the Bootheel, which includes the state's six southeastern-most counties.⁵

The Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) is an independent philanthropic foundation dedicated to improving the health of the uninsured and underserved in 84 Missouri counties and the city of St. Louis. In 2012, MFH prioritized infant mortality as one of its four initiatives and decided to focus its efforts in two distinct regions: St. Louis (an urban area) and the Bootheel (a rural region).

The need to address the rate of infant mortality in these two communities was already well-known; many local nonprofits, hospitals, universities, and other institutions already administered small-scale programs. The problem, of course, was that these many stand-alone programs did not add up to substantial change. **MFH decided that it needed a new approach and committed to championing the design and launch of collective impact initiatives in both regions.** In the Bootheel area, MFH's first step was to identify two organizations involved in infant mortality and child and maternal health, and work with them to facilitate a collective impact planning process. MFH encouraged the two organizations, which had a history of working on the

same issues in the same place but not necessarily in the same way, to co-create the emergent CI initiative's backbone infrastructure and begin laying the groundwork for the development of a Common Agenda.*

To support its grantees in developing a CI initiative, MFH has made available a range of resources, including hands-on support from the MFH staff; a public health expert who offers content-based technical assistance; a learning coach who provides training, workshops, and site visits to build grantees' skills, capacities, and knowledge base; and two developmental evaluation (DE) coaches from the Spark Policy Institute and the Center for Evaluation Innovation. **The DE coaches support MFH program staff members and grantees in using DE to improve the design and implementation of their emergent CI initiatives.** The foundation decided to use DE coaches rather than dedicated evaluators because it wished to build the capacity of MFH staff and Bootheel grantees to use DE on their own in the initiative's later years.

The DE coaches began by offering training on the developmental approach to evaluation: what kinds of questions it can answer, how data collection works, and how findings are fed back into decision making. They also provided examples of DE in action in other CI initiatives. They conducted a quick survey of the backbone staff during the training to understand the staff's readiness for developmental evaluation. This information helped to guide the overall DE approach.

Next, the coaches worked with the backbone organizations to uncover their first learning

* Note: MFH also provided a planning grant to an existing organization in St. Louis to support similar activities. There are important differences in the design of the two infant mortality initiatives, and, thus, their approach to developmental evaluation. For purposes of clarity and brevity, this vignette focuses mainly on the work in the Bootheel region.

How Developmental Evaluation Is Supporting the Launch of a Collective Impact Initiative to Address Infant Mortality

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question. As is typical for many CI initiatives in their very early stages, the grantees decided to focus on better understanding how key contextual factors and cultural dynamics influenced their problem definition and strategy development. **Their learning question was: “What does the problem of infant mortality look like from the perspective of different stakeholders in our region, including within the two different grantee organizations?”**

By exploring this question through DE, grantees hope to uncover some of the tensions that underlie their efforts to address infant mortality (e.g., expectations of mothers and medical care providers, racial disparities in access to and quality of prenatal care) and grapple with the implications of these tensions for the design of their collective impact initiative. The backbone organizations generated this question early in December and requested the beginnings of an answer by early January so that they could inform a major planning retreat. This episode highlights one of the evaluation needs often seen in a CI initiative—the ability to move quickly, but still collect meaningful and accurate information.

The data collection methods used for this learning cycle include surveys of staff at each Bootheel grantee organization, as well as interviews with a diverse range of key informants in the region. These interviews will seek to understand stakeholders' perceptions of the factors that contribute to high infant mortality rates, the barriers that limit progress, and the relative importance of infant mortality compared to other public health issues in the region.

This approach to uncovering new questions and answering them within the timeline needed for decisions will be repeated at least quarterly—more often, if needed. While the developmental evaluation coaches conduct the first round of data collection and analysis, the evaluation will gradually transition so that the grantees take responsibility for collecting and using their own data with coaching support. Even in the first round, three grantee staff members participated in designing the survey and interpreting the results. They also presented the findings to the rest of the backbone staff. The coaches helped each participant prepare and discussed the experience with the foundation staff and grantees, but were

not part of the process of presenting and using the findings. This practice allowed the grantees and foundation to take ownership of the evaluation process while still receiving the support they needed to use developmental evaluation in the early stages of their CI initiative.

Participants hope that this structured approach to understanding and managing perceptions (both among grantee staff members and among external stakeholders) will help build trust and open lines of communication, which are critical to the initiative's long-term success. They further hope that the first DE cycle will improve staff and grantees' understanding of what DE is and how it can help inform and improve the emerging initiative's work going forward.

For more information:

About MFH's work in infant mortality:
www.mffh.org

About the Center for Evaluation Innovation:
www.evaluationinnovation.org/

About the Spark Policy Institute:
www.sparkpolicy.com/

Sources:

- Interview with Tanya Beer, Associate Director, The Center for Evaluation Innovation, December 2013.
- Correspondence with Kathleen Holmes, Program Director, Missouri Foundation for Health, February 2014.

Middle Years

A CI initiative’s middle years are a critically important time in which the initiative should achieve significant successes regarding its intermediate outcomes. These outcomes, related to changes in patterns of behavior and systems, serve as the foundation for the initiative’s pursuit of its ultimate population-level outcomes. As a result, some CI initiatives begin to achieve traction toward ultimate outcomes during these middle years.

Tables 4A–4E offer a set of sample intermediate outcomes that CI initiatives may seek to achieve in these years and suggest some indicators that CI partners can use to track progress toward these outcomes. (The Supplement offers a longer list of sample intermediate outcomes and indicators.)

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
Formal actors and organizations demonstrate increased responsiveness to community needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal actors/organizations better understand the population they serve and are better able to address their needs The population or issue(s) targeted by the CI initiative are viewed as a priority among system actors The population or issue(s) targeted by the CI initiative receive greater attention from system actors

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
The CI initiative is influencing changes in awareness/knowledge related to the desired behavior change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals report increased awareness of the issues surrounding the desired behavior change Individuals report improved knowledge of the desired behavior change

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
Social and cultural norms that govern individual behaviors evolve to support the behavior change goals of the CI initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media messages support desired behavior targeted by the CI initiative (PSAs, television/radio/newspaper messages, blogs) Social media messages support desired behavior targeted by the CI initiative (e.g. messages, conversations, or campaigns on social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, or Pinterest) The public narrative surrounding the targeted issue area/system includes language and messaging that support the goals of the CI initiative; formal actors/organizations better understand the population they serve and are better able to address their needs

Table 4a:

Sample Outcome and Indicators Related to Changes in Professional Practice

Table 4b:

Sample Outcome and Indicators Related to Changes in Individual Behavior

Table 4c:

Sample Outcome and Indicators Related to Changes in Cultural Norms

Table 4d:

Sample Outcome and Indicators Related to Changes in Funding Flows

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
Public funding in the targeted issue area/system targeted by the CI initiative is increasingly aligned with the goals of the CI initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall public funding (federal, state, or local government) for the targeted issue area or system has increased• Existing public resources are directed toward evidence-based strategies in the targeted issue area/system• New public resources are committed to evidence-based strategies in the target issue area/system• Public funding is increasingly designed to allow for program innovation and experimentation in the targeted issue area/system

Table 4e:

Sample Outcome and Indicators Related to Changes in Public Policy

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
The CI initiative is strengthening the base of support for CI policy goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased public involvement in an issue• Increased action taken by champions of an issue• Increased breadth of partners in support of an issue• Increased media coverage• Increased awareness of the CI's messages among public and key policy stakeholders• Public opinion changes to support of CI messages/goals

During these pivotal middle years—which may span an initiative's third or fourth year through its sixth, seventh, tenth, or twelfth, depending on its scale and scope—CI partners can use data from the shared measurement system to determine if, where, and for whom the initiative is making progress. For example, Partners for a Competitive Workforce (PCW) uses its shared measurement to track progress toward its ultimate goal of boosting the regional employment rate.

How PCW Uses its Shared Measurement System

Partners for a Competitive Workforce (PCW) is a workforce development initiative in the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana tri-state region. The initiative's mission is to meet employer demand by enhancing the skills of its current and future workforce. PCW has been charged with leading the effort to meet the region's "Bold Goal" for 90 percent of the regional labor force to be gainfully employed by 2020. Partners in the initiative include employers, chambers of commerce, workforce boards, educational institutions, service providers, labor, and other community volunteers. The initiative is funded by a range of local, state, and national organizations, including the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, the United Way, Proctor & Gamble, and the National Fund for Workforce Solutions.

PCW evolved into a collective impact initiative through a long history of collaborative, cross-sector efforts to address regional workforce challenges. Initially launched in 2008, the initiative has prompted significant changes in workforce-related systems, such as streamlining funding flows and improving data-sharing policies (see evaluation framework). PCW has also made progress toward the ultimate goal of boosting the regional employment rate. Over the past six years, it has trained more than 7,800 people for in-demand jobs. Of these, more than 6,300 subsequently found a job and nearly 4,600 kept their job for at least a year.

The Shared Measurement System at Work

The development and ongoing use of the initiative's shared measurement system (SMS) has been a critical component of its success to date. The bones of the system were put in place by the Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment in 2007, using the G*STARS platform. Today, about 30 regional service providers participate in the SMS, directly inputting data on their clients' demographics, as well as the types of services offered to each client. In addition, PCW established data sharing agreements with government agencies in Ohio and Kentucky, allowing the initiative to access state unemployment insurance data. This data, which includes information on individuals' employment status and current income, enables PCW to track key outcomes, including hourly wage and job retention.* The system currently includes more than 100,000 unique client records.

The SMS includes three categories of performance measurement:⁶

- **Demographics:** Age, gender, race, county, zip code, barriers,** education level, criminal record
- **Services:** Total served, intake organization, and services provided (e.g., occupational training, supportive services, job search, soft skills training)
- **Outcomes:** Credentials, job placement, industry of placement, hourly wage, 6-month retention

PCW's former executive director, Ross Meyer, describes the purpose of the initiative's shared measurement system as "understand[ing] overall effectiveness and gaps in services.... [T]he point is to generate *learning* so we can work toward our collective goals."⁷

* Note: Due to state privacy policies, PCW has only indirect access to this data. (In Ohio, only the initiative's evaluator has direct access to the data. In Kentucky, G*STARS's provider, AGS, pulls the relevant information from the state's database into the initiative's shared measurement system.)

** This category includes a list of twelve possible "barriers to employment" that all providers track.

How PCW Uses its Shared Measurement System

continued from previous page

The data collected through the shared measurement system allows partners to reflect on questions such as:

- Who is being served (i.e., demographics and location)?
- Where are the gaps in services?
- Which barriers are clients facing?
- Which barriers are associated with lower placement/retention rates?
- Which services are associated with better placement/retention rates?

Since participating providers all input the same types of data, staff members at PCW's backbone organization are able to compare providers' performance and facilitate information-sharing. Janice Urbanik, PCW's current executive director, described how access to comparative performance data helped improve performance among a group of six providers focused on the construction trades:

"I was able to generate graphs on measures such as number of participants and completion and employment rates across agencies. That was a really powerful tool because it showed all of us which organizations were performing well and which ones were struggling. And that provided an incentive to the lower performing providers to figure out how to do their work better." ⁸

PCW supported this peer learning process by convening participating providers on a regular basis to reflect on their work and share information and experiences. Urbanik notes that this process of evidence-based continuous improvement is critical to PCW's ability to drive community-level change.

PCW's shared measurement system has been operational for several years, but it has not remained static. Partners continue to refine the definitions of key terms and look for opportunities to improve consistency in data collection and reporting. In addition, PCW is actively working on the development of a dashboard reporting mechanism, which would allow the initiative to quickly and simply communicate its progress to external stakeholders.

Lessons Learned

Ross Meyer has referred to the development of the shared measurement system as a "major challenge" for the initiative.⁹ This is not unusual among CI initiatives, because the process of identifying shared measures often reveals important differences in partners' goals and definitions of success.

In the PCW context, many organizations in the region, including funders, initially used different approaches to measuring key workforce outcomes. (For example, some organizations measured job retention at three months, others at six months, and still others at a year or more.) "The key [to launching the shared measurement system]," Meyer notes, "was coming to agreement on the outcomes and definitions we wanted to track.... The actual technical side was much less of a challenge."¹⁰ Encouraging funders to adopt common measures was a particularly important step, since their reporting requirements had a trickle-down effect on providers' and other partners' data collection efforts.

For more information:

About Partners for a Competitive Workforce (PCW): www.competitiveworkforce.com

About FSG Case Study on the development of PCW: www.fsg.org/casestudiesCI

Sources:

- "Collecting and Using Common Data to Drive System-Wide Continuous Improvement." Presentation by Sherry Kelley Marshall and Ross Meyer to National Association of Workforce Boards. March 2012.
- Interview with Ross Meyer, Former Executive Director, PCW, June 2013.
- Interview with Janice Urbanik, Current Executive Director, PCW, January 2014.

CI partners who seek to better understand how or why their initiative is advancing toward its goals may wish to conduct an evaluation to complement the data collected through their shared measurement system. During an initiative's middle years, it is likely that an evaluation would include both developmental and formative approaches. The developmental evaluation would help explore newer aspects of the initiative (e.g., emergent strategies or structures). The formative evaluation would help CI partners refine, improve, and fine-tune their work by exploring questions like:

1. How can the CI initiative enhance what is working well and improve what is not?
2. How well is the CI initiative adapting in response to changing circumstances and what can it do to adapt more effectively?
3. What outcomes are being achieved, for whom, and at what level?
4. What effects or changes are beginning to show up in the various systems?
5. What is getting in the way of future progress and how can this be managed or addressed?
6. What are the implications of what we are learning for the design of our shared measurement system (e.g., should we refine, eliminate, or add indicators)?

The process of implementing a formative evaluation sometimes involves engaging CI partners directly in data collection and other evaluative activities. Other CI initiatives choose to hire a third-party evaluator to provide additional expertise or capacity and/or to serve as a neutral observer. The primary roles of the formative evaluator are: to work collaboratively with CI partners to determine the most pressing evaluation questions, using relevant and credible data collection methods; to work with the partners to make sense of the findings; and to communicate and report the findings and key insights using multiple methods with various audiences. Depending on the needs and interests of the CI partners, learning conversations around the evaluation findings typically occur two to three times per year.

How the Road Map Project Is Using Performance Measurement and Formative Evaluation

The Road Map Project (RMP) is a collective impact initiative aimed at dramatically improving student achievement in the low-income communities of South Seattle and South King County, Washington. Launched in June 2010, the initiative's goal is to double the number of students who are on track to graduate from college or earn a career credential by 2020, and places a specific focus on closing the achievement gap for low income students and students of color. The initiative is now in its third year and is transitioning from a focus on initiative design and implementation to a focus on early systems and behavior change outcomes.

The Road Map Project has carefully woven performance measurement and evaluation into its approach from the beginning. Within months of starting up, the initiative had organized four working groups (Early Learning, Community Supports, K–12 Education, and Postsecondary Education) tasked with engaging community members and reviewing existing research to identify a set of indicators for the initiative's shared measurement system (SMS). Once the indicators were selected, the RMP commissioned a Baseline Report to provide "a point of departure" against which project members could measure their progress on key indicators. The report was published in November 2011.

The following year, the initiative published its first annual report card, which shared "the most recent data on the project's Indicators of Student Success and, where possible, [showed] trends and results relative to baselines and targets."¹¹ The report revealed a decline in third grade reading levels across all racial and ethnic groups—a signal to the Road Map Project of the need to intensify efforts to improve rates of early literacy.

As the Road Map initiative entered its third year, one of its primary funders, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, together with leaders from the Community Center for Education Results (CCER), a nonprofit that performs the Road Map Project's backbone function, decided to begin a three-year *formative evaluation*. The evaluation was designed to complement the initiative's SMS by helping Road Map Project partners understand *how* and *why* their efforts were making a difference, as well as to uncover actionable insights that could inform future decisions. The RMP hired Education Northwest, an applied research and evaluation firm, to design and implement the evaluation.

The following questions guide the evaluation:

1. In what ways does the RMP use its core strategies (data mobilization, public will and commitment, and aligned funding) to catalyze organization and systems change in the region?
2. How is the RMP being implemented?
Sample sub-questions include:
 - What roles do community-based organizations, educational institutions, public sector agencies, business partners, and community members play in the RMP?
 - What specific action plans are being developed and deployed by the implementation work groups and the RMP as a whole?
 - Are sufficient supports (through communication, facilitation, etc.) provided for the work to occur and to develop networks and collaboration?
3. What changes are occurring across the South Seattle and South King County region and within individual organizations as a result of the RMP?

Sample sub-questions include:

- Are policies and actions more aligned—in school and out—to RMP outcome indicators and long-term goals?
 - Are public and private funders allocating resources and deploying funding mechanisms in different ways? If so how?
4. What progress has been made on the outcome indicators and the overall attainment goals of the RMP? In closing achievement gaps across the region?

To answer these questions, Education Northwest collected quantitative and qualitative information using a variety of evaluation methods and approaches. First, the team conducted online surveys with RMP's organizational partners (defined as individuals who are engaged directly in the RMP work) and with RMP's broader stakeholders (defined as individuals who are less directly involved but have an interest in the initiative's outcomes). The team also conducted interviews with nearly 50 people who represented different RMP stakeholder groups (e.g., advocacy, funder, early learning, K–12). Finally, members of the evaluation team attended various RMP meetings throughout the data collection period.

The evaluation team is sharing its findings with stakeholders through informal meetings and check-ins, monthly phone calls with CCER and the Gates Foundation, semi-annual progress reports, "year in review" reports, and a final report at the end of the three-year period.

While the first year of data collection is just being completed, the information gathered through the learning process has already influenced the RMP's strategy and activities. For example, early

findings from surveys and interviews revealed that several RMP working groups, while useful, could be even more effective if they had greater clarity of purpose and a better understanding of how RMP governance is organized. As a result, the RMP's leadership focused its annual retreat on clarifying its own purpose and developing ways to be more strategic and focused on guiding and monitoring implementation.

For more information:

About the Road Map Project and CCER:
www.roadmapproject.org/

About Education Northwest:
educationnorthwest.org/content/about

FSG Case Study on the development of the Road Map Project: www.fsg.org/casestudiesCI

Sources

- Road Map Project website:
www.roadmapproject.org
- Education Northwest Evaluation Plan (March 1, 2013)
- Interview with Christopher Mazzeo, Director of Evidence Use and Policy, Education Northwest, December 2013.
- Correspondence with Lynda Peterson, Associate Director, Community Center for Education Results, October 2013.
- Correspondence with Mary Jean Ryan, Executive Director, Community Center for Education Results, January 2014.

Later Years

In a collective impact initiative's later years, CI partners may seek to take stock of the initiative's accomplishments and understand its long-term impact on targeted issues or populations.* Information from the shared measurement system can inform this learning process by contributing longitudinal data on the initiative's achievements and challenges. In particular, data from the SMS can reveal trends in key indicators and can help partners understand the staying power of the initiative's earlier accomplishments.

To better understand how and to what extent the initiative's ultimate outcomes have been achieved, as well as the extent to which the CI effort contributed to these outcomes, CI partners may wish to commission a **summative evaluation**. This evaluation could focus on the following kinds of questions:

1. What about the CI process has been most effective, for whom, and why?
2. To what extent has the CI initiative achieved its ultimate outcomes?
3. How has the work of the CI Initiative contributed to improving its targeted outcome(s)?
4. What ripple effects did the CI initiative have on other parts of the community/system?
5. What difference did the CI initiative make?

Summative evaluations are typically conducted by third-party evaluators, given their scope and the importance of external validation. These evaluations may be commissioned to last for 6 months to a year, and they typically result in a final written report. Many summative evaluations (and some developmental and formative evaluations) produce a public-facing report to share reflections and lessons learned.

* We recognize that many, perhaps most, CI initiatives are committed to fundamentally changing the way people and systems in their targeted geographies address pressing problems. In a sense, this can mean that the CI initiative never truly ends. For the purposes of this discussion, though, we refer to the initiative's "later years" as the final one to two years of formal, organized activity and funding for the initiative's core infrastructure.

How Vibrant Communities Used Performance Measurement and Evaluation Throughout Its Lifetime

Vibrant Communities (VC) was a pan-Canadian initiative that helped 13 communities expand their capacity for strategic poverty reduction. The key approach was a set of five principles, which included collaboration across sectors, comprehensive thinking and action, building on community assets, and a long-term process of learning and change. While the initiative's launch pre-dated the formal concept of collective impact, its work embodies many of the same principles. In fact, VC sponsors and local partners designed the national initiative together as a way to develop a bold new way to "turn the needle on poverty" through a process of experimentation, trial, and error.

Over a ten-year period from 2002 to 2011, Vibrant Communities involved thousands of participants and organizations from its 13 communities and inspired the development of 164 initiatives that touched the lives of an estimated 170,000 households. Vibrant Communities was established through the partnership of three national sponsors—Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement; the Caledon Institute of Social Policy; and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation—as well as a series of local communities across the country.

The initiative used developmental and formative evaluation. It also developed a number of internal mechanisms to monitor results from local efforts (VC by the Numbers), identify and distill lessons from across communities (e.g., performance stories), and encourage local reflection on strategy (e.g., annual theory of change reflection events). The project sponsors contracted with CAC International to complete two interim assessments of the project;

these focused extensively on interviews with local communities and used the findings to adjust (even restructure) many of the national supports provided to communities.

In 2010, the VC project concluded with a two-year "end-of-campaign evaluation," as mandated by its sponsors. Designed to be a summative account of the initiative, this assessment focused on (1) understanding the local outcomes of the initiatives, and (2) discovering lessons learned about collaborative, comprehensive approaches; the sustainability of local efforts; and the best ways to support VC-like approaches through funding and policy.¹² Vibrant Communities' funders hoped that the evaluation's findings would contribute to building an even stronger foundation for place-based poverty reduction in Canada in the future.

VC hired Imprint Consulting to work with an internal team to develop the evaluation plan. Over a seven-month period, this team poured over volumes of existing data and research on VC and collaborated with VC partners, funders, and experts in the field of poverty reduction to identify the following evaluation questions:¹³

What is the VC model?

- Is VC a model? Is it replicable (or what components are replicable)? If yes, how?
- Is the effort to create this complex local governance/collaboration in a community worth what you get in return?
- What are the implications for other funders/governments for supporting this kind of approach?

How Vibrant Communities Used Performance Measurement and Evaluation Throughout Its Lifetime

continued from previous page

What is the model's performance with respect to poverty reduction?

- Was the poverty reduction effect stronger in some communities? If yes, is it possible to articulate why?

What is the experience of applying the VC model?

- What are the lessons about stimulating and supporting collaboration in communities?
- What are the key lessons about engagement with government, low-income residents, and the business community?
- What are the benefits of supporting a peer learning community as part of the initiative?

To answer these questions, the evaluation team collected data from numerous documents and databases, including the initiative's outcome tracking system, and conducted interviews, surveys, and focus groups. They also used the *Most Significant Change* approach to locate stories about the nature of change.*

The team's findings were published in two reports that are available on the Vibrant Communities website. The first report (2011) focused on documenting VC's outcomes and assessing the VC approach to poverty reduction. The second report (2012) explored the effectiveness of VC's system of national supports (e.g., coaching, funding, the learning community, and the dissemination of learning).

A key finding from the first report concerns the effectiveness of the collective impact approach in addressing complex problems:

"[C]omplex issues need a different kind of traction, which a [Vibrant Communities] approach supports.... [C]ommunities using a VC approach are able to attract significant resources, engage a broad and diverse range of multi-sector leadership, raise the profile and understanding of poverty, and introduce innovative solutions. This contributes to a community's ability to influence substantive public policies related to poverty, strengthen links and coordination of responses to poverty, and shape private-sector practices."¹⁴

Vibrant Communities' first ten years were so successful, in fact, that the initiative is currently scaling up to additional cities and communities across Canada. The findings and recommendations published in its two summative evaluations serve as a critical source of learning for these new communities.

Sources:

- Tamarack Institute website: <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/>
- "Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement. Evaluating Vibrant Communities 2002–2010." White paper, Waterloo, Ontario: Tamarack, 2010.
- "Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement. Inspired Learning: An Evaluation of Vibrant Communities' National Supports." White paper, Waterloo, Ontario: Tamarack, 2012
- FSG case study: <http://www.fsg.org/tabid/191/ArticleId/979/Default.aspx?srpush=true>

* The Most Significant Change technique is a technique used for evaluating complex interventions. It uses a participatory approach to uncover stories of significant change, and then facilitates discussion of those stories among targeted stakeholders. This technique is designed to identify the ways in which an intervention has most significantly affected targeted populations. *For more information*, see: Davies, Rick, and Jess Dart. "The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use." n.d. <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf> (accessed Dec. 18, 2013).

Guidance for Implementing a Collective Impact Evaluation

The guidance and examples presented above are intended to assist CI partners in clarifying the scope and purpose of their evaluative activities. The section below builds on this foundation to offer readers practical advice on how to implement a CI evaluation. This section addresses a number of commonly asked questions regarding the collection and use of data, the development and dissemination of findings, and key considerations for working with evaluators and budgeting for evaluation. We hope the advice offered on these important topics will aid CI partners in making well-informed decisions about the design and implementation of their CI evaluations.

Collecting Data

CI partners have many options to choose from when determining the best methods to use in gathering high-quality data (whether quantitative or qualitative) about their initiative's progress and impact. These include commonly used methods, such as document review, surveys, interviews, and observation, as well as newer methods, including social network analysis and systems mapping. Of course, no single method is perfect; each has distinct strengths and weaknesses and can offer more or less useful data, depending on what a user seeks to learn. Table 4 briefly describes some commonly used data collection methods and their advantages and disadvantages.

Determining which methods are best suited for an initiative's learning goals requires careful consideration and collaboration among CI partners (and any external evaluators). The following factors can help guide this decision-making process:

- The questions CI partners wish to answer
- The need or interest in qualitative or quantitative data
- The number of data sources (e.g., people or documents)
- The accessibility and geographical coverage of the data sources
- The degree of certainty needed to make decisions (e.g., using more than one method and including data from multiple sources) increases the likelihood the findings are valid (trustworthy)
- The extent to which the data collection methods are culturally sensitive and responsive to the evaluation context
- The time available to collect the data
- The level of skills and knowledge needed to collect quality data
- The size of the evaluation budget

Table 5:
Advantages and
Disadvantages of
Commonly Used Data
Collection Methods

EXAMPLE TYPES	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<p>Records & Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records: Participation rates, transcripts, election records • Documents: Grantee reports, meeting minutes, annual reports, press releases • Databases: Census data, BLS website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Easy and often cost effective + Unobtrusive + Credible + Data on quantity or frequency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May not always be available - Review can be time consuming - May be incomplete - May require complex analysis
<p>Observation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full and Partial Participant • Non-Participant • Written notes, videos, drawings, photographs can be used by observer to record observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Data easy to collect + Allows evaluator to observe patterns across several observations + Provides context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluator's bias could interfere - Need several to ensure solid patterns - Can be costly and time-consuming - Training required
<p>Surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude or Opinion Surveys • Behavioral or Skill Surveys • Employee Satisfaction or Organizational Climate Surveys • Knowledge Surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Easy to administer + Easy to aggregate data + Efficient + Helps to establish relationship with stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take time to develop - Varied interpretation of questions - Participation bias - Forced responses can be inhibiting - Open responses take time to analyze
<p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual In-Person Interviews • Telephone Interviews • Focus Group Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Can probe for details + Can uncover unexpected info + Group interaction during focus groups can enrich quality of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expensive compared to online survey - Requires skilled interviewer - Scheduling logistics - Interviewer's biases
<p>Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper • Simulation exercises • Computer-Based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Scored objectively + External validity + Can test large numbers of people + Can obtain results quickly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complex and time consuming to develop - More summative than formative

EXAMPLE TYPES	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Social Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blogs • Wikis • Twitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Variety of sources for data + Up-to-date information + Relatively inexpensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality and accuracy inconsistent – Data biased or incomplete – May only represent sample of population with technology access
Social Network Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses data from: Questionnaires, Interviews, Observations, and Archival Data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Identifies various aspects of network reach + Identifies relationships between and among actors + Identifies missing relationships and growth areas + Tracks changes in networks over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dependent on having quality data – Captures a moment in time snapshot – Focuses on the interactions between actors, not the actors themselves – Doesn't illuminate why connections exist or don't and are stronger/weaker
System Mapping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphical representations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Helps plan for and evaluate system change efforts + Represents reality and clarifies complexity + Can be easily understood + Situates initiative within greater context + Can provide guidance for future data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – May only reflect the perspectives of those who've developed it – Is a static representation – Difficult to capture all actors and relationships – Doesn't describe the quality of relationships

Table 5:
Advantages and Disadvantages of Commonly Used Data Collection Methods
 (continued)

Making Sense of Data

Collecting data for the shared measurement system and various evaluation studies results in a lot of information. While it is important to analyze this data appropriately and thoroughly, the data is only data (i.e., numbers, pictures, and words) until it is ascribed some kind of meaning. We cannot overstate how important it is for CI partners to allocate sufficient time to the sense-making process.

The sense-making process involves reflecting on and discussing the meanings of analyzed data. This means that the data brought to the sense-making process should be in the form of descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, range),

and/or synthesized qualitative data (e.g., from interviews, focus groups, documents, photographs, video, websites, observation) that has been analyzed for themes and patterns and may include quotes and examples. Before analyzing any data, it is important to consider the key evaluation questions, the kinds of analyses that are appropriate for the data collected, and aspects of that analysis that will be meaningful to the intended users.

It is often tempting to look at a set of analyzed data (e.g., mean scores or frequencies for survey items) and jump right to making recommendations. Doing so, however, not only reduces the opportunity to consider possible

meanings and alternative explanations for the responses, but it may also lead to faulty conclusions. This can diminish decision makers' confidence in the findings, or, worse, cause CI partners to make unwarranted changes. To take full advantage of the data's content and to ensure that it contributes to real learning, the following questions may be helpful in guiding the sense-making process from analysis to recommendations:

Analysis—How can we aggregate, show differences and relationships, and find patterns and themes in the data?

- What kind of data have we collected? (e.g., interviews produce qualitative data, Likert or rating scales on surveys produce quantitative data)
- What would we like to know from this data? (e.g., how many, what percentage, what themes are reflected, what relationships exist between variables?)
- What is the best way to represent this data once it is analyzed to help us understand its meaning? (e.g., tables, charts, other graphics)

Interpretation—What does the analyzed data mean?

- What do we individually and collectively think the analyzed data suggests or signifies?
- What does this analyzed data explain? What doesn't it explain?
- What inferences are we making about the data, and how do our previous experiences influence our interpretations?

Judgment—Are these findings good or bad?

- Do our interpretations of the findings suggest that something needs to change, be different, or stay the same?
- What is our opinion of how things are going based on these findings? To what extent do we agree with our judgments?

Recommendations—What should we do to enhance the effectiveness of the CI initiative as a result of what we've learned?

- What implications are there for how we do our work and what we should continue doing or do differently?
- What action steps should we take to enhance, amplify, change, adapt, or improve the CI work?
- What timeline should we establish for making any necessary changes?
- Who should be involved in making any necessary adaptations or changes?

To ensure that the interpretations, judgments, and recommendations are grounded in the realities of the CI work, and that the lessons learned from the sense-making process are credible, it is critically important that CI partners and other stakeholders be involved in the above processes. This might be guided by an external evaluator or by internal staff, if they are able to facilitate this part of the evaluation process.

Using Data to Support Strategic Decision Making¹⁵

Acting on an evaluation's findings and recommendations—that is, doing something based on lessons learned from the data—is called “using the findings.” **Evaluation should not be conducted unless there is a clear intention to use the findings for learning or change.**

There are three primary ways in which findings from evaluation efforts can be used. Considering each one helps in determining the most important evaluation questions and the potential intended users of the findings.

- **Instrumental**—This type of use refers to lessons' immediate and tangible application to the CI initiative and it is the most frequent way in which evaluation findings are used. For example, an evaluation might show that current forms of communication to engage partners are not effective in keeping partners motivated and informed. As a result of the evaluation findings, the Steering Committee may change the frequency and format of communications to the CI partners.

- **Conceptual**—This type of use, also called “enlightenment,” refers to the ways in which the evaluation findings actually change our ways of thinking about the issue, the CI work, each other, and/or the community. The “use” is really about developing new insights and understandings that may have no immediate tangible effects, but could contribute to the ways in which conversations are framed or decisions are made. In other words, the evaluation findings are used to change our minds or mental models. In the MFH infant mortality initiative described earlier, the evaluators hope to help participating organizations test their assumptions about how different stakeholder groups think about the drivers of infant mortality and the interventions that are most likely to make a difference.
- **Political/symbolic/persuasive**—This type of use, when used for legitimate purposes (as opposed to misuse) involves using the evaluation findings to persuade others to think or do something, to lobby for additional resources, and/or to provide evidence of progress to key decision makers, influencers, and funders. An example of this type of use is when a CI partner submits an evaluation report to a funder for accountability purposes and to make claims about the work to date.

Communicating Findings¹⁶

The insights generated from the shared measurement system and various evaluation efforts can be used to inform a variety of stakeholders about the collective impact initiative’s development, progress, and impact. How and when to communicate and report evaluation findings to potential users involves making thoughtful and strategic choices.

The first thing to consider is with **whom** findings will be shared. In addition to implementers and funders involved directly in the initiative, other relevant stakeholders might include those who:

- Sponsor, commission, or fund the evaluation
- Are in a position to make decisions based on the results (e.g., policymakers, funders)

- Have provided information/data (e.g., community members, beneficiaries)
- Are interested in the CI initiative (advocates and critics)
- Have a right to the evaluation findings
- Might be affected by the use of the evaluation’s results (e.g., working group members, steering committee, community members)

Once CI partners have determined their key audiences, they must determine **what** to share and **when** to share information with others. Many CI initiatives publish quarterly or annual reports (e.g., scorecards, dashboards) that contain year-to-date data from their shared measurement systems. These brief reports allow community members and other interested stakeholders to observe an initiative’s progress on key indicators and monitor its improvement over time. For example, the Magnolia Place Community Initiative, a comprehensive community change initiative in a five square mile area of Los Angeles, publishes a quarterly Community Data Dashboard that charts progress over time on key indicators and provides a snapshot of progress on several other important measures. The two-page Magnolia Place Community Dashboard (available at www.magnoliacommunityinitiative.org) is designed to “mobilize residents, providers, and policymakers to take effective actions to improve outcomes and conditions for families.”¹⁷

An evaluation may include a greater number or range of communications than an initiative’s annual SMS report card. For example, throughout an evaluation’s implementation, partners could choose to distribute information about upcoming evaluation activities, provide updates on the progress of the evaluation, and inform stakeholders about key lessons and findings that emerge during the evaluation. Once an evaluation is completed, CI partners can use various communication strategies to build awareness and support for the CI initiative, to support change and improvement within the initiative, and/or to show results and demonstrate accountability.

Being thoughtful and intentional about choosing a **format** for sharing the information also ensures that the key messages are clearly understood.

This is important for several reasons: 1) people process information differently, so various formats will appeal to different kinds of learners; 2) people have varying levels of time they are willing to devote to reading or listening to evaluation findings, 3) depending on the level of desired learning for stakeholders, different formats are more or less effective in engaging stakeholders in learning about results, and 4) each of the possible formats has budgetary implications (some are easy to produce with existing resources, while others may require additional support, such as a graphic designer or videographer).

There are several **alternatives** to using the traditional evaluation reports to communicate the lessons CI partners have learned from an evaluation and its findings. One way to choose a format is to consider the level of interaction desired between stakeholders and the information. For example, if little interaction is needed, then methods such as written reports, emails, learning briefs, website communications, news releases and newsletters may be good options. The annual “report cards” that many CI initiatives publish are good examples of this type of communications method.

To complement the traditional written reporting methods described above, CI partners can host interactive experiences, such as working sessions to discuss a report’s findings or individual or small group conversations, and use collaborative forms of technology (e.g., webinars, teleconferences, online hangouts, and chat rooms). Finally, partners could consider using communications methods that are designed to *create* interaction, depending on how they are designed and facilitated. These include in-person presentations, at conferences and community meetings, video presentations (e.g., YouTube), and social media (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook), as well as posters that can hang in different locations.

Assembling the Right Learning and Evaluation Team

The effort to cultivate and sustain a strong learning culture within a CI initiative requires time and dedication. As discussed throughout this guide, the process of designing a performance measurement system or evaluation involves making many strategic choices (e.g., what indicators a shared measurement system will track, what questions an evaluation will answer, and what data collection methods will be used). And once the design work is complete, the implementation process involves gathering data (often in stages); reflecting on the data and making sense of it through analysis, interpretation, and judgment; and developing recommendations.

CI partners across the country are experimenting with a range of approaches to managing these processes. One emerging best practice is the establishment of a standing “data committee” comprised of volunteer data experts. This committee can help select shared measures and evaluation questions, ensure agreement on the definition of key terms, help assess the utility of different data collection methods, and support the sense-making process, among other things. Members of the data committee serve in an advisory capacity; they are not typically responsible for designing or implementing evaluations.

Some CI initiatives have developed an internal evaluation position (full or part-time) within the backbone infrastructure to provide support similar to the data committee, described above. In addition to managing the CI initiative’s performance measurement and evaluation activities, though, the individual in this position is also sometimes responsible for *implementing* an evaluation.

Many CI initiatives seek the support of external evaluators, either instead of or, often, in addition to internal evaluation resources. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with both internal and external evaluation teams. Choosing among these options depends on a number of factors, as the table below summarizes.

	INTERNAL CI EVALUATOR (TEAM)	EXTERNAL CI EVALUATOR (TEAM)
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to bring a deep understanding of the CI work and its community and/or context • Likely to have developed trust with partners and, possibly, funders • Likely to have a more intuitive understanding of different audience's information needs • Likely to be less costly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to have depth of evaluation knowledge and skills, as well as experience evaluating systems change initiatives • Can bring an outside perspective; likely to be less biased when interpreting data; can be viewed by funders as more independent • More likely to have significant capacity if a larger team is needed
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May lack deep evaluation knowledge and skills, but engaging in evaluation could be an opportunity to build these • May not be able to be neutral or objective when asking questions and/or analyzing and interpreting data and findings • May lack the capacity to fully commit to all of the evaluation activities if juggling other CI and/or work responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to be more costly • Likely to require time (perhaps significant time) to get up to speed with the initiative's goals and strategies, as well as its culture and context (if not local) • May require time to develop trust among CI partners

Table 6:
Relative advantages of
internal and external
evaluation teams

Often, CI partners choose to combine internal and external resources by, for example, hiring a professional, external evaluator to serve as a coach to an internal evaluation team. As a coach, the evaluator would bring evaluation expertise and guidance as needed. This could be done by phone, email, or a few key meetings. To further support an internal evaluation team, an external evaluator could provide capacity building workshops and webinars on various evaluation topics to increase the team's knowledge and skills about effective evaluation practice.

Regardless of whether an internal or external evaluation team is chosen, it is important that those taking responsibility for the evaluation's design and implementation are qualified to produce credible and useful findings.

Good evaluators share three characteristics:

- **They are competent professionals**, as demonstrated by, for example, cultural competence, respect for confidentiality, and commitment to the Program Evaluation Standards.¹⁸
- **They have relevant evaluation experience and strong skills** with data collection instruments, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and facilitation and coaching.

And most importantly:

- **They are willing to be good partners to the CI initiative**, by, for example, understanding what collective impact is and what the partners and funders are trying to achieve; working collaboratively to develop (and modify) an evaluation plan; and being flexible, responsive, and nimble, responding to stakeholders' evolving information needs as they emerge.

An important consideration when hiring an external evaluator is the extent to which you also want the evaluator to provide technical assistance (TA) on collective impact. This might be especially important in the early years of the CI effort when the five conditions are just beginning and partners would benefit from TA to help them navigate their way. If the TA provider is not the initiative's evaluator, then it is recommended that they find ways to work together, so that the TA provider can learn from the evaluator, and vice versa.

Budgeting for Evaluation

The question of how much to budget for formal evaluation is often asked. Unfortunately, there is no specific dollar amount or formula to determine how much to expend on assessing the progress and impact of a collective impact initiative. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify the factors that most significantly influence costs and to offer guidance on how to weigh those factors.

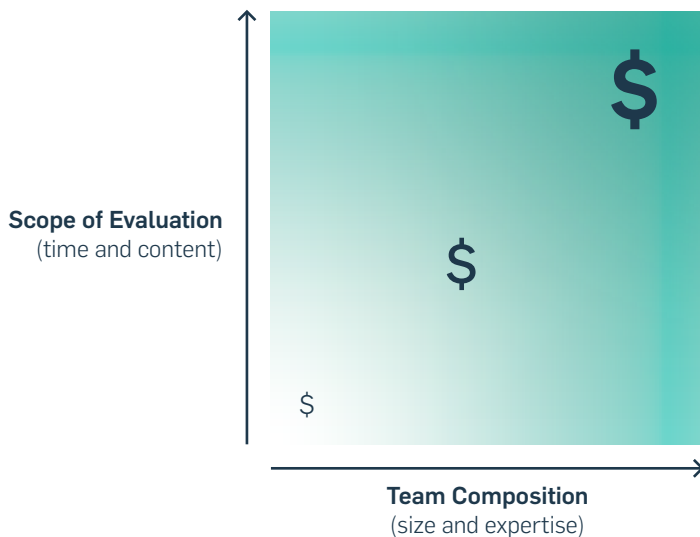
Figure 2 identifies two of the most significant factors that influence the cost of evaluation: the scope of the evaluation (including its focus area(s) and time period) and the composition of the evaluation team. A small-scale evaluation conducted by one or two evaluators may cost

\$10,000 to \$100,000. On the other hand, a complex, multi-year evaluation carried out by a team of evaluation consultants can cost well over a million dollars. (This is similar in scale to the costs associated with evaluating many large-scale social change programs, such as the Harlem Children's Zone.)

In addition to scope and team composition, the following factors, which can vary greatly depending on the goals of an evaluation, directly influence the size of the budget: the number of evaluation questions posed, the number of outcomes to be explored, the number of collection methods used, the number of data sources included, the location or accessibility of data sources, the amount of time needed to conduct the evaluation, and the amount of travel and communications expenses. In addition, while it is almost always a good idea to design and conduct an evaluation in participatory and collaborative ways, there are costs associated with engaging others. These can include costs associated with incentives, honoraria, facility rental, refreshments, and the time it takes to schedule, plan, design, and facilitate an interactive session (e.g., bringing stakeholders together to make sense of emerging findings).

While it is difficult to predict the size of an appropriate evaluation budget for different types of CI initiatives in different stages of development, the value these evaluations bring to CI practitioners and their funders is indisputable. As Grantmakers for Effective Organizations has written: "When you look at evaluation as a means of learning for improvement ... investments in evaluation seem worthwhile because they can yield information needed for smarter and faster decisions about what works."¹⁹ As such, we urge CI partners to carefully plan for how evaluation activities can inform and support their initiative throughout its lifecycle, and we encourage all funders to embed support for evaluation into every CI initiative's budget from the very beginning.

Figure 2: Key Drivers of Evaluation Expenses



Conclusion

At its core, collective impact evaluation is about learning: learning how to “do” CI—how to communicate and collaborate across sectors, set shared goals, assess progress together, and use data to make decisions—and learning how to generate momentum, shift systems, change behavior, and, ultimately, solve a complex problem more effectively. For CI practitioners and funders seeking to address large-scale problems, this means that learning can't be an isolated event. It must be a continuous process that provides relevant, credible, and useful information to inform strategic decision making. In effect, this means that performance measurement and evaluation must be an integral part of any CI initiative.

We hope that the guide has effectively addressed CI partners' key questions about how to plan for and implement a variety of evaluative activities aimed at assessing their initiative's progress, effectiveness, and impact.

Additional guidance on potential evaluation questions, outcomes, and indicators is included in the Supplement to this report.

We welcome readers' comments, feedback, and suggestions regarding this guide and its application to real-life CI evaluation on the Collective Impact Forum (collectiveimpactforum.org), an online community and collective impact resource center.

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