



COLLECTIVE  
IMPACT FORUM



## How Public Policy Can Support Collective Impact

IN COLLABORATION WITH





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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 launched in early 2014.

Learn more at [collectiveimpactforum.org](http://collectiveimpactforum.org)



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The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, non-partisan action tank dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are ready by 21 – for college, work and life. Informed by research and practical experience, the Forum forges innovative ideas, strategies and partnerships to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. Founded in 1998 by Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, two of the country's top leaders on youth issues and youth policy, the Forum is a trusted resource for policymakers, advocates, researchers and practitioners.

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# Table of Contents

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<b>In theory</b>	04	Introduction
	08	A Step in the Right Direction
	14	How to Enhance Public Policy Through Government Structure and Practice
	18	How Philanthropy Can Incentivize Smarter Public Policy
	20	Three Mindset Shifts to Sustain Changes in Policy and Practice
	22	Conclusion

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<b>In practice</b>	05	Table 1: The Five Conditions of Collective Impact
	09	Table 2: Public Policy Elements that Encourage Collective Impact
	10	Case Study: Working Cities Challenge
	12	Case Study: Performance Partnership Pilots
	15	Case Study: Lessons from José Esquibel
	19	Case Study: Lessons from the Graustein Fund

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<b>Appendix</b>	24	Interview List
	25	Additional Resources for Policy Recommendations
	26	Endnotes

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# Introduction

Approximately 15 percent of Americans live in poverty.<sup>1</sup> Over 49 million Americans live in households that experience hunger at some point in the year.<sup>2</sup> Scores on reading achievement for 17 year olds have not improved since 1971.<sup>3</sup> More than 30 percent of adults and 17 percent of children and adolescents are obese, accounting for at least 10 percent of the national health care budget.<sup>4</sup> Almost 75 percent of ex-offenders will be arrested within five years of release from prison.<sup>5</sup> The number of gangs has increased by 15 percent since 2006.<sup>6</sup> Nearly one in nine people living in the United States are veterans,<sup>7</sup> and up to 40 percent of those veterans struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder, impacting employment, family, and community relationships.<sup>8</sup>

These statistics describe problems many years in the making, and over time, non-profits have created innovative programs to address them. Funders have invested billions into programs, measured their success, and scaled effective interventions. Government has played a role in both program delivery and funding. All parties have had some success, and all can point to bright spots of positive outcomes for program participants. However, too few have achieved large-scale, lasting success in their target populations. Why is that?

The problems we face are not simple, predictable, or linear. They do not fit neatly into electoral cycles or grant timelines. They are complex and involve many fluctuating actors, conditions, and norms. Yet many people in the social and public sectors feel constrained by a traditional approach to solve these problems through a

single strong program, a single funding stream, or a single organization. They often understand the implications of complexity but feel bound by rules that oversimplify the range of possible responses. In a time of scarce resources and intractable problems, however, no one in the social sector, including policymakers, can afford to believe in singular solutions.

Instead, we must all embrace the notion that addressing complex problems requires a collective impact approach that involves many actors from different sectors committing to a common agenda to solve a specific problem at scale. Many communities have adopted this approach, outlined in Table 1, and achieved success in tackling such complex challenges. If implemented more fully, the collective impact approach could increase the effective use of public resources.

**In a time of scarce resources and intractable problems, no one in the social sector, including policymakers, can afford to believe in singular solutions.**

**Table 1:**  
The Five Conditions  
of Collective Impact<sup>9</sup>

Condition of Collective Impact	Definition
<b>Common agenda</b>	All participants share a vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions
<b>Shared measurement</b>	All participants agree on the ways success will be measured and reported, with a short list of common indicators identified and used for learning and improvement
<b>Mutually reinforcing activities</b>	A diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinate a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action
<b>Continuous communication</b>	All players engage in frequent and structured open communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation
<b>Backbone support</b>	An independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative provides ongoing support by guiding the initiative’s vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, advancing policy, and mobilizing resources

Using a collective impact approach, cross-sector partnerships across the country are working hard to tackle challenges in education, crime, health, poverty, unemployment, and many other areas. For example:

- In Franklin County, Massachusetts, binge drinking among youth declined by 46 percent from 2003 to 2012 due to the Franklin County Communities that Care Coalition, which fights youth substance abuse by strengthening protective factors and decreasing risk factors for youth and their families.<sup>10</sup>
- In New York state, the number of youth in state custody declined by 45 percent between 2011 and 2013 as a result of a collaborative effort across different levels of government, funders, advocates, youth service providers, and others to create a juvenile justice system that promotes youth success and ensures public safety.<sup>11</sup>
- In Chicago, Illinois, 6,000 public housing residents obtained quality jobs between 2006 and 2011 due to the collaborative effort of Opportunity Chicago, which connected low-skilled, low-income job seekers to workforce development resources.<sup>12</sup>

# What do we mean by...

## Public policymakers?

- An elected government official
- An appointed government official
- A career civil servant

## Public policies?

- Legislation at any level
- Guidelines in procurement such as RFPs
- Program requirements
- Regulations that govern programs
- Cross-agency initiatives
- Mayoral or gubernatorial initiatives

Public policymakers have been important participants in these and similar efforts and support the goals of collaboration nationwide. Too often, however, federal, state, and local policies impede rather than enhance the conditions necessary for communities to operate collectively to address their needs. In fact, some public policies explicitly prohibit the very things that collaborative partnerships need to succeed. Strictly defined funding models, emphasis on annual reporting, silos within and between agencies that administer programs and funds, and inaccessible or unaligned data sets all create obstacles to achieving collective results.<sup>13</sup>

Our democratic process demands that policymakers clearly account for resources and create adequate checks and balances, and thus over the years they have built structures that work against collaboration. For example, policymakers typically operate within isolated subcommittees, departments, and agencies that result in responsibility for or loyalty to a specific issue and funding stream. They require reports for individual grants, and may ask grantees to strictly separate public funding streams.<sup>14</sup>

But not all problems lend themselves to a narrow, targeted response. Many are better addressed through simultaneous action by more than one office. In these cases, siloed policy-making structures and processes are counterproductive. Moreover, policymakers and partnerships often lack clear information about what types of collaborative actions are even allowed.<sup>15</sup>

Strictly defined funding models, emphasis on annual reporting, silos within and between agencies that administer programs and funds, and inaccessible or unaligned data sets all create obstacles to achieving collective results.

It comes as little surprise that when policymaking culture and practices come from siloed agencies and inhibit risk-taking, public policies that promote collective impact are few and far between. However, government has been innovating in the face of these challenges. Some current policies, governmental structures, and processes do help partnerships achieve collective impact. We will outline and provide examples of these in this learning brief and hope to collect more in the coming months.

While we do intend to share examples and recommendations with policymakers, we do not intend to create a partisan platform or an electoral roadmap. The policies and structures outlined in the following pages can impact government's day-to-day operations, which are often shaped by career civil servants whose important roles extend beyond a single electoral cycle.

## Government as participant in Collective Impact

Although our focus in this learning brief is on public policy, it is important to note that policymakers can also participate in collective impact directly. Some of the important roles policymakers and government entities play more broadly in states and communities around the country include:

- **Serving as backbone support:** Government can fund and/or house positions for backbone support. For example, the backbone for the Shape Up Somerville initiative, which tackles childhood obesity, is housed within the City of Somerville, Massachusetts.
- **Acting as a member of a partnership convened outside of government:** A community may decide that it needs to pull together high profile leaders from the nonprofit, business, foundation, and government sectors in a collective impact effort. The aforementioned juvenile justice reform effort in New York State included officials from several agencies at the city, county, and state levels, most of whom were able to plan and implement policy.
- **Collecting data for a state or community:** Government can institutionalize the collection and storage of longitudinal data for use by a host of community partners. In Maryland, the Governor's Office for Children has tracked the Results for Child Well-Being for 15 years. The data, which depict trends over time, are used by advocates, legislators, local coordinating bodies, and various state agencies.
- **Championing the need for a collective impact initiative:** Policymakers' use of the bully pulpit to call for increased collaboration is an important first step for communities wishing to bring about more collective impact on an issue. In King County, Washington, County Executive Dow Constantine and Council member Rod Dembowski have both called for making better coordination of youth programs, services, and funding in the County a top priority. Because of their leadership, a Task Force is now creating a Youth Action Plan for the County and the County Executive has proposed a "Children's Levy."

# A Step in the Right Direction

Public policies can contribute to, or detract from, collective impact in a variety of ways. Some policies explicitly prohibit collaborative partnerships from taking actions to promote collective impact (often unintentionally) and others provide incentives for them to do so. Many public policies lie somewhere in between.

Those policies that do not explicitly prohibit collaborative actions are too often interpreted and implemented as though they do. Many grantees are hesitant to jeopardize their funding and thus may interpret policies cautiously.<sup>16</sup> Until there is a more widely spread understanding of the current flexibility in public policy, policymakers could accomplish a great deal by more explicitly stating what is allowed in RFP, program, or other guidelines.

These “collective impact friendly” public policy elements are found in issues as diverse as economic revitalization and youth development, as shown by the following two examples: The Working Cities Challenge and Performance Partnership Pilots. These examples are nascent, so it is too soon to know if they will ultimately lead to positive population-level outcomes. But each example suggests a path forward for policymakers looking for ways to allow and incentivize partnerships to achieve collective impact.

**Those policies that do not explicitly prohibit collaborative actions are too often interpreted and implemented as though they do.**

In the course of our research for this learning brief, we came across many current public policies that do include elements that explicitly allow for and incentivize partnerships to create each of the five conditions necessary to achieve collective impact. See Table 2 below for details on each of these elements.<sup>17</sup> These public policies should be celebrated, shared, and implemented more broadly.



Condition	Public policy elements that allow or incentive the conditions of Collective Impact
<b>Common agenda</b>	<p><b>Planning grants in addition to implementation grants:</b> Bringing community stakeholders together around a common agenda can take many months. RFPs can be structured to allow for this process to occur and not circumvent it by calling for programmatic funding to be spent on implementation before shared understanding of problem and solution has been reached.</p> <p><b>Requirements to engage partners from multiple sectors:</b> Uniting organizations from multiple sectors around a common issue can be a prerequisite of application in order to support common agenda development. Any application should include evidence that these organizations are true partners in the work, not just in name only.</p>
<b>Shared measurement</b>	<p><b>Data sharing agreements:</b> Coalitions often seek to use data from existing government sources to track progress and learn. Sharing this data publicly, however, may not be authorized. Policymakers can support this process by entering into data sharing agreements to share internal databases (such as public health or education) with agreed upon entities involved in a coalition.</p> <p><b>Accountability for shared outcomes:</b> Coalition members must be held accountable to the measures set forth in the common agenda in order to maintain collective progress. Ideally, grants ask grantees to set outcomes that are shared across multiple organizations and hold them accountable for achieving that shared set of outcomes (rather than individual program outcomes).</p>
<b>Mutually reinforcing activities</b>	<p><b>Blended funding streams:</b> Coalitions may bring together different grants from many funders to address the many facets of a complex problem, leading to many, slightly different reports to funders. Allowing blended funds cuts down on reporting while maintaining accountability. Blending involves co-mingling funds from multiple sources such that programs can draw down service dollars and/or pay personnel expenses and then make a common report of results from use of the total funds to all funders.<sup>18</sup></p> <p><b>Allowances for tailoring to local conditions:</b> Collective impact efforts use data and local knowledge to better target their interventions in their communities, yet grant guidelines often dictate that the grantee use a specific program or service, regardless of the local context. Instead, it is better when grant guidelines dictate the broad specifications of service but refrain from dictating that the grantee uses a specific type of program, curricula, or service provider.</p>
<b>Continuous communication</b>	<p><b>Requirements for documenting the process of collaboration:</b> Coalitions must meet and otherwise communicate regularly in order to ensure constant learning and alignment to their common agenda. To support this communication, grant guidelines can require regular reports of meeting agendas and minutes, newsletters, or other forms of communication between entities involved in the coalition.</p> <p><b>Allowing for adjustment in plans to support emergence:</b> Communications about data, community context, and stakeholder concerns may yield new information that requires a coalition to change course of action, yet grant guidelines often do not allow for deviation from the plan submitted as part of the application. Instead, grant guidelines can be flexible to allow changes in previously submitted plans as long as they maintain focus on the overall goal.</p>
<b>Backbone support</b>	<p><b>Funding for backbones:</b> Collective impact initiatives require dedicated backbone support in order to maintain focus, accountability, and progress against the common agenda, yet grants often limit the amount of funds for such “overhead.” Instead, policymakers can set aside larger portions of funds for such work or explicitly allow funds to be used for administration, overhead, project management, data analysis, and coordination functions for one or multiple organizations.</p> <p><b>Grant criteria that require defined backbone functions:</b> Coalitions need long-term sustained support for the backbone, yet they may face pressure over time to redirect funds to program purposes given fluctuations in funding. To combat this pressure, grants can require, rather than simply permit, some funds to be used exclusively for backbone functions.</p>

**Table 2:**  
Public Policy Elements that Encourage Collective Impact

## Working Cities Challenge<sup>19</sup>

From 2006 to 2008, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (“the Boston Fed”) studied cities throughout the country that struggle with concentrated poverty.<sup>20</sup> The study found that cities in the midst of revitalization were led not by a mayor, local CEO, or philanthropist acting largely alone, but rather by a key leader or group of leaders, demonstrating “leadership in collaboration.” The Boston Fed began to explore these and other conditions, inspired in part by Living Cities’ emphasis on coalition-based systems change. Grounded in this research and the conviction of “many Federal Reserve economists that human capital is the key sustainable source for long term economic growth,” the Boston Fed launched the Working Cities Challenge.

Itself a collaboration, the Working Cities Challenge provides grants to cross-sector teams in small cities throughout Massachusetts through a merit-based competition designed to promote economic revitalization by supporting “bold, promising approaches that have the potential to transform the lives of low-income people and the communities in which they live.”<sup>21</sup> The Working Cities Challenge also offers a learning community for grantees as well as non-winning cities, including networking and training opportunities. It has awarded a total of \$1.8 million to 6 cities in 2014. These awards are funded not by the Fed, but by private and community foundations, state government, and the private sector. The funds are rounded out by targeted technical assistance for winning teams.

The Boston Fed intends to expand the effort in 2015 and in future years, in Massachusetts as well as in other New England states, and other Reserve Banks are examining the model. Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen has cit-

ed the effort as an innovative model, and the Working Cities Challenge offers several promising practices. These include:

### **Latitude for communities to select their own outcome measures:**

The Boston Fed believes that prescribed measures can have unintended consequences. For example, a target outcome of increased income may lead to simply moving low-income residents from inside to outside the city limits. Also, a top-down measure might narrow the scope of partners too early to a specific organization in a community. An educational achievement nonprofit may focus on high school graduation rates, or a municipal office may deal with unemployment, but both should most likely be part of an effort to strengthen the local economy. Dictating the outcome, rather than letting the collaboration determine one, may centralize work in one organization and turn others into uninvolved spectators, even when the funding is designed to encourage collaboration across many organizations.

Finally, prescribed outcomes may entirely miss the root challenges that are unique to each community. For example, a city may struggle with crime, and not high school graduation rates or lack of new jobs, as the driver of economic decline. The Working Cities Challenge is designed to “incentivize the process [of collaboration], not a specific outcome, towards the broader goal of revitalizing small cities.”

### **Relationship building prior to grant award:**

The Working Cities Challenge Grant allowed only one application from any one city. Past grant or development programs had permitted multiple applications from one city, so those entities that should have been partners in an initi-

ative instead competed for funds. They circumvented the important process of relationship building that can lead to stronger outcomes. The Boston Fed also held outreach meetings and an applicant workshop to describe the criteria in further detail and to provide advice and examples of productive collaboration.

**A long-term and transformational view of success:** The Boston Fed was particularly well positioned to help launch an initiative designed to revitalize long declining cities, a goal that will take years to achieve. Why? Prabal Chakrabarti, a Vice President at the Boston Fed, notes that “the Boston Fed has been committed to making economic growth happen in more places across

the region through its community development activities. We are a 100 year old institution and part of the nation’s central bank. We can work with cities for several years or longer, and track their progress for a decade.”

Beyond having a long view of history and sense of commitment to the future, the Boston Fed recognizes that the power of collective impact is not just in helping a community achieve its goal, but allowing that community to learn a new, more effective way of working: “Is there a new way of working in the city? Do they say ‘being collaborative is the way we are supposed to be’? That is success.”

“While it’s important that the cities reach their 10 year goal, we hope they create the civic infrastructure that allows them to work on the next thing and the next thing.... If this is the only cross-sector initiative that occurs during that decade, even if it increases jobs, but they aren’t working together across the board, and don’t keep working together, it fails.”

PRABAL CHAKRABARTI, VICE PRESIDENT  
BOSTON FEDERAL RESERVE BANK



## Performance Partnership Pilots

Opportunity youth, also known as disconnected youth, are low-income individuals between 14 and 24 who are either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, unemployed, or not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of an educational institution. Using multiple independent programs to provide the variety of services they need—including education, job training, health care, childcare, food assistance, and housing—proves inefficient and ineffective.

The White House Office of Management and Budget, in partnership with the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Labor, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences, designed the Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) to allow communities to bring these disparate programs together to create a more unified solution. Launched in 2014, P3 will provide up to 10 sites with the flexibility to use existing federal funds to create a coordinated approach to supporting opportunity youth. Lessons from the experience of creating P3 include:

**Flexibility beyond funding:** There are no new dollars associated with P3. However, federal policymakers can provide selected sites flexibility in any statutory, regulatory, or administrative requirements in discretionary funding streams to better implement their unified plans. This flexibility is allowed as long as the P3 site agrees to a rigorous, outcome-based accountability system. Allowable flexibilities may be related to eligibility, intake, blending funding, data sharing, RFP development, auditing, allowable use of funds, and more. Communities will welcome the flexibility of P3, given that many have been trying to innovate but repeatedly run into rigid policy in these areas.

**Partnership between levels of government:** In the early development of P3, a few states and communities worked with the federal government, with help from the Forum for Youth Investment, to test out what would be needed on the ground. For example, the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet and the Broward County Children’s Services Council proposed to blend funds from local, state, and federally-funded programs to provide services that increase high school graduation rates and successfully transition to post-secondary education or employment. Their design includes the creation of common eligibility criteria and a shared client database for the Workforce Investment Act, 21st Century, Supplemental Education Services, and the local Summer Youth Employment program. This in turn will streamline intake, client tracking, and outcome measurement, reducing the number of staff members needed to administer the program and consequently lower the cost per participant. Youth and their families would also not be subject to multiple enrollment processes. Identifying the opportunities for better vertical alignment between these levels of government was no small task.

In addition to these two promising examples, there are many other public policies that support collective impact across federal, state, and local levels and for various social issues.

- **The Drug-Free Communities Support Program (DFC)** has provided an example for how **funding can be structured to support several conditions of collective impact** for nearly two decades. Launched in 1997 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, the grant requires that applicant coalitions demonstrate commitment and participation from the 13 sectors known to be important in prevention work. DFC also requires shared goals and plans (the basis of a common agenda) and funds staff to manage the coalition (similar to a backbone). It also allows grantee coalitions to choose the activities and services needed to address the challenge. Recognizing that change at the population level takes time, the program awards multi-year grants.

Over the past eight years, DFC-funded communities have achieved significant reductions in youth alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use: middle school students saw a 20 percent reduction in alcohol use, a 26 percent reduction in tobacco use, and a 23 percent reduction in marijuana use. High school students have reduced their use of alcohol by 10 percent, tobacco by 17 percent, and marijuana by 4 percent.<sup>22</sup>

- **The Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative** provides a newer example of funding that is structured to catalyze or support collective impact. These programs take a **place-based approach**, targeting funds at communities with multiple related needs, such as low high school graduation rates, high unemployment, and blight.<sup>23</sup> Many of these programs use planning grants to allow communities more time to develop their common agenda prior to rushing to implementation. They are housed in the U.S. Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, and Health and Human Services.
- **State policymakers** are also in a strong position to try new approaches to addressing a social issue on a smaller scale, often with more flexibility than their federal counterparts. To help spur this type of innovation at the state level, the National Governors Association (NGA) is hosting a “Policy Academy on Aligning the Education and Training Pipeline to the Needs of the Economy.” This Policy Academy is providing grants, technical assistance, and a learning community for several states or territorial government entities, helping the grantees to “articulate and implement a strong vision connecting the education and training systems with the needs of the economy so more Americans achieve a postsecondary degree or certificate with labor market value to gain access to the middle class and beyond.”<sup>24</sup> The Policy Academy will help grantees use data and create partnerships to achieve this vision.

# How to Enhance Public Policy Through Government Structure and Practice

One state policymaker, José Esquibel, thought in new ways about both the policies he could shape and the structures that supported policy planning and execution. This new thinking allowed for greater institutionalized support of collaboration in the state of Colorado.

Esquibel serves as Manager of Prevention and Interagency Collaboration at the State of Colorado Department of Human Services. He started working in this position completely dedicated to interagency collaboration in 2004. Since then, he has become the glue that connects leaders across agencies to align their work on prevention programs and services for children and

youth.<sup>25</sup> The case study on the following page lists just some of the ways that Esquibel and his many partners inside and outside of government created an interagency structure that fostered a movement to improve accountability for outcomes, make better connections with partners at the local level, and create a common agenda that focuses upstream on prevention.

“Instead of managing people, how do we manage networks?  
Instead of managing programs, how do we manage resources?  
There is so much that government can do to support collective  
impact by shifting from a purely hierarchical approach to  
implementing a network approach.”

JOSÉ ESQUIBEL, MANAGER OF PREVENTION AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION  
STATE OF COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

## Lessons from José Esquibel

**Bringing collective impact to state government:** State legislation enacted in 2000 initiated a formal interdepartmental network approach to the coordination of children and youth programs managed across multiple government agencies. A memorandum of understanding among the departments formed the Colorado Prevention Leadership Council (PLC), a collaborative group that consisted of representatives from nine state departments, two institutions of higher education, two statewide resource organizations, and a regional technical assistance organization. The PLC was active from 2000 until the end of 2013. Its mission was “to provide a strong, unified voice for prevention, early intervention, and treatment in Colorado and promote coordinated planning, implementation, and evaluation of quality prevention, intervention, and treatment services for children, youth, and families at the state and local levels.” The PLC members met monthly and held annual meetings with executive directors of state departments to gain support for areas of shared priorities. Some of the PLC accomplishments that continue to have an impact include:

- Agreement on a broad framework shared by agencies as diverse as Juvenile Justice, Public Health, Education, and Transportation on uniform minimum standards of prevention
- Common components for children and youth request for proposals/applications utilized across state-managed children and youth programs of various departments
- Partnership with the county-level Collaborative Management Programs, which are financially incentivized for achieving outcomes resulting from collaborative and integrated services for families
- The 2010 adoption of the State of Colorado Guidelines for Information Sharing by the Governor’s Office of Information Technology
- Inclusion of representatives of local Collaborative Management Programs in the state government collaborative infrastructure who are viewed as partners rather than constituents

- Making allowances to tailor statewide plans to local conditions; for example, with their federal Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive grant (SPF-SIG), which was collaboratively managed by the PLC, the members of the PLC looked closely at data and focused allocation of funds on places most in need

**Dedicating a career staff person:** It is unusual to have a dedicated staff person such as Esquibel focused on these connections. It can be challenging to justify support for these kinds of positions focused on coordination and alignment as opposed to grant management or another traditional role. While having a dedicated career staff member such as Esquibel is important, it is not sufficient to get traction and support for long range collaborative work when there is a constant reorganization and turnover among political appointees. Where these backbone positions are housed, how they are funded, and what authority they possess is constantly shifting. Esquibel has been able to work through these shifts and cycles due to his tenacity and ability to build relationships.

**A bold experiment to share accountability:** The PLC’s interagency work is in a transition phase. New legislation enacted in 2013 builds on the last decade of Esquibel’s work and mandates the creation of a statewide youth development plan and the coordination of youth development programs. Instead of reforming a state government collaborative group, the Colorado Statewide Youth Development Plan calls for a legislatively recognized council consisting of diverse youth, family, community, and government stakeholders to provide greater organization of efforts, reduced duplication of services, and a structured approach to achieving positive outcomes for youth and young adults. It also recommends the creation of a division within state government to enhance collaborative work on youth issues and programs across departments, to coordinate recommendations from existing collective impact efforts in the state, and to address the necessary policy changes at the state and local levels to better align systems and incorporate a positive youth development approach.



José Esquibel’s story demonstrates some of the principles related to how broader adoption of public policies that encourage collaboration will require changes to policymaking structures, accountability mechanisms, and auditing and accounting practices. Below are descriptions of several specific types of such changes, which we assembled based on Esquibel’s story and other promising practices we encountered in our research:

- **Creating interagency structures focused on populations and issues:** The most direct solution to the problem of fragmentation among departments is to create permanent structures that cut across silos, as Esquibel did in Colorado and other states and localities have done through “Children’s Cabinets,” through which the heads of related departments work toward shared goals on issues from early childhood education to opportunity youth programs.<sup>26</sup> Many of these were established and institutionalized either by executive order or through legislation. In New York City, former Mayor Michael

## Another way to cut across policymaking silos is to hold grantees accountable for results, instead of specific services.

Bloomberg created the “Center for Economic Opportunity,” which broke down silos among city agencies addressing poverty and resulted in the incubation of dozens of collaborative initiatives.<sup>27</sup> These permanent structures are more efficient than ad hoc interagency groups because policymakers can use their existing relationships and collaborative work processes to confront new problems as they arise and to create a culture of working together that can permeate other parts of government.

- **Flipping accountability from “services provided” to “outcomes achieved”:** Another way to cut across policymaking silos is to hold grantees accountable for results, instead of specific services. The focus shifts from outputs (program) to outcomes (population). When communities are no longer focused on running specific programs, and instead focus on achieving outcomes, they are more likely to replace overlapping, underfunded sets of services with aligned, efficient, and effective ones. Pay for Success initiatives, which guarantee funding for organizations that achieve specific outcomes for a population, are a prominent example of outcome-based policymaking.<sup>28</sup> These initiatives are a type of contract, including RFPs and social impact bonds, which monetize social impact/outcomes of social services, realize costs savings for governments, and may incentivize private investment in community challenges. The U.S. Department of Justice will give priority funding consideration in 2012 Second Chance Act grant solicitations to highly qualified applicants who incorporate a Pay for Success model in their program design. The U.S. Department of Labor made up to \$20 million available within the Workforce Investment Act for programs that focus on employment and training outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

This type of innovation is also seen at the state and local level. For example, the state of Michigan recently released an RFP asking for “responses to undertake Partners for Success (PFS) initiatives related to the design and development of a program focused on improving birth, health, and other outcomes of mothers and infants in Michigan’s Medicaid population.”<sup>30</sup>



Other changes to structure and practice are driven by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the entity charged with implementing a President's vision across the federal government, overseeing the development and execution of the budget, planning and rulemaking for agencies, and overseeing overall agency performance and financial management, among other duties.<sup>31</sup> OMB's unique view across the federal bureaucracy allows it to enact changes that can influence alignment and coordination more broadly. Its influence includes:

- **Changing government auditing and accounting practices:** Fear of triggering a governmental audit is perhaps the primary reason that grantees often assume they are not allowed to align, blend, and braid siloed funding streams across agency lines. Fortunately, it is possible to address this by changing auditing and accounting rules and practices. For example, OMB recently released a new rule allowing private organizations that receive money from more than one agency to consolidate their performance plans and reporting.<sup>32</sup> Such regulatory changes actively encourage grantees to think about blending and braiding to align programs and services to a collective goal. They also allow grantees to use their time and energy to deliver services instead of preparing for many audits in a single year.
- **Aligning government agency and staff incentives:** OMB sets measureable performance objectives across agencies and can incentivize collaboration via the performance scorecard. The President's Management Agenda under the George W. Bush administration and the Accountable Government Initiative under the Barack Obama administration both included items explicitly requiring agencies to work together to achieve joint goals. Position descriptions and performance objectives for individual federal staff positions may be written to align to these goals. However, further work is needed at the agency level to align many levels of career civil service position descriptions and related performance objectives for long-term support of collaborative work both in Washington, D.C., and in communities throughout the nation.

OMB's unique view across the federal bureaucracy allows it to enact changes that can influence alignment and coordination more broadly.

# How Philanthropy Can Incentivize Smarter Public Policy

The prior sections describe instances where public policy catalyzed or supported collaboration. Philanthropists may also use their funding, relationships, and technical expertise to spur and support policymakers to such actions. For two decades, the William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund (“the Graustein Fund”) has provided an example of a private foundation that works alongside government to create more funding opportunities that support collective impact and strengthen collaboration.<sup>33</sup>

In 1995, the Graustein Fund began the Children First Initiative to support local “collaborative tables” that focused on strengthening early childhood education and development across seven municipalities in Connecticut. At the same time, the state government was considering funding for early childhood programs in communities. The Graustein Fund shared relevant data about community needs, developed by the local collaborative tables, with elected officials and invited them to meet with those existing coalitions. In part due to the Graustein Fund’s educational efforts, Connecticut’s state government essentially codified early childhood coalitions’ work into legislation in 1997, creating a new funding stream and calling for the establishment of Early Childhood Councils at the mu-

nicipal level the administer it. In 2005, the state created an Early Childhood Education Cabinet, bringing cross-agency collaboration to the state level. Soon thereafter, the Graustein Fund offered to match state funds to build the capacity of local Councils to develop common agendas for their communities. State government agreed to commit funding for this planning and system building work. In the last two years, public-private partnership grants for efforts to strengthen cohesion and outcomes of early childhood services have totaled over \$6.3 million.

The Graustein Fund’s two-decade story reveals several important lessons about how private philanthropy can partner with government to fund and support collective impact, as detailed in the case study on the following page.

## Lessons from the Graustein Fund

### **Build, and build on, relationships with government:**

While tax laws governing nonprofit status can limit some advocacy efforts, private foundations are allowed under such laws to have real, substantive conversations with state agencies and policymakers in areas where both state and foundation invest. The Graustein Fund was thus able to develop meaningful relationships with relevant agencies over time and to understand their programs, plans, and concerns. For example, many government agencies felt pressure to fund programs and were frustrated at their inability to make the case for collaborative work. The Graustein Fund was able to bring its experience and research in early childhood to help these agency partners make the case, bolstering both parties' aims.

Later, the Graustein built on these existing relationships by offering to match funds if the government committed them. Some people may have seen this move as a challenge to government, rather than an invitation. However, the Graustein Fund's longstanding relationship with state policymakers allowed the organization to take a more active approach to partnering with government.

**Be truly local:** State government is not the only policymaking institution involved in Connecticut early childhood initiatives. Local early childhood tables and councils had to involve municipal systems that did not usually talk about young children, as well as the providers and other social service agencies. While policy may be enacted at a state level, practice is embedded at a local level. The heads of each local council had to spend time building relationships with key stakeholders such as a mayor, only to see those people leave at election time. However, sometimes the local nature of this work allowed the council to help adults understand that it was their children, and their neighbors' children—a future town citizenship and economy—that were at stake.

Several of the local Early Childhood Councils also became primary conduits for other funding from state, municipalities, and foundations for the 0–8 age group, allowing them to see duplications and gaps in services. The Graustein Fund also created a statewide learning community among the local Early Childhood Council leaders and other relevant organizations, allowing them to share best practices and concerns and giving the foundation's advocacy partners insight into potential new policy challenges that they could bring to the state's attention.

“How do we tell that the system is working? What are the measures that tell us what's working? What measures tell us why it matters? It's not just about how many seats in child care are filled today, but rather how consistently we have supported a child in prenatal all the way through the early elementary school years.”

ANGELA FRUSCIANTE, KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER  
WILLIAM CASPER GRAUSTEIN MEMORIAL FUND

# Three Mindset Shifts to Sustain Changes in Policy and Practice

Changes in public policy and practice to support collective impact may come from policymakers themselves or they may be inspired by philanthropic partnership. The mindset shifts that sustain this type of change may have come before the policy change, or as a result of it, but those shifts must be more broadly adopted at local, state, and federal levels for the changes to be truly sustainable.

Recent reports,<sup>34</sup> such as the evaluation of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities Program and the KnowledgeWorks' guide for federal policymakers, document these types of mindset shifts and confirm what many policymakers already knew: supporting collaboration is not just about changing RFP language; it also requires changing beliefs to better address complex problems. These mindset shifts include:

Supporting collaboration is not just about changing RFP language; it also requires changing beliefs to better address complex problems.

**From a focus on program delivery to a focus on problem solving:** Solving complex problems requires more than a single program. It requires instead that many programs (and actors and funds supporting those programs) be aligned toward a common goal. As policymakers adopt this mindset, they change the way they think about program delivery. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is thinking about ways to fund communities to fight chronic conditions and attack the social and environmental determinants of poor health, rather than funding programs that focus on a single disease.<sup>35</sup> This mindset shift also has implications for the way policymakers think about their roles as technical assistance providers, moving beyond content expertise (e.g., in transportation planning) to coordination expertise. An example of the latter is the Strong Cities, Strong Communities model of embedding a government employee with deep understanding of relevant funding streams within a community, for example in a mayor's office, to help align and coordinate federal funds and programs.<sup>36</sup>

**From working within a federal agency to working across agencies and levels of government:**

Policymakers solving a problem need to work across all levels with all government entities that touch the solution. Rather than focusing on alignment work within a single agency, they recognize that setting goals and aligning reporting and other functions across agencies supports a community's use of a collective impact approach to achieve a shared goal. For example, the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development and the Environmental Protection Agency work together to plan and support the Sustainable Communities program to coordinate federal housing, transportation, and infrastructure investments in urban, suburban, and rural communities.<sup>37</sup> To support collaborative approaches to HIV prevention, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funded state-level departments of health to work with community clinics, while the Health Resources and Services Administration funded community clinics to work with those same state agencies.<sup>38</sup>

**From designing programs for standardized implementation to using local implementation needs to inform program design:**

Policymakers strive to use best practices and evidence-based strategies to inform program design, helping to promote better outcomes and using tax dollars only on proven interventions. However, sometimes these well-designed programs do not achieve intended out-

comes in light of local circumstances. Variables such as relationships, social norms, and existing locally-run programs can be difficult for policymakers to include in their program design. Gathering input from communities in advance on their own local context would allow for intentional design to avoid implementation challenges and ultimately create stronger outcomes. For example, the Social Innovation Fund allows local philanthropies to tailor funds to local needs. Instead of funding state and local government and service providers directly, the Social Innovation Fund provides funding to grantmaking organizations such as foundations and chapters of the United Way.<sup>39</sup> Each intermediary must match the federal investment with its own funding, creating a blended pool of funding that is awarded through a competitive grant process to nonprofits based on the needs identified directly by the community and local funders.

Setting goals and aligning reporting and other functions across agencies supports a community's use of a collective impact approach to achieve a shared goal.



# Conclusion

This is a time of great transition in the United States. There are promising economic gains, constant technological improvements, and breakthroughs in medicine and other areas that enhance daily life. Yet social challenges remain. Actors across sectors, including traditional nonprofit service providers, individuals who volunteer in their communities, and corporations that think about both social and business value, are focusing more energy on the hard work of social change.

The U.S. government, too, works to serve the citizens from whom it draws its strength and power, promoting and undergirding the growth and vitality of the nation.

Yet the challenges faced by citizens in communities around the nation are overwhelming for government alone to solve. Simply funding an innovative program will not be enough to dramatically alter the outcomes in education, health, crime, and other areas that developed over many years, propelled by many different forces. Communities have begun to recognize this and to release the notion that a single solution or single entity can address these problems. They are coming together to collectively affect the lives of their residents.

Put simply, government can either support or hinder this kind of collective, community-led collaboration. During our research, we studied innovative policies of the last two decades and met dozens of current policymakers who think and act creatively to enable and incentivize collaboration. At times, however, these policymakers face seemingly

insurmountable institutional and historical processes. As R.T. Rybak, former three-term Mayor of Minneapolis, puts it: “Collective impact models can serve as a vehicle to disrupt the government power grid that is often more interested in maintaining control than achieving results.”<sup>40</sup> This learning brief has outlined ways in which policies, structures, and mental models can support those policymakers focused on results for the communities they serve. We use this brief as a call for additional examples of such changes that allow policymakers at the local, state, and federal level to support communities in adopting a collective impact approach to tackling complex social problems.

Public policymakers can join communities on the path to positive, lasting outcomes. In this time of increasingly constrained resources, policymakers can use existing funding streams, regulations, and other mechanisms under their control to create incentives and efficiencies for this path. As they do so, we may finally make progress on some of the most important, persistent, and intractable issues facing this country today.



# Appendix: Interview List

## *Individual Interviews*

### **State of Colorado Department of Human Services**

José Esquibel  
Manager, Prevention and Interagency Collaboration

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## *Individual Interviews*

### **Federal Reserve Bank of Boston**

Prabal Chakrabarti  
Vice President

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## *Joint Interview*

### **William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund**

Angela Frusciante  
Knowledge Development Officer

Nancy B. Leonard  
Public Policy Officer

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## *Group Interview*

### **William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund's Discovery Initiative Communities**

Gail S. Ford  
Coordinator  
New Haven Early Childhood Council

Lori Hart  
Director  
Waterbury Bridge to Success

Donna Labbe  
Community Outreach Coordinator  
Torrington Early Childhood Collaborative

Mary Oster  
Discovery Coordinator  
Norwalk Early Childhood Council

Cindy Praisner  
Early Childhood Coordinator  
Collaborative for Colchester's Children

David Radcliffe  
Interim Project Manager  
Coalition for New Britain's Children

Alan M. Slobodien  
Director  
Vernon Youth Services Bureau

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# Appendix: Additional Resources for Policy Recommendations

The Forum for Youth Investment recently published a guide entitled “Collective Impact for Policymakers: Working Together for Children and Youth” (<http://forumfyi.org/CIPolicy>), which includes several recommendations also detailed in this learning brief. Their full set of recommendations includes:

- 1. Create interagency policy coordinating bodies.** Federal, state and local governments should create interagency policy coordinating bodies — such as children’s cabinets, task forces, councils and commissions — charged with crafting and implementing an overarching plan for serving specific populations, for example, children and youth.
- 2. Reserve 1 percent of funds to enhance the capacity of coordinating bodies at all levels to achieve collective impact across multiple government programs.** This set-aside in all federal, state and local funding streams would provide direct support, networking, training and technical assistance to improve partnership management capacity (sometimes referred to as “backbone functions”).
- 3. Reserve 1 percent of funds to arm coordinating bodies with the data and evaluation systems they need to manage effectively.** This set-aside in all federal, state and local funding streams would provide direct support and training and technical assistance to improve the quality of the data that policy coordinating bodies use to guide their work.
- 4. Allow funding to be used flexibly, and to be blended and braided when coupled with accountability for results.** Whenever possible, authorization committees, appropriation committees and executive branch agencies should explicitly allow coordinating bodies to use and allocate funding flexibly. This includes blending and braiding funds with other related funding streams that provide a range of related services, address a range of related outcomes and target similar overlapping populations - on the condition that they be held accountable for achieving specific results.
- 5. Develop research and evaluation methodologies appropriate for partnerships.** Government-affiliated research institutions, such as the National Science Foundation and the Institute of Education Sciences, should fund research to determine what factors underlie the success of population-specific policy coordinating bodies and to design evaluation methodologies for their unique needs.
- 6. Reform auditing and accounting practices to allow partnerships and policy coordinating bodies to be held collectively accountable for results achieved, rather than for services provided.** The key regulations within the compliance, accounting and auditing infrastructure developed by the White House Office of Management and Budget and the Government Accountability Office, along with their state and local counterparts, should provide mechanisms for holding partnerships and coordinating bodies accountable for achieving specific results, instead of for undertaking specifically prescribed activities. In so doing, a portion of the \$88 billion spent every year to audit the accounting records of public and private organizations that receive federal funds, and to attest to compliance with generally accepted accounting practices, could be redirected to measuring the results of collaborative activities to achieve collective impact.
- 7. Explicitly allow new coordinating bodies, strategic plans and data systems to use and build upon existing ones.** All policies that call for the creation of a partnership, strategic plan or data system should explicitly allow grant recipients to use and build upon existing ones (if they have been effective and if they are willing to tackle the specific issue the policy seeks to address). This could be done either universally for all grantees or selectively through waivers.
- 8. Create “Folk Law” waiver programs.** The White House, governors and mayors should put in place waiver programs, even when there is no new legislative waiver authority. Doing so sets in motion a series of actions that, in and of themselves, will spur collaborative actions that people think they are not legally allowed to undertake, when in fact they are. History suggests that this approach could address such perceived barriers, whimsically nicknamed “folk laws,” that could account for as much as one-third of the barriers that prevent partnerships from taking collective action.

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