

COLLECTIVE IMPACT: A NEW TWIST ON AN OLD ENGLISH ART

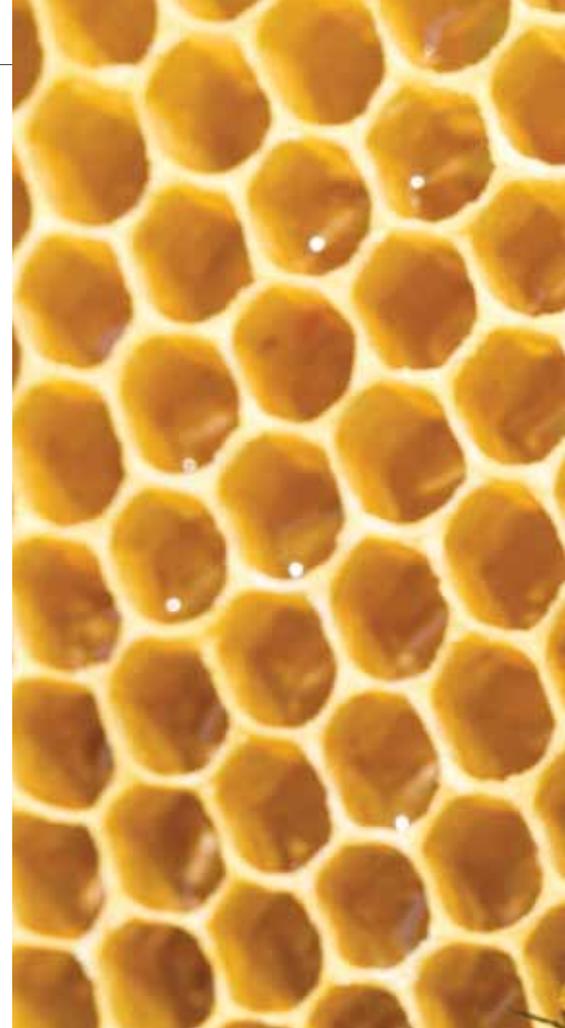
The challenges of austerity can serve as an important stimulus to philanthropic innovation, leveraging charitable resources exponentially by taking a new and more powerful approach to the old English art of collaboration through the model of collective impact, write **Mark Kramer** and **Flynn Lund** of FSG, a consultancy firm providing support for people working to create social change.

Collective impact brings people together, in a structured way, to create social change. It can be instrumental in creating significant change precisely under the circumstances of austerity. By building upon the UK's rich legacy of cross-sector partnership, collective impact puts a new twist on the old English art of collaboration. The five elements of collective impact (see box) seem quite simple, yet they are exceedingly powerful in their impact.

Consider the example of the juvenile justice system in New York State (NYS). The system had a history of being ineffective, inefficient and unsafe. Despite state annual placement costs that were among the highest in the US (for some youth at an annual cost of around £170,000 per child), the recidivism rate neared 60% after release for some youth. A coalition of 12 foundations understood change was needed and brought together government and NGO leaders in positions to affect the

issue. Through a £275,000 philanthropic investment, a collective impact approach was taken forward. In just three years, following a series of systems-level changes, the number of youth in NYS custody fell by 45% without any increase in crime or risk to public safety. A similar local effort, Tackling Youth Substance Abuse, reduced opioid overdose fatalities by 32% in just two years on Staten Island, New York. As far away as Victoria, Australia, Go Goldfields, funded by the ten20 Foundation, has successfully reduced the proportion of primary school children requiring speech pathology interventions from roughly 40% to 27% in two years.

Each of these efforts depended on philanthropic funding from forward-looking charitable foundations, and in each case, the funding required was a minute fraction of the public resources saved as a result of the collective impact effort. Such examples give hope to the possibility that the limited



resources of philanthropy, when combined with the tools of collective impact, might actually serve to offset the vastly larger reductions in public spending driven by austerity measures.

AN ENGLISH APPROACH

One of the most promising UK examples of collective impact is the West London Zone (WLZ). WLZ is leading a highly structured and ambitious collaborative effort to enable some 13,000 of England's most vulnerable children and youth to be supported by a joined-up pipeline of

THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Common agenda – All participants have a shared vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed actions.

Shared measurement – Agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported with a short list of common indicators identified and used across all participating organisations for learning and improvement.

Mutually reinforcing activities – Engagement of a diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinating a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

Continuous communication – Frequent and structured open communication across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.

Backbone support – Ongoing support by independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative, including guiding the initiative's vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilising resources.



preventive 'cradle-to-career' services that will enable them to flourish.

Why is WLZ well positioned to create a level of impact not seen in previous efforts? It is because local community leaders understood that setting their individual agendas aside to work in concert with others was the only way to unlock the potential of the young people they served. In late 2014, the leaders of almost 40 organisations agreed to participate in the WLZ effort, including voluntary community and social enterprises, schools, early-years centres, resident associations, community and voluntary service organisations and grant-giving organisations.

These organisations worked together for six months to develop proposals for the future operations of WLZ. Together, they co-created a common agenda and theory of change, designed a rigorous measurement system, and articulated how each partner organisation would mutually reinforce each other's work, without duplication of effort. WLZ serves the essential backbone functions. Although still in its early stages, WLZ's progress is promising. Here, too, it was private philanthropic funding that launched and supported the initiative.

All these collaborations share a common philosophy: that solutions to complex problems rarely come from a

single intervention delivered by one solitary organisation. A profound shift in mind-set is needed if the philanthropic sector is to move away from isolated impact, typically giving one-off grants to individual non-profits that are not coordinated with other sectors. The funders of these efforts each recognise that their role is more powerful when they serve as enablers of a well-structured cross-sector collaborative process.

PHILANTHROPIC PIONEERS

There are five ways that funders can catalyse more collective impact efforts:

- **Lead from behind** Facilitating the conditions within which others can make progress towards systems change is a powerful role for funders to play. As a recent Columbia University study funded by the Wallace Foundation confirms, it is not enough to simply get well-intentioned people together to create change. Focusing attention on an issue and enabling a long-term collaborative process through which organisations can find the solution themselves are the keys to unlocking changes in the system. Issuing grants to fund the process of collaboration, funding the backbone function, and shifting focus from

outputs to outcomes are all ways of achieving this change.

- **Learn from the community**

Philanthropy does not need to have the answers, but it can help the community find its own answers. Within each community lies a deep understanding of the problems through the eyes of those with lived experience. Community members hold the assets, energy and sense of duty that any sustainable solution relies on. Funders can issue clear criteria in their grants to ensure that collective impact efforts engage the community members whose lives are most deeply affected, and who can help co-create and implement solutions, increasing the potential for significant and lasting progress.

- **Understand the problem** Despite ongoing budget cuts, there are still many high-quality public services in place. As a result, funders may choose to focus on either bringing together actors to tackle issues that fall outside of current service provisions, or building coordination capacity in communities most severely affected by service cuts. In all cases, local authorities should be at the table as a partner. Funders must commit to establishing a baseline understanding of the problem they seek

Continued overleaf

to address, and then conduct collective impact readiness assessments to confirm if collective impact is the right approach to be pursued together with local authorities and other key partners.

- **Invest in measurement** Without data, an initiative is not able to understand what is working and what is not. Funders can play a vital role in enabling collective impact initiatives to prove their case by supporting measurement. Assistance might range from making data more widely available, to building the capacity of the people to collect, analyse and learn from the data. Pushing for collective impact efforts to prove the case will allow for systems-level changes, such as shaping policy and unlocking new sources of funding.
- **Be a catalyst** Practitioners listen to fellow practitioners more than anyone else. Foundations can build a movement around a particular issue by convening communities of practice. The Collective Impact Forum, for instance, has grown to 16,000 community practitioner members in the two years since its inception, and is a vibrant virtual and physical community continuously advancing the practice of

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collective impact globally. There is great opportunity for funders to advance dialogue and learning further in the UK.

Collective impact is not a recipe that always works. It has, however, frequently enabled measurable progress on previously intractable social issues at scale. Those experimenting with the model during these challenging times are bright and confident that collective impact offers a new opportunity to address our most urgent and complex problems. Who will be the next philanthropic pioneers to catalyse social change through collective impact? ●

For codification of collective impact in Stanford Social Innovation Review, see www.ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

For Columbia University study see <http://bit.ly/1W0ldXF>

The Collective Impact Forum is at www.collectiveimpactforum.org

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IMPACT INCUBATOR: FORMING COLLABORATIONS TO EFFECT SOCIAL CHANGE

Collective impact has been applied in the UK by the Impact Incubator, a collaboration of foundations and social investment bank Social Finance working to effect change to a range of entrenched social issues. **Emily Bolton** and **Mariyam Farooq** of Social Finance expand.

One of the issues the Impact Incubator has used this approach to focus on is ethnic inequalities in mental health. In the first instance this work has been based in Lambeth, due to the strong local leadership and energy for change.

Our research identified that the inequality exists due to a complex kaleidoscope of factors exacerbated by a lack of trust between the community and system. This multi-faceted issue needs multiple actors to work together to effect change. To address this we are developing an equal partnership between the statutory system and the community it is there to serve. It will operate at a strategic and operational level to ensure change happens and will be underpinned by transparent measurement of outcomes. We are working towards the launch of this collective impact response early next year.

Philanthropic foundations have been central to the success of this work. It has taken time to research the issue, to

understand the drivers of the problem, evolve and co-develop potential solutions and build the relationships and partnerships needed to effect change. This development work has been supported in large part by grant-makers.

Philanthropic funding has enabled:

- Long-term commitment to addressing a long-term entrenched problem
- Independence, which has enabled us to build trusting relationships with a wide spectrum of statutory stakeholders and community members
- The time and space to think in a strategic and systemic way.

Grant-makers have a unique role to play in fostering these systems-changing approaches. Their ability to focus on long-term outcomes, support strategic change and bring an independent neutral voice to the table is critical in solving some of our most complex issues.