# Rethinking Community Development: What does Collective Impact offer?

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## Acknowledgements

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## Definitions

**Collective Impact**: A framework for facilitating and achieving large-scale social change around results or outcomes that are identified by a community. It is a structured and disciplined approach to bringing community and stakeholders together to focus on a common agenda that results in long-lasting change. Collective Impact approaches build on and strengthen existing effort around issues and activities to address them (Kania & Kramer, 2013).

**Backbone Organisation:** An organisation that facilitates Collective Impact initiatives through activities such as guiding vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, facilitating shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilising funding (Kania & Kramer, 2013).

# Executive Summary

There is longstanding evidence that working collaboratively reduces duplication, more efficiently utilises resources and improves outcomes for communities (Kania et al., 2014; Kania & Kramer, 2013; Weaver, 2014). Collective Impact aims to provide a framework for more effective and sustainable collaboration and to reduce fragmented and competitive approaches to social change, via five conditions (Figure 1): a common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, shared measurement systems, continuous communication and backbone organisational support (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016; Kania & Kramer, 2011).

**Figure 1: The five conditions of Collective Impact**
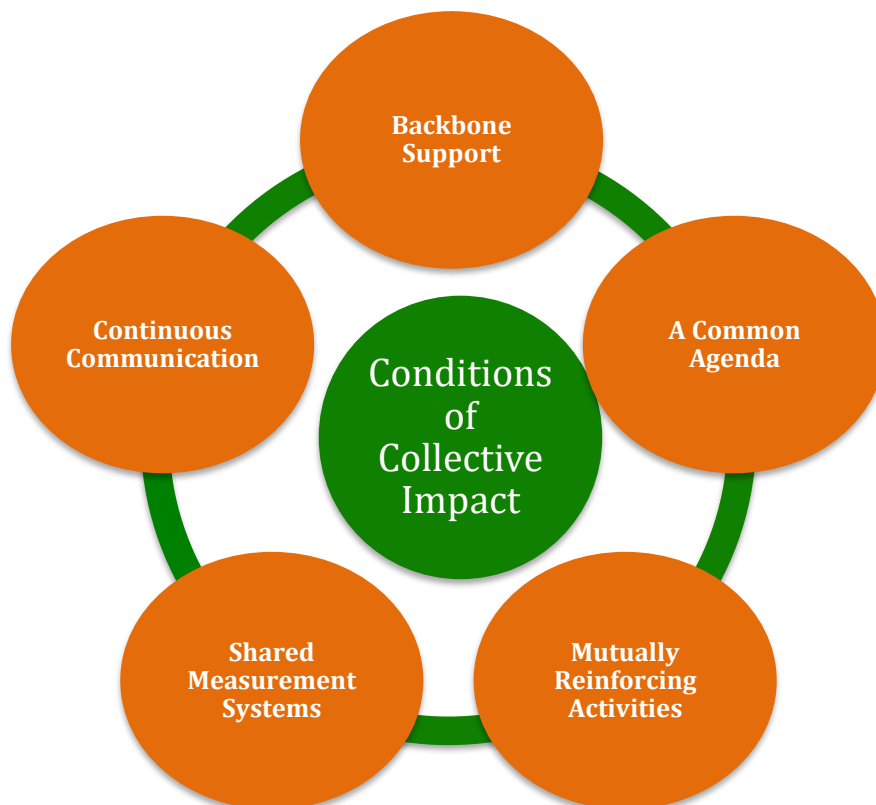


**Source: Kania & Kramer, 2011.**

This project explored how local government areas in South Australia can implement a Collective Impact framework to produce tangible benefits for the communities they serve and support.

Overall, the evaluative research found that participants were positive about the Collective Impact initiatives they were involved with. Reasons for this assessment of initiatives included demonstrable buy-in from the broader community for the social change efforts; co-design and commitment to shared goals; and the potential for Collective Impact to lead to significant positive change(s) in the community. Participants felt that Collective Impact offered an opportunity for collaborative work that could address social concerns in an efficient and coordinated way.

A number of challenges were also identified in relation to Collective Impact initiatives. These were primarily associated with sustainability of funding and resources as well as the longevity of the backbone organisation driving initiatives. Participants strongly recommended that Collective Impact initiatives dedicate significant time and resources to relationship building, developing simple governance structures and securing ongoing financial or in-kind support from initiative partners. Additionally, participants indicated that Collective Impact is not a linear framework, and that initiatives often need to revisit their underpinning structures, the conditions or principles of Collective Impact, in order to maintain momentum and stakeholder support for an initiative.

This report provides practice-focused resources for stakeholders to more effectively undertake and support social change initiatives in their local communities. The report contains a **Collective Impact Assessment Tool** which offers a simple, visual and easy to follow roadmap or guide to the practical steps necessary for formulating a Collective Impact initiative. The report also makes recommendations drawn from the evaluative research, being that:

1. Community development approaches are reinvigorated to make better use of resources offered through Collective Impact and its framework for collaboration and equity.
2. Investment is made in developing community voice and leadership to raise and drive social change initiatives.
3. Community voices are recognised as being central to all aspects of Collective Impact initiatives from conception to implementation.
4. Collective Impact conditions are seen as principles and not prescriptive instructions for community change.
5. Relationship building is adopted as a critical aspect of Collective Impact, and is a priority for investment within initiatives.
6. A Collective Impact network is developed in South Australia to allow initiatives or people interested in developing initiatives an opportunity for information sharing, support and collaboration.

## Introduction

In recent years Collective Impact has gained increasing recognition as a successful framework for working in a coordinated and collaborative manner to address complex social problems. Furthermore, Collective Impact initiatives have shown potential to strengthen communities, extending the traditional theory and practice of community development by promoting outcomes related to increased community participation, wellbeing and social cohesion, particularly for children, families, and vulnerable groups.

This project explored three examples of Collective Impact in South Australia – the Adelaide Zero Project, Mid Murray Family Connections Network and Together in the South, to inform how local governments can benefit from applying the principles of Collective Impact to challenging social issues in their communities. The project reports the results of the following four-step evaluative research methodology:

1.  Review of relevant literature and practice documents on Collective Impact, including from local initiatives;
2.  An online survey targeted at stakeholders involved in three Collective Impact initiatives on the ground in South Australia: The Adelaide Zero Project, Mid Murray Family Connections Network, and Together in the South. Stakeholders involved in this stage of the project were members of project governance groups, workers/managers in services and agencies, community members impacted by initiatives, and representatives of different levels of government and relevant government agencies. Thirty-six people completed the survey.
3.  In-depth interviews with participants in the online survey (self-nominated) to further flesh out thinking and experiences around Collective Impact as a social change approach. A small number of one-on-one telephone interviews were undertaken in this research stage, further enhancing understandings of the Collective Impact initiatives in focus, their benefits and the challenges experienced.
4.  Building on and reinforcing stages 1-3, a Collective Impact Assessment Tool was developed as part of this project to assist councils and other stakeholders considering leading or participating in a Collective Impact initiative (Figure 2). A roundtable session was held with representatives from local councils to provide feedback and workshop the Collective Impact Assessment Tool.

The research found that participants were generally positive about the Collective Impact initiatives they were involved with, but challenges were also identified, and participants indicated that Collective Impact is not a linear framework  - initiatives need to revisit their underpinning structures, the conditions or principles of Collective Impact, in order to maintain momentum and stakeholder support for an initiative. This report and the associated Collective Impact Assessment Tool developed for end-users provide practice-focused resources for stakeholders to more effectively undertake and support social change initiatives in their local communities. They support a range of recommendations for rethinking community development presented at the end of this report.

# Background: the Value of Collective Impact

## What is Collective Impact?

Complex social issues persevere in society despite varied approaches at multiple levels of intervention. Issues such as poverty, educational attainment, health, homelessness, discrimination and environmental concerns continue to impact large proportions of society. Such issues are influenced by, and impact on, a range of social factors (Kania et al., 2014; Smart, 2017). The complex, multi-faceted nature of these issues means that no single policy or approach will address the negative effects of these problems. The ongoing variables and rapidly changing structures of society mean that a range of solutions that work towards destabilizing broad, complex or wicked problems are needed (Moore & Fry, 2011; Weaver, 2014). However, most interventions, programs and services are currently structured and funded in a manner that provides 'isolated impact'. This means a majority of organisations or programs are funded based on demonstrated capacity to deliver, or the potential to reach defined measurable targets, often at an individual level and without consideration for broader population outcomes (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Such thinking and approaches often results in a community sector in competition for funding, short term program support, duplicated or missing services, limited potential for sustainable and effective population outcomes, and limited evaluation of population-level impact (Smart, 2017).

Previous research demonstrates the capacity of taking a collaborative approach to complex social problems. Community and nonprofit organisations that work together, and funding arrangements that promote this, have been shown to produce improved outcomes at a population level, more effective support for individuals, more efficient use of resources, and ongoing sustainability in social change initiatives (Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Weaver, 2014). One framework for supporting more collaborative and sustainable approaches to social issues is Collective Impact. Although the framework was defined and named in 2011 by Kania & Kramer of FSG consulting, there is a long-standing history of collaborative community action working towards reducing the traditionally fragmented and competitive approach to social initiatives. Collective Impact differs in that it provides a clear framework with five conditions required for success (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016; Kania & Kramer, 2011), as follows:

- **A common agenda**: For collective action to be successful, those working within the project must have an agreed vision and shared understanding of the issue they wish to address, actions to be undertaken and outcomes they wish to achieve. Any organisational or individual agendas must be suspended in favour of the agreed goals, and differences should be discussed and resolved for the benefit of the overall project and vision.

- **Shared measurement systems**: To support a common agenda, a Collective Impact initiative must have a shared measurement system. Without a common understanding of measuring and analysing data, the objective of a shared goal and outcomes measurement is illusory. Shared measurement systems hold the participants in a Collective Impact initiative accountable and

help guide shared vision to best suit the needs of the project and community through evidence-based decision making.

- **Mutually reinforcing activities**: To ensure the continuity of a shared vision amongst a diverse range of participants it is important that all actions reinforce their contribution to a shared agenda and utilise individual or organisational strengths and resources to the benefit of the initiative. These activities or actions should complement each other, reinforcing the collaborative nature of the framework.

- **Continuous communication**: Communication must be prioritised in all Collective Impact initiatives: All parties must feel equally engaged and informed about the project and the actions and outcomes associated with shared goals. This ensures accountability, trust and equity amongst varied participants and ensures challenges are addressed quickly and effectively.

- **Backbone support organisations**: Collective Impact initiatives require resources and people to manage and facilitate the projects and the varied number of participants involved. Often, the coordination of this collaboration is where other frameworks fail as participants are often already under resourced or seen as biased facilitators. Collective impact proposes the need for backbone organisations to overcome this and to plan, manage and facilitate the initiative through the provision of infrastructure, technology, communication support, data collection and management and all organisational activities such as meetings and administrative tasks (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Weaver, 2014).

More recently, a revised model of Collective Impact has been developed by Cabaj and Weaver (2016) in an effort to address the challenges identified in early-adopted Collective Impact initiatives. This model, termed Collective Impact 3.0, proposes the following shifts in thinking from the original:

- **Common agenda to community aspiration**: Cabaj and Weaver suggest that for successful Collective Impact initiatives to achieve an authentic common agenda, leadership is required in order to bring people together, review data and strategies and to facilitate the shared vision for change. However, a common agenda based on a leadership vision will not succeed in this framework: It must draw on community aspirations to underpin the common agenda. This broad aspiration not only ensures support for project goals, but also allows the diverse range of potential contributors to impact the outcomes of a community ambition that could not be achieved via an isolated impact model.

- **Shared measurement to strategic learning**: Since the conceptualisation of the initial framework, Collective Impact initiatives have found that without strategic learning, shared measurement systems do not provide the right data, or the datasets that support shared measurement instead become

inflexible, and overwhelming, hindering initiative progress. Accordingly, Cabaj and Weaver suggest that manageable strategic learning systems, built on a foundation of end-user focused datasets and data systems, overarching shared measurement work to better inform decision-making and enrich the Collective Impact approach.

- **Mutually reinforcing activities to high leverage activities:** It is argued that for Collective Impact initiatives to succeed, participants should work beyond collaborative and complementary strategies and invest in high leverage opportunities for change. This shift in thinking and practice involves reviewing systems and then utilising local skills, knowledge and networks to influence system wide change. Working for high leverage opportunities may result in the combining of competition and collaboration, where participants actively pursue different outcomes to influence broader system changes. These outcomes should contribute to the same shared vision despite being achieved through competitive or conflicting strategies.

- **Continuous communication to authentic engagement**: The success derived from the inclusion of all stakeholders in an identified complex problem, including those affected by the 'problem' (community members), positions authentic engagement as a key condition for transformative change in Collective Impact initiatives. Continuous communication can be achieved by aiming for authentic community engagement. Without the core components of continuous communication, trust building, participant mobilisation and meaningful interactions, it becomes increasing unlikely a project will have the broad spectrum of community participants required for its success.

- **Backbone organisation to containers for change**: Drawing on Kahane (2012), Cabaj and Weaver state that containers for change:

    > … *transform their understandings [of the system they are trying to change], the relationships [with others in the systems] and their intentions [to act]. The boundaries of the container are set so that the participants feel enough protection and safety, as well as enough pressure and friction, to be able to do their challenging work* (Kahane, 2012)

    In order for a container for change to be successful it must mobilise financial supports and diverse leadership on identified issues, facilitate participant capacity to suspend or question existing ways of thinking, cultivate trust and honest communication that encourages fierce conversations, manage power imbalances, provide organisational and administrative structure to allow participants the time and energy to focus on activities and outcomes, and facilitate engagement with a diverse range of people (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016).

In addition to the five conditions of the Collective Impact framework, research has proposed that three pre-conditions are needed to for initiatives to be successful: '*having an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency*' (Hanleybrown et al., 2012, p. 3). Three phases of undertaking an initiative have also been identified: initiating action, organising for impact, and sustaining action and impact (Hanleybrown et al., 2012, p. 8) along with the following eight principles of practice:

- Design and implement the initiative with a priority placed on equity, to ensure voices of community members at the margins are heard and reflected in practice.
- Include community members in the collaborative.
- Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners.
- Use data to continuously learn, adapt and improve.
- Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills.
- Focus on program and system strategies.
- Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust and respect across participants.
- Customise for local context (Brady & Splansky Juster, 2016).

A systemic review exploring peer-reviewed Collective Impact work by Ennis and Tofa (2020) also found that other components are required in addition to the five core conditions to foster collaboration in an initiative. Ennis and Tofa (2020) specifically identified relationships and trust as being critical within initiatives, although not specifically addressed in the Collective Impact framework. Convincing funders to support the time and cost of building trust and relationships has been described as difficult in some of the included studies (Ennis & Tofa, 2020).

### *Acknowledged limits to Collective Impact*

While there is increasing evidence for the value of Collective Impact as a framework for collaborative change, no framework is without limitations (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016). Evolving practice in Collective Impact has shown several challenges that may hinder capacity to influence transformative population level change. Challenge areas are:

(a) The authenticity of community engagement and inclusion, highlighting the tendency for initiatives (to date) to be top-down and service-led rather than formulated and driven by the people impacted (geographically/place-based or through lived experience). This line of critique raises concerns about equity, power differentials, voice and reach among those most vulnerable or marginalised within communities (see Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Ennis & Tofa, 2020, Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Harwood, 2014; LeChasseur, 2016; McAfee et al., 2015; Raderstrong & Boyea-Robinson, 2016; Ryan, 2014; Smart, 2017; White, Blatz & Joseph, 2019).
(b) The resourcing required for Collective Impact, especially for the broad remit of backbone organisations (see Cabaj & Weaver, 2016; Wolff, 2016).
(c) Concerns that the core conditions lack focus on the policy and system changes needed to achieve population wide outcomes (see Cabaj & Weaver, 2016; Flood et al., 2015; Graham & Weaver, 2016; Himmelman et al., 2017;

LeChasseur, 2016; McAfee et al., 2015; Smart, 2017; Weaver, 2016; Wolff, 2016).

On this first point, Wolff (2016) reminds us that *'Collective Impact never explicitly states that you need to engage the people most affected by the issue(s) driving the coalition'*. As such, there is a risk that Collective Impact can be 'done to' people, rather than *with* them. Building community capacity is an important part of what Collective Impact can and should achieve within communities. In this respect, Collective Impact can be seen as an extension of existing community development theory and practice; a repackaging of collaborative ways of working, as well as a new paradigm for community change (Born and Bourgeois, 2014). However, Ennis and Tofa (2020) recognise that a potential strength of the Collective Impact framework may lie in its flexibility and capacity to be combined or adapted with other social change or community development models. It could be surmised that there are opportunities in recognising and learning from historical approaches to collaborative social change and exploring how applying these in conjunction Collective Impact can enhance existing community development projects and models.

In discussing the identified limits to, and challenges for, Collective Impact it is important to note that the framework is relatively new, arguably evolving, and that limited evaluation has been undertaken. Many Collective Impact initiatives, especially in Australia, are in their formative stages – early in development or implementation – and accordingly it is too early to comment on the ability of Collective Impact to impact population level outcomes. To date, the Collective Impact literature has generally taken on one of two focuses: exploring the application of Collective Impact in relation to an existing community development project (see Bradley et al., 2017; Wood, 2016), or evaluation of the beginning stages of an initiative (Ennis & Tofa, 2020; Smart, 2017). As Salignac et al. (2017) conclude, further research is needed to ascertain Collective Impact's successes, particularly research exploring longitudinal outcomes. Notably, there is increasing development of evaluation tools for use Collective Impact initiatives, particularly in places such as Canada where the model has been operational for longer periods of time (see Cabaj, 2014; Halliday, 2020; Preskill et al., 2019; Tamarack 2019a).

This evaluative project has been undertaken with the identified limits to, and challenges for, Collective Impact in mind. We found that such limits/challenges can be offset within initiatives if they are recognised and front of mind in the planning, development, implementation and ongoing delivery, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives. The Collective Impact Assessment Tool developed for this project (Figure 2) reflects this and aims to support initiatives to overcome these limitations.

## Collective Impact in Action

### *The international experience*

Collective impact has a strong foundation in Canada and the United States. There are a number of initiatives in action demonstrating progress towards their outcome measures and shared agenda. However, as noted above, few have been evaluated

empirically. Two significant examples of Collective Impact in action are the Tamarack Institute and Strive. The Tamarack Institute in Canada works with non-profits, governments, businesses and the community to support and initiate innovative social change (Tamarack, 2019b). Resourced primarily through a combination of philanthropy and self-raised revenue, they also have support from government, various foundations and businesses. Their work not only means they operate as a backbone for some initiatives, such as in the Vibrant Communities projects utilising a place-based approach to tackle poverty, but as a lead organisation through their Deepening Communities initiatives, which aim to further policies and programs that increase community capacity and resilience (Tamarack, 2019b). Tamarack also undertakes work to advocate for Collective Impact, and various other community or social change models, through community engagement, collaborative leadership, evaluations, networks and workshops (Tamarack, 2019b). In the Vibrant Communities initiative, Tamarack has operated in an overarching national backbone function, administrating the initiative and supporting the various projects connected to it (FSG, 2013, J.W McConnell Foundation, 2017; Tamarack, 2020). This included facilitating meetings, evaluations, managing grants, as well as coaching around the core issues and fostering community leadership (FSG, 2013, J.W McConnell Foundation, 2017; Tamarack, 2020). Tamarack also operates as a **backbone to backbones** in this initiative, as each regional initiative of Vibrant Communities has its own backbone organisation that focuses on local backbone functions (FSG, 2013, Tamarack, 2020).

Strive is another example of a successful use of the Collective Impact model. Located in the urban school districts of Cincinnati, Ohio and Northern Kentucky, Strive brought together local leaders to improve education outcomes and increase student success (Kania & Kramer, 2011). More than 300 cross-sector representatives were engaged in the initiative, ranging from school district superintendents, non-profit practitioners, business leaders, city officials and parents (StriveTogether, 2020). The Strive partners agreed on a common agenda based around a shared set of goals, outcomes and 53 success indicators (StriveTogether, 2020). Within the first four years Strive improved 34 of the 53 indicators, and in the first five years in Greater Cincinnati it achieved a 9% rise in kindergarten readiness, an 11% increase in high school graduation and a 10% increase in college enrollment (StriveTogether, 2020). Strive initially operated as what they termed 'the anchor backbone', but with an increasing number of local initiatives, moved to *conceptualising the backbone as a function rather than an entity*, that is diffused amongst the initiative and flexible to the needs of specific communities (StriveTogether, 2014). Strive report to be engaged with approximately 70 community partnerships connected to over 10,800 local organisations. Additionally, the founding Cincinnati-North Kentucky partnership report measurable improvement in more than 90% of their outcomes (StriveTogether, 2020).

In 2018, the Spark Policy Institute published findings of a study that explored Collective Impact via a case study methodology across 25 American initiatives, including some of which are linked to the Tamarack Institute and the Strive collective. The study discussed a theory of change, shown in Figure 3, to explore and document early changes, systems changes and population changes resulting from initiatives. In

doing so it was found that there were identifiable links between the stages. For example, it was noted that there were strong relationships between Collective Impact conditions and early changes in the sites visited, and consequently that there were strong relationships between early changes and system changes in sites visited (Spark Policy Institute, 2018). Furthermore, for seven of the eight visit sites, there was also '*compelling data linking new or expanded programs/services to the population change'* (Spark Policy Institute, 2018, p.24).

**Figure 2: Collective Impact theory of change**



**Source: Spark Policy Institute 2019.**

Across all eight sites visited, the study found that Collective Impact had contributed to the desired population level change and that, when examined against alternative explanations for these changes, three sites had compelling evidence that there was '*low plausibility of an alternative explanation for how that change could have otherwise occurred'* (Spark Policy Institute, 2018, p.26). These three sites shared a strong focus on resource allocation and funding and had well established data collection and sharing strategies. It was noted that, in some cases, Collective Impact initiatives may not be solely responsible for population level outcomes, but they play an important contributing part in population changes, working parallel to other systems, policies and interventions. Reflecting previous literature exploring Collective Impact, this study also found that in relation to equity, only one third had specific equity capacity or focused actions, and many faced challenges to undertaking meaningful inclusion and achieving equity for stakeholders (Spark Policy Institute, 2018).

Other notable findings from the study included the importance of mature backbones, governance and leadership as well as the key role of data and leveraging of resources. These key factors can be linked to the five conditions of Collective Impact, which the report found to have reciprocal influences on each other as shown in Figure 4. The study did identify limits to the research, including difficulty isolating the effects of Collective Impact on population level changes, and challenges to identifying if a lack of population change was due to insufficient time or other factors (Spark Policy Institute, 2018).

**Figure 3: Foundational elements of Collective Impact**
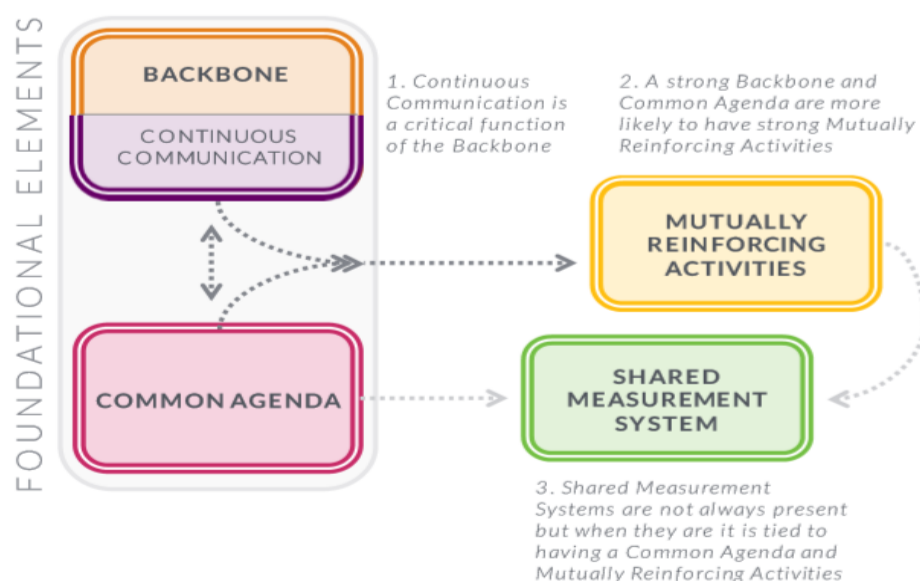


**Source: Spark Policy Institute 2019.**

### Australian Collective Impact experiences

There are an increasing number of social change initiatives in Australia specifically utilising Collective Impact. Furthermore, a number of initiatives undertake collaborative community change that demonstrates the core conditions of the Collective Impact framework.

United Way Australia, a subsidiary of United Way in America, has undertaken a number of Collective Impact initiatives within Australia as a 'neutral' backbone organisation (United Way, 2017). The 90 Homes for 90 Lives coalition, comprised of seven core partners and a collaboration between key corporate, government, community and philanthropic stakeholders utilised Collective Impact and an outcomes based approach to implement a Housing First model. (United Way, 2017). The initiative secured funding for permanent housing for 70 rough sleepers and, by January 2014, 83 had been housed (United Way, 2017). United Way Australia (2017) noted that this initiative was successful not only due to the collaboration between partners, but also because of the neutral 'backbone support' role it played. The organisation has also utilised this neutral backbone approach with The Hive in Mt Druitt. However, it could be said that in this initiative United Way Australia also operated in a fashion similar to Tamarack, as a backbone to a backbone (United Way, 2017). The Hive was developed in 2014 as a partnership between United Way Australia, the Ten20 Foundation and NSW Family and Community Services to '*facilitate local community change and influence systems to ensure every child in Mt Druitt starts school well, and has enhanced life outcomes*' (The Hive, 2020). United Way Australia provided the backbone role for The Hive, coordinating and project managing the initiative (The Hive, 2020; Lilley, 2016).

United Way Australia's experience in Collective Impact initiatives is that effective backbones must be neutral so that they foster trust in the community and are believed to be in acting in the best interests of the collective rather than in accordance with their own agendas. United Way Australia offer their organisation's services as a backbone for commissioning by other initiatives across Australia, helping Collective Impact projects avoid the challenges associated with creating new backbones, such as funding, experience and infrastructure (Lilley, 2016).

The Logan Together initiative aims to enhance the health and wellbeing of infants, children and young people, their families and communities. The backbone team is hosted by Griffith University, who provide support to coordinate and enable the collective (Logan Together, 2017). The initiative's vision is that the children of Logan, '*at age eight will be as healthy and full of potential as any other group of Australian children*' (Clear Horizon Consulting, 2018). The initiative has a ten-year plan, with a five-year commitment to having made material progress in improving the rates of healthy development for Logan children at age eight. The initiative's long-term outlook reflects the time Collective Impact initiatives take to demonstrate population level outcomes, and demonstrates the importance of sustainability as a focus within both initiatives and their driving backbones (Logan Together, 2017).

Data tracked thus far demonstrates that Logan Together has made progress towards their shared goals. However, as data is yet to be collated from various activities within the initiative, it is too early to definitively make conclusions about outcomes (Logan Together, 2017). A 2018 evaluation report notes the collective's success to that time period, describing the progress as on track to deliver early and systemic changes (Clear Horizon Consulting, 2018). Like with other initiatives, challenges were noted in the evaluation work around sustainability of resource intensive work, authentic community engagement and growing the capacity and capability of stakeholders to share in delivery of the work.

As previously noted, the evidence for the effectiveness of Collective Impact internationally is limited (Smart, 2017). Given that Australia's Collective Impact movement is younger than its United States and Canadian counterparts, there is substantially less evidence for the efficacy of the framework in the Australian context. However, literature suggests that there are some significant social and political differences in Australia that have impacted how the framework is utilised in practice. Firstly, the Australian philanthropic sector is significantly smaller than that of the United States or Canada, impacting ability to secure funding not only for activities, but also for the backbone role. In turn, the government often plays a greater role in funding and leadership within Australian initiatives, particularly in rural and remote areas (Salignac et al., 2017; Smart 2017). Moreover, where the Australian social services sector is funded and therefore operates in a primarily competitive manner, with organisations tendering for contracts to provide services, this has impacted collaborative approaches (Smart, 2017). Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge Cooper's (2017) proposition that Collective Impact may exclude participation by smaller organisations and groups due to their limited ability to contribute financial or in-kind resource and collect and share data. In Australia this

may be more evident due to increased frugality and competitive cross-organisational relationships that are counterproductive to collaboration.

Despite these challenges, Australian initiatives are employing a more flexible, inclusive and community driven approach, which has been recognised as facilitating more effective Collective Impact work. It has been argued that this may be in part be driven by sector wide shifts to co-design and authentic lived experience engagement (Smart 2017). Exploratory research in Australia supports flexibility as a facilitating factor in initiatives and suggests that the Collective Impact framework be seen as, '*as a method for network-based collaboration rather than a distinct methodology or philosophy*' (Salignac et al., 2017). Salignac et al. (2017) also identify that the success factors of Australian Collective Impact projects reflect theories of inter-organisational collaboration. These include factors such as authentic engagement with community, embracing diversity, clear business and governance processes and strategies for monitoring and evaluation (Salignac et al., 2017). They also include relational factors such as investing in and developing positive relationships, trust, honesty and effective leadership that brings stakeholders together and champions the Collective Impact approach (Salignac et al., 2017). It can be argued that Salignac et al.'s (2017) work reflects views that Collective Impact is not in and of itself a groundbreaking new approach, but a more effective *guide* for collaborative social change.

Importantly, Salignac et al. also note that whilst Australian initiatives vary in how they apply the framework, there were also identifiable similarities among them (2017). Across their study there was clear engagement with, and implementation of, the five conditions of Collective Impact. Firstly, the importance of a common agenda for guidance and transparency was highlighted, along with the importance of community input into agenda development, and in implementing initiatives. Shared measurement was described as a vital component, but one that was difficult to develop and sustain. Undertaking mutually reinforcing activities was seen by their study participants as central to initiative success, whilst continuous communication via a range of methods helped facilitate and coordinate activities and mitigate tensions extending from historically competitive tendering dynamics. Reflecting international research, Salignac et al.'s study found a range of backbone types in operation, noting the importance of selecting an appropriate organisation to act as the backbone and advance activities such as administration, communication, relationships and resourcing. It was concluded that most of the participants in their research found that the five conditions of the Collective Impact framework provided a more effective tool than other forms of interorganisational collaboration they were aware of, or had been engaged with previously.

### *Collective Impact: The South Australian experience*

A diverse range of Collective Impact initiatives have emerged in South Australia over recent years. Table 1 provides a brief summary of such initiatives in operation at the start of 2019 as collated by Together SA. These initiatives cover 11 local government areas. Importantly, this summary is not an exhaustive list of all initiatives in South Australia.

**Table 1: 2019 Collective Impact initiatives in operation in South Australia**

| Initiative | Focus |
|---|---|
| Together in the South | Children |
| Together in the North | Children & young people |
| AIBS – Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary | Local communities, shore birds, environmental sustainability |
| WAY – Wellbeing of Adelaide Youth | Young people |
| Impact Inner North | Children & families |
| Inner West Collective | Children & young people |
| Mid Murray Family Connections | Children |
| Peterborough Collective | Community of Peterborough |
| Thriving Neighborhoods | Children, youth & families |
| Whyalla HOPE Collective | Community of Whyalla |
| Adelaide Zero Project | Rough sleeping homelessness |
| Making an Impact: Northern Adelaide | Children |
| Thriving on the Fleurieu | Children, young people & families |

**Source: Together SA 2019a.**

The three initiatives explored for this project - The Adelaide Zero Project, the Mid Murray Family Connections Network and Together in the South, stand alongside others such as the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary – Winaityinaityi Pangkara – which have been operating since 2014 (Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary Collective Plan (AIBSCP), 2017). Within that initiative, thirty-five stakeholders act as a leadership roundtable and '*advise and guide the establishment, collaborative management and future partnership model for the Bird Sanctuary*' (AIBSCP, p.17, 2017). The current backbone function is provided by The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. However, the initiative notes that this may shift to other organisations or to a partnership/collaborative model (AIBSCP, 2017). The initiative has four focus areas: to protect shorebirds, build and protect the local economy, enhance wellbeing and strengthen local partnerships (AIBSCP, 2017). The project has shown significant progress in the five conditions of Collective Impact (AIBSCP, 2017), but like other initiatives is still in early stages of implementation, thus limiting access to impact data. However, the initiative has recently undergone consultation on both a new management plan and new collective plan for the sanctuary (AIBSCP, 2017).

Another notable place-based Collective Impact initiative locally is Wellbeing of Adelaide Youth (WAY). WAY is a relatively young South Australia initiative that includes stakeholders from '*local and state government, the social, education and health sectors, local business and community including young people*' (Together SA, 2019b; WAY, 2018). This initiative stemmed from the results a 2016 PERMA+ survey measuring positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, physical activity, nutrition, sleep, optimism, general health and resilience, finding that City of Adelaide residents between 18-24 years self-reported lower levels of wellbeing than other age groups (Together SA, 2019b; WAY, 2018). The plan seeks

to improve this and achieve its goal such that, '*all 18-24 year olds who live in the City of Adelaide have great wellbeing*' via seven outcomes and 10 priority areas (Together SA, 2019b; WAY, 2018). The 2018-2022 plan that developed these was co-designed with young people and relevant supporting services. The WAY initiative also plans to, 'select whole population indicators for all 18-24 year olds in the City of Adelaide and create baselines from available datasets to compare trends over time' (WAY, 2018). It also aims to undertake measurement of impact at an individual level via co-designed 'performance measures like the rates of service use or positive service user experience' (WAY, 2018). The initiative has needed to develop its own data collection systems as the project identified that limited population level data exists for the targeted age group. The initiative also has plans to evaluate collaboration and performance against co-developed indicators (WAY, 2018).

These initiatives, as part of the suite identified in Figure 5, historically received support from Together SA, who significantly contributed to the development of the Collective Impact movement in South Australia by providing backbone functions for some of the initiatives outlined. In their support and advancement roles, Together SA was initially funded by Community Centres SA, who secured a small allocation of funds through the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion for piloting its operation state-wide. Between 2013 and 2019, the operations of Together SA were resourced by the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion and Department of Premier and Cabinet (Community Centres SA, 2016).

Together SA was, in practice, a new non-profit style backbone organisation, and like other new non-profit backbone entities, it benefited from perceived neutrality and strong, clear focus on championing the Collective Impact agenda (Collaboration for Impact, 2016; Klempin, 2016). With significant support from the former South Australia State Government, Together SA leveraged important public sector support for initiatives until it was disestablished by the newly elected Government in 2019.

### The case studies

#### The Adelaide Zero Project

The Adelaide Zero Project is an initiative aimed at achieving and then sustaining Functional Zero street homelessness (rough sleeping) in Adelaide's inner city by the end of 2020. The initiative has a firm foundation in Collective Impact, involving more than 45 project partners from across the not for profit sector, government (housing, health, corrections, SAPOL), philanthropics, the private sector and universities. In accordance with the principles of Collective Impact, the project has a clearly articulated shared goal, shared measurement system and a backbone organisation driving it; the Don Dunstan Foundation. Together, project partners have established and continue to refine the supporting governance structures and the actions being collectively undertaken to end street homelessness in Adelaide. The project is also underpinned by a solid foundational architecture developed by review of the evidence base used in end homelessness campaigns (Tually et al. 2017, 2018).

The Adelaide Zero Project is working to achieve its social purpose goal by using the Functional Zero approach successfully pioneered in the United States (discussed

below) and localised to the Adelaide context (Tually et al. 2017). To date, this approach has seen numerous communities achieve a functional end to veterans' or chronic homelessness. These successes are part of an expanding national end homelessness campaign across the United States known as 'Built for Zero' (Community Solutions 2018, 2016). The Functional Zero approach starts with knowing the names and needs of every homeless person sleeping rough in Adelaide, then working to ensure that the homelessness support system places more people into secure housing than are entering the system during a defined time period (usually a month). It is a dynamic measure of homelessness, which relies on real time data about the movements of people into, within and out of the homelessness services system. The project has built, refined and is using this data system for Adelaide (Tually et al. 2017, 2018).

The Adelaide Zero Project model is based on the principle of Housing First (but not housing only) and moving people into secure housing that meets their needs as quickly as possible. Placing people into secure housing requires aligning housing to support needs to ensure people moving on from homelessness can access and sustain an appropriate and safe place to call home. Sustaining Functional Zero is a key focus of the project, sitting alongside a further longer-term shared goal to apply the approach across other areas and homeless populations in South Australia. The Functional Zero approach sits neatly with the Collective Impact framework, principally because the model is founded on shared direction, data and accountability, transparency about outcomes and achievements and constant trialling of actions to end homelessness (Tually et al. 2017, 2018). It is a collective endeavour which requires partners working together to contribute components of a mutually reinforcing homelessness system. It is an exercise, in other words, of systematising a homelessness sector (Tually et al. 2017, 2018).

The Adelaide Zero Project remains active and is constantly evolving to meet its ambitious goal. Recent data (as at 18 February 2020) available via the Adelaide Zero Project data dashboard shows that 297 people have been supported to move on from rough sleeping and into housing across the life of the project (since May 2018) (Adelaide Zero Project, 2020). While such data is impressive, the project is struggling to meet the thresholds needed to achieve its goal on the specified timelines as inflows into rough sleeping homelessness remain consistent and high. Additionally, resourcing the multiple elements of the project, including the backbone, remain constant challenges, as does sourcing sufficient appropriate housing to meet the needs of people moving on from rough sleeping.

### *Mid Murray Family Connections Network*

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a nationwide census that is undertaken by teachers as children enter their first year of school. It captures children's development against five domains that have been linked to predicting health wellbeing and academic success. These domains are:

- Physical health and wellbeing.
- Social competence.

- Emotional maturity.
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based).
- Communication skills and general knowledge (AEDC, 2020).

The Mid Murray Family Connections initiative emerged in 2012 in response to AEDC data that highlighted that one in three children in the Mid Murray region were developmentally vulnerable, making the Mid Murray region the location with the second highest rates of developmentally vulnerable children in South Australia (MMFC, 2019a). The Mid Murray Family Connections Network includes stakeholders from government and non-government agencies, community groups and citizens who live and work across the Mid Murray region (MMFC, 2019a). The Mid Murray Council provides backbone support for the initiative. Work towards the initiative's goal that '*Children in the Mid Murray enjoy positive well-being and are emotionally mature'* has been undertaken via four focus areas:

- Children and their caregivers share strong attachment.
- Children are emotionally resilient.
- Children are engaged learners.
- Children and their caregivers are safe and supported (MMFC, 2019a).

The Mid Murray Family Connections Network has undertaken activities including delivering wellbeing sessions to over 150 participants, creating online educational resources for families, training community members in resilience and wellbeing, introducing localised play groups and family events, setting up the *Mid Murray Mums* Facebook community page, raising awareness and money to combat domestic violence, running children's mental health workshops and establishing links with Aboriginal leaders to support health initiatives (MMFC, 2019c).

The initiative has demonstrated significant success in achieving its desired outcomes. In 2015, the AEDC recorded that the percentage of children classified as developmentally vulnerable in the region dropped from 2012's figure of 32.4% to 18.8% (MMFC, 2019b). This was further improved in 2018 with the AEDC showing that the number of children vulnerable on one or more childhood development domains had decreased from 41% to 26% and from 19% to 11% on two or more domains (MMFC, 2019b). The Mid Murray Family Connections Network project is currently ongoing and is exploring the possibility of establishing a Children's Wellbeing Centre as part of their continuing action plan (MMFC, 2019c).

### *Together in the South*

Together in the South was established to improve the lives of children across eight target suburbs in outer southern metropolitan Adelaide: Christies Beach, Christie Downs, Hackham, Hackham West, Morphett Vale, Noarlunga Downs, O'Sullivan Beach and Lonsdale (Together SA 2018). These target areas were chosen based on Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data suggesting children in these areas *'present as vulnerable on one or more domains at a greater percentage rate than when compared to the results for children across the City of Onkaparinga and South Australia'* (Together SA, 2018). Together in the South was also one of the

State Government's Thriving Community sites and one of the national Opportunity Child communities. Thriving Communities was a South Australian Government initiative focused on changing the outcomes of South Australia's most disadvantaged communities utilising a Collective Impact approach (Together SA, 2018). Together SA operated as the backbone for this initiative. Opportunity Child, an organisation comprised of communities and organisations focused on changing outcomes for children nationally using a collective approach, also provided support and funding. The dissolution of Together SA resulted in Together in the South losing their backbone support.  The initiative has since undertaken a co-designed action plan for 2018-2019 and narrowed their focus to one priority area: *'families are learning through play, developing social networks and have access to parenting information and support services through attendance and ongoing participation at playgroup'* (Together SA, 2018). The research team were unable locate current outcomes data for Together in the South, and very few stakeholders responded to invitations to participate in this evaluation. This has limited the ability to comment on the impact and experiences of the Collective Impact model within this initiative.

# Research Method

This evaluative research explores experiences within the Collective Impact movement in South Australia, focusing specifically on learning from three South Australian initiatives: The Adelaide Zero Project, the Mid Murray Family Connections Network and Together in the South. These three initiatives were chosen for this study because of their diverse scope, focus and reach (homelessness, families, children) and different geographical/place settings (the Adelaide Central Business District, regional South Australia, outer metropolitan Adelaide,). Such case studies provide both individual and collective learning to advance theory and practice around Collective Impact and for rethinking community development in the context of challenging social issues in South Australia.

The empirical component of this project collected a range of stakeholder insights about the three South Australian Collective Impact initiatives in focus. The research was guided by the following core research questions:

- How can Collective Impact lead to tangible benefits for local government areas and their community members? and,
- How can the principles of Collective Impact be integrated into current local government area practices to increase efficiency, strengthen and diversify collaboration, improve overall outcomes for community members and develop current local government practice, particularly in areas of community wellbeing and social cohesion?

It is important to note that this research did not seek to evaluate these projects individually or their outcomes. Rather, it sought to understand and synthesis the facilitating and inhibitive factors, potential benefits and practical requirements of implementing Collective Impact in South Australia, as well as collecting empirical evidence to support the develop a tool for local governments to draw on in using Collective Impact as a framework for community-driven change in their communities.

## Data collection

The project utilised a mixed methods approach for data collection. The research approach incorporated four distinct stages: a review of relevant literature and practice documents; an online survey targeted at stakeholders involved in three Collective Impact initiatives; in-depth interviews with participants in the online survey (self-nominated) to further flesh out thinking and experiences around Collective Impact as a social change approach; a roundtable session with representatives from local councils to provide feedback and workshop the Collective Impact Assessment Tool.

### Online survey

The online survey incorporated a range of open and closed questions to elicit quantitative and qualitative data about stakeholder experiences with Collective Impact. The survey was distributed to a range of stakeholders through the connections of the former CEO of Together SA via snowball sampling. Participants

voluntarily self-selected to participate, and consent was obtained via the survey instrument. Thirty-six people participated in the survey.

### Interviews

A small number of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with people who had experience within one of the three identified Collective Impact initiatives. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their appropriateness as a tool for gathering rich data on participant views and experiences. (Neuman, 2013; Postmus, 2013).

### Roundtable

An important feedback and development component of this evaluative research was a roundtable co-design session to present preliminary research findings, garner feedback on them and co-design the Collective Impact Assessment Tool. Invitations for the roundtable were extended to council staff via the network of Local Government Professionals South Australia. Fourteen people attended, from eight different councils. These people provided significant insight into their own Collective Impact initiatives, their desire to begin initiatives and the challenges of doing so. Extensive notes were taken during this workshop and these were thematically analysed to further inform findings and adjust the Collective Impact Assessment Tool.

## Data analysis

Quantitative survey data was analysed in SPSS version 23 and involved descriptive statistics to consider frequencies of responses. Open-ended survey data was analysed using content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which involved coding of responses and calculation of the number of times codes occurred across the data set in response to particular questions. For analysis of the notes taken during the follow up interviews, the Halcomb and Davidson (2006) method of thematic analysis was used. This approach is efficient whilst also ensuring the researcher can reflexively and comprehensively engage with the data. The steps for this process are as follows:


- Combined audiotaping (where appropriate) and note taking at interview
- Reflective completion of field notes immediately following an interview
- Listening to the audiotape to amend/revise field notes and observations
- Preliminary content analysis
- Secondary content analysis
- Thematic review (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

## Ethics

Ethics approval was granted through the University of South Australia's ethics process. All participants provided informed consent. Participants were informed via relevant paperwork and prior to interviews that all data would be presented in a de-identified manner, and raw data would be stored securely at the University in accordance with ethical practices.

# Findings & Discussion

## Survey

### *Participant characteristics*

Thirty-six stakeholders involved with the Collective Impact initiatives participated in the online survey: eleven as employees of an organisation related to an initiative, sixteen as employees of a council/government involved in an initiative and four participants as end users. Five people did not nominate the capacity in which they were involved in an initiative. Among the thirty-six participants, seven were affiliated with Together in the South, 24 with the Adelaide Zero Project (AZP) and six with Mid Murray Family Connections. One participant indicated that they had experiences with several different initiatives in South Australia.

Because of the potential for stakeholders to have been involved with more than one initiative, participants were asked to focus their answers to survey questions on one site. Four people nominated Together in the South as their focus initiative, eighteen indicated the Adelaide Zero Project, three nominated Mid Murray Family Connections and one focused on another initiative that they were involved with, Thriving on the Fleurieu. One participant did not specify which initiative they focussed their answers on. Two thirds of participants had been involved in an initiative for between one and three years (see Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Length of time involved in initiative**
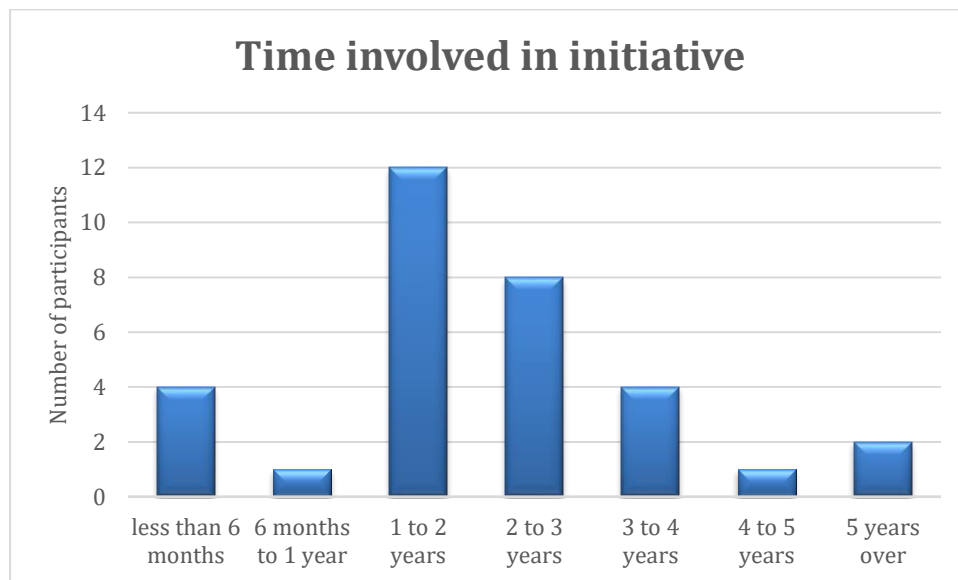


### *Experiences with Collective Impact initiatives*

### *Satisfaction*

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the effectiveness of their nominated initiative on a four-point Likert scale (Not at all satisfied; somewhat satisfied; mostly satisfied; very satisfied). Almost three quarters of people who indicated their level of satisfaction were mostly satisfied or very satisfied with its

effectiveness (20 of 27 participants). Employees and other stakeholders indicated moderate satisfaction with the effectiveness of the Collective Impact initiative they were involved in (See Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Satisfaction with effectiveness of initiative**
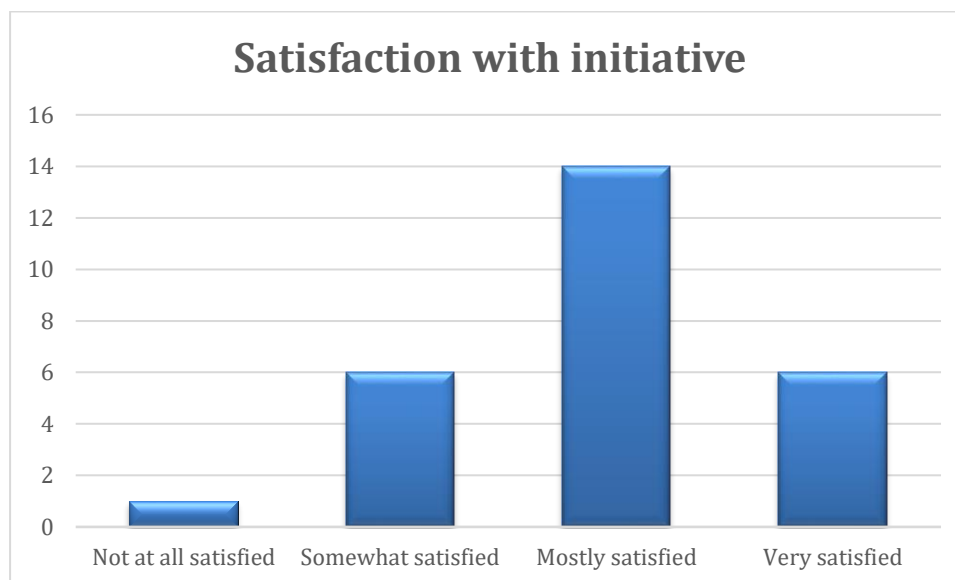


When asked to provide more detail about their experiences, participants gave mixed responses. Key themes related to the efficacy of Collective Impact in general as a framework, but challenges in the actual implementation. For example:

> *Collective impact gave us a good framework to get diverse partners involved across a whole sector, as well as build infrastructure and make decisions that would have been impossible if done solo by one organisation.*

> *While partners were totally committed to the work of Together in the South, only one (local Council) contributed resources in any significant way. After years of growth, the initiative needed to be self-sustained once the funding secured through Together SA ended. The initiative was funded through Together SA and a philanthropic organisation called Opportunity Child. It was a unique contract, which identified Together SA as the auspicing body only. But, Together SA employed staff to manage the group, and as Together in the South was not an incorporated group, Together SA was liable for management of funds. This complication caused very blurry lines for everyone […] I believe that Together in the South was SA's best example of true community-led social change. However, this negatively impacted progress and support.*

The size of some of the initiatives was also seen by some participants as unwieldy, creating other challenges:

*Collective Impact has been useful for AZP [Adelaide Zero Project], but it is also heavily reliant on collective will. The governance structure has been somewhat cumbersome and bringing new partners along further into the project has been a challenge. Having a coordinating body in the Don Dunstan Foundation has been very helpful, but with the number of partners involved (over 40 now) there is a challenge in coordinating a large group of people from different mindsets and with different expectations, to move them towards the same set of goals.*

Other participants indicated that they felt the initiative they had been involved in was successful and able to deliver change:

*AZP [Adelaide Zero Project] has been working well for many months now. The collective behind the project is inclusive and driving difficult reform.*

*It has been great to bring agencies together to tackle the issue of rough sleeping, and it's a great start to tackling the system wide shortages that exacerbate poverty and exclusions from appropriate supports, particularly in health. However, the lack of affordable housing and the lack of investment in affordable housing supply continues to undermine the outcomes achieved.*

### Best and worst elements

Participants were asked to identify the best three elements of the initiative they were involved in. Table 1 presents the results of this line of inquiry.

**Table 2: Participants' three best elements of Collective Impact initiative**

|     | Most common response | Second most common response |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1st | Collaboration with communities and other agencies | Community commitment to shared goal |
| 2nd | Clear outcomes | Attention brought to issue |
| 3rd | Providing a framework to work together | Focus on clients |

Participant's indications of the three worst things about the initiative they were involved in are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: Participants' three worst elements of Collective Impact initiative**

|  | Most common response | Second most common response |
|---|---|---|
| 1st | Lack of funding and resources | Hard to get buy-in from all relevant agencies |
| 2nd | Time constraints | Balancing competing interests |
| 3rd | Politics influencing decisions | Organisation 'egos' or hierarchies still impacting outcomes |

### *Impact*

Participants expressed mixed views in relation to whether the Collective Impact initiative they were involved in had an impact on the community around them (See Figure 7):

**Figure 6: Extent to which Collective Impact improved community around it**
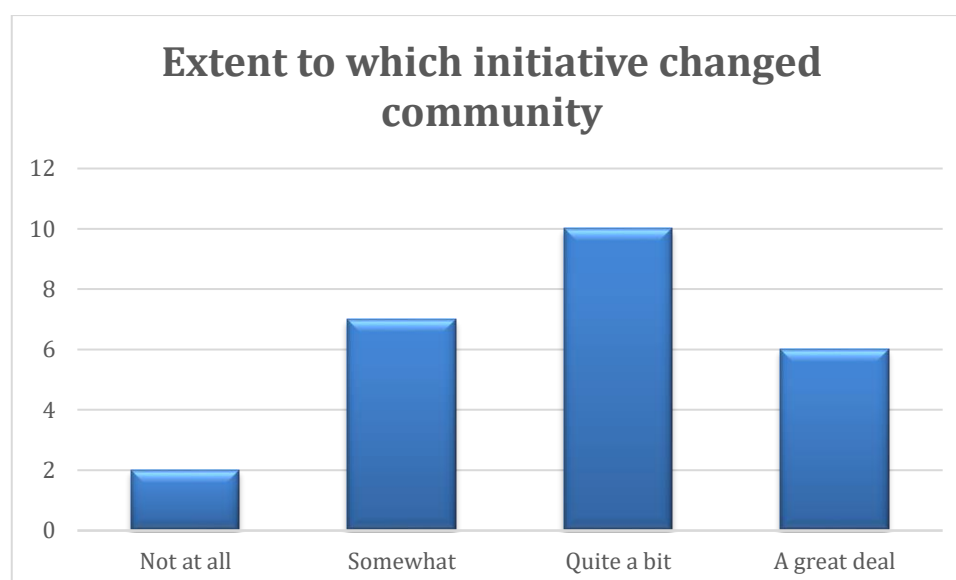


When asked to provide more information, participants highlighted that they thought the initiative was successful because the community was involved and there were shared goals:

*The reason we achieved so much was because we got community to drive the work. And once community gets involved you see change.*

*[The initiative] renewed relationships in the sector. It made a platform for different parts of [the] community to get involved. We developed new relationships to help focus a whole community on one goal.*

*Despite its problems, Collective Impact has been a good way to keep track of everything happening in the project. More could have been done*

*to make goals and principles clear to everyone as they joined, but the strong backbone and the existence of clear goals (even if not always communicated well) ensured as many people as possible were moving in the right direction. I'm not sure this project would've worked without the Collective Impact lens - the sense of ownership and the decentralised nature of the project helped a lot.*

Participants also highlighted that the initiative was successful because it raised awareness, and helped to achieve goals or outcomes for communities:

*It helped to focus attention on ending street homelessness, rallied additional resources, and made a range of improvements to the homelessness support system.*

*I think that it's really hitting its stride the longer we spend on it. If we had more time to match people to houses and understand the data provided by people better I feel we would be making a larger collective impact. This is not to take away from the fact that this is the first time something like this has been undertaken, and we have come very far already, learning as we go.*

Participants indicated that they felt Collective Impact was particularly useful for solving challenging problems, but some participants felt the initiative they were involved in was not successful due to resourcing or issues of communication among project partners.:

*I feel CI [Collective Impact] is the approach for the future. The resourcing side of it, however, must be in sharp focus and adequately recognised within funding, especially for government. Stakeholders in community based projects understand there is always a need for in-kind and goodwill, but there are also limits to this and CI activity needs to be valued (relationship building and management, monitoring goals and progress, data analytics etc.).*

*Collective approaches to "wicked" problems are necessary to address the systemic nature of their causes. Introducing outsourcing and market principles to service delivery has increased competition and pushed collaboration back, however Collective Impact measures are bringing players back to the table, reducing the barriers to sharing ideas, a welcome change after many years of looking inward and protecting patches.*

Survey participants were asked to consider whether the initiative they were involved in made in an impact in within the community, across four areas: 1) sense of community; 2) wellbeing; 3) sense of belonging, and; 4) social inclusion. As shown in Table 4, participants felt there was a positive impact across all four areas, and particularly in the domains of social inclusion and wellbeing.

**Table 4: Assessment of impact of Collective Impact on community**

|                     | Negative impact n (%) | No impact n (%) | Positive impact n (%) |
| ------------------- | --------------------- | --------------- | --------------------- |
| Sense of community  | 1 (5%)                | 4 (21%)         | 15 (74%)              |
| Wellbeing           | 1 (5%)                | 3 (16%)         | 16 (81%)              |
| Sense of belonging  | 1 (5%)                | 4 (21%)         | 15 (74%)              |
| Social inclusion    | 1 (5%)                | 2 (10%)         | 17 (85%)              |

Some participants indicated that it was clear the community benefitted from the initiative, with positive outcomes for community members:

> *MMFC became recognised as a leading driver of change and outcomes for children in the Mid Murray.*

> *I have been working on ways to assist isolated families and communities to develop engagement with each other and improve their connections. We recently held a family fun day in a very disengaged town and about 300 people attended!*

> *Community have willingly joined us not only to identify the long term goals for our families, children and young people, but have been an integral part of the process. There has been cross-generational input, with a noticeable increase in people's sense of hope that they can make a difference. This has been translated into practical approaches like forming a Local Drug Action Team, and working on a Women's Safety Project.*

Participants also indicated that community impact was sometimes hard to judge, but there were outcomes that could be linked back to the initiative:

> *This is hard to judge because of the nature of the project. I think the organisations felt some positive impacts, but the community as a whole are probably not as involved as it should be in AZP. The project has certainly made a positive impact on the people who have been housed through the project, but that isn't necessarily due to Collective Impact, although it probably guided and facilitated more coordination.*

> *It's difficult to know whether the Collective Impact framework made a difference to the individual clients we were aiming to support. However, it meant the partners were working towards a common goal in a common way, so we had more chance of making a coordinated impact.*

### Success

Participants were asked to provide an example of success related to their initiative. Responses related to success are typified by the following:

1) Bringing people together:

   *I think that housing allocations are a really good success story. Where all organisations/housing providers can **come together** and advocate for a person who is most in need of support regardless of what service they are connected to is a great process.*

   ***Bringing people** at an operational level **together** has been one of the great strengths of the project - forums like Coordinated Care, where **people meet** and talk about operational issues and how to support individuals into housing has changed the way the sector works for the better. That spirit of collaboration began very much with Connections Week, which brought together operational workers from different services and really fostered positive relationships.*

2) Creating community change:

   *… has resulted in a social licence for **change** and a broad focus on a common objective.*

### Improvements

Participants provided highly consistent responses to a line of inquiry about how improvements could be made with/within the initiative they were involved in. Such responses centred around:

- Increased funding
- Greater/better sharing of responsibility amongst involved organisations
- Greater clarity about shared goals

### Recommendation

Participants strongly recommended Collective Impact as a foundational framework for other community and social purpose projects (see Figure 8), supporting this thinking with qualitative comments indicating that it was a good way to ensure broad community involvement and buy-in and to share responsibilities for local challenges.

   *I think that collective impact is a powerful way to share resources, understand services and find a way to best support people within the population accessing supports.*

**Figure 7: Would you recommend Collective Impact for other community projects?**



*Would you recommend Collective Impact?* — Bar chart. Not at all: 2, Somewhat: 4, Quite a bit: 6, A great deal: 11.
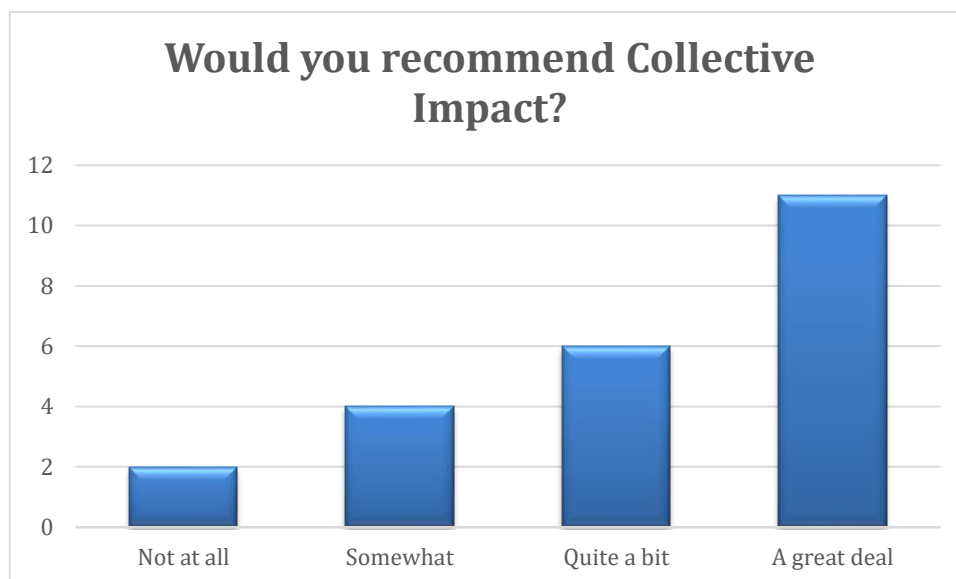
### *Conclusions*

Overall, participants were positive about the Collective Impact initiative they were involved in, with primary reasons relating to buy-in from the broader community, a sense of creating shared goals, and the potential for Collective Impact to lead to positive change in the community. These positive views about initiatives and the Collective Impact framework, however, were tempered by concerns, including those about resourcing for projects, particularly regarding sufficient recurrent funding. Most participants indicated that it was hard to measure outcomes from the initiative they were involved in, and that the initiatives were still relatively young, making conclusions about impact difficult. The majority of participants saw value in the approach from their experiences with it, sufficiently to recommend it for other communities and organisations (including councils) for other initiatives.

### Interviews

The survey findings were explored in depth with four people from the three Collective Impact sites. Generally, responses were reflective of the broader survey findings with the participants feeling that Collective Impact offers an innovative way to strengthen community development. Overall, the five conditions were described as being key to the success of Collective Impact initiatives, but participants felt that that ensuring initiatives were context focused and flexible was more important than strict adherence to the elements of the framework:

> *Collective Impact needs to be more about each initiative's own context, using the principles to strengthen a community and develop deeper collaboration.*

Flexibility was also proposed as a strategy for addressing the weakness participants identified with South Australian initiatives. They explained that local initiatives have struggled with how to authentically engage community members in early stages and that without flexibility in what community voice looks like, many initiatives would not have been successful in getting started. They also proposed that for some initiatives, being guided from the top down was necessary to gain initial momentum, but that community voice and power could be lost with this approach. It was suggested that Collective Impact could be strengthened by including building community leadership and voice in an initiative as part of the common agenda, or as an outcome objective and indicator.

When discussing the conditions of Collective Impact, participants felt that part of the Adelaide Zero Project's success has been a clearly articulated goal, and suggested other initiatives could learn from this. Interviewees proposed that focusing on a clear and simple shared agenda, with both short term and long-term goals would help future initiatives engage stakeholders and maintain momentum and passion for a project.

> *Zero's [Adelaide Zero Projects'] success was in their simple vision. It was easy for people to attach to, they are passionate about it. The simplicity is clever.*

Conversely, the Adelaide Zero Project was used as an example of governance systems that were overly complex and a hindrance to effective relationships and communication. Participants felt that the project's governance needs to be simplified, with clear accountability pathways and equitable division of responsibility.

All four participants expressed frustration with obtaining sustainable resourcing, acknowledging the competitive tendering environment and small philanthropic presence in Australia as key challenges. They also linked this to reluctance for organisations to take on the backbone role, and reluctance of funders to provide support for backbone functions. Difficulty in resourcing a strong backbone was suggested to directly impact an initiatives' ability to build deep and meaningful stakeholder relationships.

It was felt that the South Australian initiatives studied underestimated the impact stakeholder relationships have on a project's success. Several proposals were put forward to address this. The most strongly supported was early investment in relationships. By explicitly investing in relationship building activities, it was argued that a strong common agenda could be developed that would help potential funders see the value and community benefits of an initiative, thus helping with the procurement of funding. Two participants also proposed that more innovation was needed in conceptualising an initiative's backbone, with a particular strategy identified in this context being a dual- or muti-agency backbone, offering an opportunity to promote equity among initiative partners and to share responsibility more broadly. Models of such an approach to backbones are needed.

*The burden of resourcing; no one wants to be a backbone. The role needs to change, from one organisation taking on the responsibility of the backbone to a role of joint ownership with equal funding from partners.*

All four interview participants perceived a Collective Impact approach to be an opportunity for local governments (and other coalitions) to more effectively undertake community change. Collective Impact was described as a framework that could make better use of increasingly limited recourses by pooling not only funding, but also skills, knowledge and expertise. They saw this is an important extension to traditional community development practice, which was described as overly programmatic and narrowly focused. By contrast, there was belief that Collective Impact could bring community resources, aspirations and drive together to create a more sustainable and significant impact.

Finally, participants in the interviews were questioned about the value of an Assessment Tool for Collective Impact in the light of their experiences with their initiatives. Participants were supportive of a tool that would better outline how to undertake Collective Impact, also explaining the practical activities needed to facilitate the five conditions of the framework. They suggested that the tool should not be prescriptive, but that it should provide options where conditions were not being met and allow initiatives to revisit stages as required during the lifetime of an initiative.

## Roundtable

Like the stakeholders involved in prior stages of the research, roundtable participants indicated that Collective Impact had potential to enhance their engagement with social change. However, participants felt constrained by lack of sustainable funds and difficulties in developing the strong reciprocal relationships needed between stakeholders to work collaboratively on a common goal. The group provided advice which was incorporated into the development of the Collective Impact Assessment Tool presented herein, which was designed to help interested parties better understand and implement the five conditions of Collective Impact, as well as to develop effective strategies to mitigate the challenges in doing so. It is also important to note that the group noted a lack of opportunities to connect, share and work with each other, and several noted that this had been compounded by a lack of representative body to facilitate networking, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer across initiatives. This is notable, as prior to their dissolution Together SA undertook many of the administrative, representative and event activities participants felt would help enhance their initiatives.

## Summary and Conclusion

Collective Impact is a relatively new model of enacting social change. Participants in this research felt that, so far, it has proven to be a useful model for tackling difficult social issues, building community capacity and developing partnerships across systems and organisations. They also felt that the model has led to tangible benefits by bringing people together to enact community change. If adopted as a guiding model for community development projects by local governments, Collective Impact could support a strategic approach to improving social wellbeing and cohesion. Collective Impact may not only allow local authorities to better foster community leadership, it could allow them to make better use of increasingly limited funding through a collaborative, coordinated approach that embeds shared responsibility for work and resourcing such work across initiative stakeholders in a more equitable way.

The importance of the five central conditions of Collective Impact was identifiable in participants' responses, as was that of the eight principals of practice identified by Brady and Splansky Juster (2016). For some research participants though, they felt a purist approach to the pursuit or development of the conditions may in fact hinder the potential of a model in practice. Accordingly, it was proposed that the five conditions should be seen more as guiding principles, which may not occur in linear progression. They may need to be revisited as an initiative progresses and/or be built in as a future goal if an inability to achieve a condition hinders the initiative's progress.

In addition to participants' identification of, and thoughts around, the five traditional conditions of Collective Impact, participants' experiences with the approach also reflected concepts developed in Cabaj and Weaver's (2016) Collective Impact 3.0 model. This was particularly so in relation to challenges around authentic engagement with community and for setting community aspirations. Interview participants described the importance of doing community engagement better, along with the need to ensure that the community drives an initiative's shared agenda, and that they have substantial input into and leadership within an initiative. Such a shift in thinking and practice from community consultation to community leadership has been acknowledged in Collective Impact work (Raderstrong & Boyea-Robinson, 2016). Participants in this study, however, noted that there are challenges in promoting genuine community leadership among some communities or focus populations. For initiatives engaged with such communities or populations, it is important that engagement goals and strategies become core business and measured within an initiative as it progresses. Investment into developing community voice and leadership within South Australian communities should be considered a high level priority for local governments interested in engaging with the Collective Impact framework. Notably, discussions of population equity were absent from the voices in this particular study, and it is advised that Collective Impact collectives engage with prior learning to ensure diversity is a core component of initiatives. Without this focus, initiatives may inadvertently marginalise people, or risk their credibility among the community they should be aiming to work in partnership with (White, Blatz & Joseph, 2019).

Interview participants highlighted that actively engaging in different or competing activities was vital to progress, so long as these activities ultimately contributed to the overall goal of the initiative. A shift away from strictly complementary mutually reinforcing activities to more effective use of high leverage opportunities to impact systematic level change was desired, reflecting the 3.0 model conditions of Collective Impact. The process of competitive tendering for services was noted as having a detrimental effect on relationship building among stakeholders, suggesting that whilst activities may be competing, funding for these should be strategic and administered with an outcomes orientation (i.e. via purchasing outcomes rather than services).

The effect of initiative maturity as described by The Spark Policy Institute (2018) was identifiable in participants' experiences with their initiatives. This was particularly evident in relation to difficulties in measuring outcomes. The Spark Policy Institute (2018) noted that investing in and developing mature backbones, resourcing and relationships affects an initiative's ability to develop a strong shared agenda and shared data systems. Without these conditions, measuring the impact and outcomes of an initiative becomes difficult. Relatedly, participants noted that securing sustainable resourcing was the most time consuming and worst aspect of undertaking an initiative, and that resourcing had a direct correlation to the longevity and success of an initiative. They also noted difficulties with finding a willing backbone, or sufficient resources to maintain the function, as well as negative impacts associated with organisational hierarchies, competitive tendering and political agendas. Given these findings, it could be proposed that South Australian Collective Impact initiatives may have not yet matured sufficiently to be able to secure sustainable funding not only for necessary activities, but also for maintaining backbone functions. Such factors may impact the time and resources available to build successful stakeholder relationships, inevitably affecting the ability of stakeholders to work collaboratively.

The initiatives in focus for this study are relatively early in their implementation, and as such noted that their ability to measure achievement of desired outcomes has been limited. However, this is not unusual: Collective Impact is recognised as being a long-term, collaborative effort required ongoing measurement and evaluation and relatively few initiatives have matured to a stage where robust analysis of the framework's success in achieving outcomes is possible. What this does suggest is that Collective Impact initiatives require long term commitment from stakeholders, and to facilitate future research into their success and challenges, appropriate measurement systems and regular monitoring and evaluation of goals is critical.

Finally, it could be argued that whilst siloed and fragmented programs have done good work, complex and intersectional challenges require sustainable, whole of system collaborative change. Collective Impact offers local governments an opportunity to rethink what community development is in practice, using a framework that brings all aspects of a system together to work as equal partners. In doing so, community development can be reimagined to be more effective through not only shared resourcing, but sharing of knowledge, skills and expertise to address problems in a more holistic, community driven way.

## Recommendations

This project has highlighted that Collective Impact has significant potential as a framework for community change and increased social cohesion, particularly when used as guiding principles rather than a prescriptive model. The framework has clear value for enhancing and extending the community development offerings of local governments in South Australia. The findings of this report lead to a number of core recommendations for those working in the social change and community development spaces, those applying the Collective Impact framework, and for Collective Impact theory and practice generally.

**The recommendations are that:**

1. **Community development approaches are reinvigorated to make better use of resources offered through Collective Impact and its framework for collaboration and equity.**
2. **Investment is made in developing community voice and leadership to raise and drive social change initiatives.**
3. **Community voices are recognised as being central to all aspects of Collective Impact initiatives from conception to implementation.**
4. **Collective Impact conditions are seen as principles and not prescriptive instructions for community change.**
5. **Relationship building is adopted as a critical aspect of Collective Impact, and is a priority for investment within initiatives.**
6. **A Collective Impact network is developed in South Australia to allow initiatives or people interested in developing initiatives an opportunity for information sharing, support and collaboration.**

## The Collective Impact Assessment Tool

This study was undertaken with the goal of developing an assessment tool for councils considering participation in, or leadership of, a Collective Impact initiative. Participants in this evaluative research, and study findings – derived from the Collective Impact literature, online survey, interviews and roundtable – supported the development of this tool, particularly in relation to more clearly defining the structures, processes and activities required to implement the five conditions of Collective Impact. The assessment tool is provided below. It makes the Collective Impact framework more accessible and relatable.

**The Collective Impact Assessment Tool offers a simple, visual and easy to follow roadmap or guide to the practical steps necessary for formulating a Collective Impact initiative. It provides a flowchart of questions, representing a path which stakeholders can navigate on their journey towards satisfying conditions to underpin success.**

# Collective Impact Assessment Tool

**Does the community have a social change agenda or objective?**

YES →

NOT YET
Work with the community to identify opportunities for social change.

**Is there sufficient evidence to underpin an understanding of this agenda or objective?**

YES

NOT YET
Undertake research into the agenda or objective.

**Are there multiple agencies/stakeholders who can contribute to working on an initiative to address the agenda or objective?**

YES ←

NOT YET
Consider a program or service-based approach or campaign to raise capacity.

**Can the community impacted by the agenda or objective be engaged as an equal partner in the co-design and implementation of the initiative?**

YES ←

NOT YET
Explore alternative levels of engagement to ensure community driven change.

**Do the stakeholders have willingness and capacity to work together?**

YES ←

NOT YET
Explore the challenges to bringing relevant stakeholders together. Invest in relationship building before proceeding.

**Is there capacity to dedicate time to relationship building to advance the initiative?**

YES →

NOT YET
Consider strategies to create time for building stronger working relationships. Invest resources into a backbone structure to facilitate this.

**Is there a shared agenda and common goal? Do the initiative's partners agree on these?**

YES →

NOT YET
Undertake a process of co-design to develop a shared agenda and common goal. Explore independent facilitation.

**Is the common goal specific, measurable, relatable and feasible?**

YES

NOT YET
Set/review goal with the aim of ensuring feasibility and that it is relatable to the community it impacts.

**Is there a stakeholder or coalition willing to undertake the backbone function for the initiative?**

YES ←

NOT YET
Investigate options for backbone support, including independent organisations and shared roles.

**Is there resourcing capacity for backbone functions for the life of the initiative?**

YES ←

NOT YET
Focus on building resources for this function. Investigate philanthropic, government and non-government sources and social enterprise models.

**Can a simple governance structure be agreed upon that is inclusive of all stakeholders?**

YES ←

NOT YET
Provide opportunities for stakeholders and community to come together to workshop the initiative's governance structure.

**Is there enough resourcing for data collection, data sharing, ongoing monitoring and evaluation?**

YES →

NOT YET
Scope opportunities for resourcing and in-kind capacity of initiative partners before proceeding.

**Are there identifiable leaders able to champion the initiative's common goal and shared agenda in the local context?**

YES →

NOT YET
Invest in developing local leaders from the community which the agenda impacts. Leaders should include people with lived experience and service sector backgrounds.

**Collective Impact could be a useful tool for your community.**

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