# ARTICLE | INTERCONNECTED PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY & SYSTEMS IMPACT

A framework for change

Community and systems impact is all about working together and using diverse strategies and perspectives to improve our society for everyone; this approach is crucial for building a better world. The Five Interconnected Practices for Community and Systems Impact framework, shown below, provides a visual of what is needed in a collaboration to achieve true, lasting impact. Each level represents core considerations to support community change work and reflects the Tamarack Institute's evolving 20-year history and understanding of supporting community change initiatives.

Interconnected practices for community and systems impact
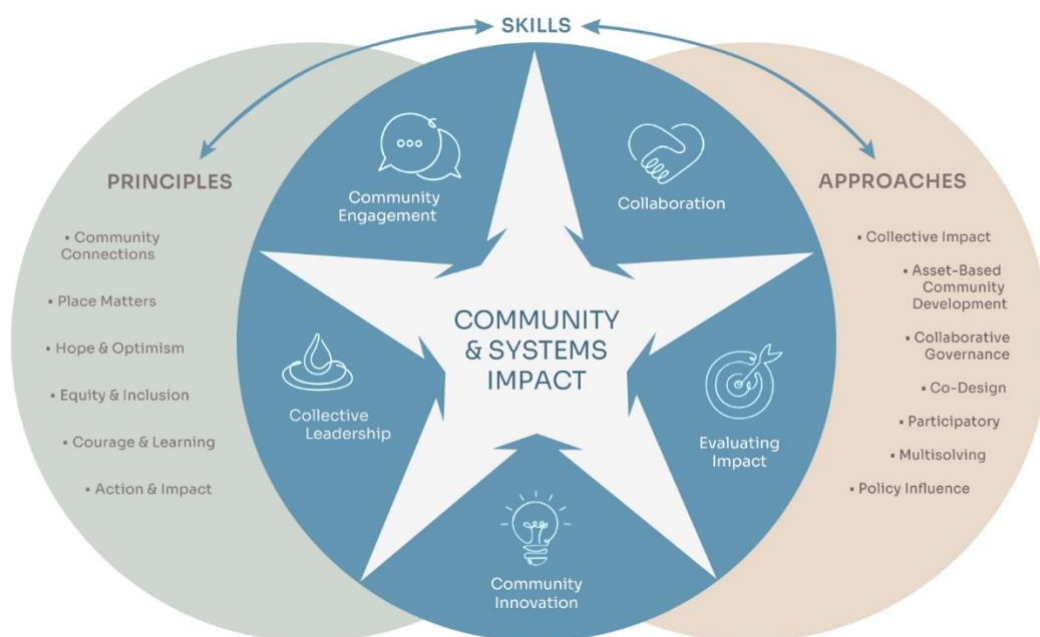
Framework dimensions

We believe that to achieve community and systems change we must consider the following:

- **Principles** – The core beliefs that guide our work, provide the foundation for how we approach our work, and address the issues we seek to address
- **Skills** – The foundational capabilities that changemakers require, allowing us to engage in a specific practice or behaviour
- **Approaches** – The methods, actions, or tools we can use in community change initiatives

Our principles

Below is a list of core beliefs that guide the Tamarack Institute's work. Reflect on your individual, organizational, and/or collaborative principles – do they reflect these principles? What might be missing or different in your context that you would adapt to guide your collaborative efforts?

Community Connections – We strengthen connections and collaborations between diverse people, organizations, and sectors to challenge assumptions, create new possibilities, and align our collective capacity to make positive change.

Courage & Learning – We ask difficult questions about the systems and structures that hold people and communities back and engage in peer-to-peer learning to build our capacity.

Action & Impact – We emphasize action and focus on impact.

Place Matters – We focus our efforts on places where people live and how to leverage the unique strengths and priorities of each place.

Hope & Optimism – We focus on the possible and our collective potential for making positive change.

Equity & Inclusion – We engage and elevate the voices of those most impacted by issues because they have the greatest insight into possible solutions.

Skills for community change

The skills – or capabilities – that change leaders need are interdependent. Each skill can be developed independently but can advance change more powerfully at both the community and systems levels when used together. Which skills do you feel you and/or your organization and/or collaborative are strongest in, and which could be improved upon?

Community Engagement – How we bring community members together, particularly those closest to the issue, to learn and work together to create bold futures.

Collaboration – How we mobilize non-profits, for-profits, the public sector, and residents to work together and create a shared, whole community response for community and systems change.

Collective Leadership – How we organize and share responsibility to lead the community and systems change efforts.

Community Innovation – How we harness the unique characteristics of a community – the place and people within it – to generate, test, and scale new approaches for transformational change.

Evaluating Impact – How we assess our impact, learn together, and apply our collective insights to strengthen our effectiveness for community and systems change.

Approaches for change

Approaches are the ways we use our skills to convene people to think, learn and drive change together. They are the methods we employ, the actions we take, and the tools we use that align with our principles. Below are some of the key methods that Tamarack often draws upon:

Collective Impact – A structured approach to collaboration that brings together diverse groups and sectors to address complex social issues and achieve community and systems impact.

Asset-Based Community Development – An approach to community development that identifies and leverages people's and the community's strengths, skills, and assets to drive positive community change.

Multisolving – Finding and implementing solutions for more than one social, economic, and/or environmental issue at the same time, creating positive impacts across various areas.

Collaborative Governance – The structures that support collaboratives to achieve their common goals, make decisions, and implement shared work in a collective and inclusive way.

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Participatory Approaches – Active involvement and empowerment of individuals and communities to contribute their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives in initiatives that affect them.

Co-Design – A process for bringing diverse members of the community together, particularly context experts, to develop new ideas, create innovative solutions to persistent problems, and build alignment and momentum for action.

Policy Influence – Sharing emerging practice amongst community change-makers, informing policies, and amplifying proven solutions to governments and decision-makers for widespread change.

Applying the framework

There are many ways that the Interconnected Practices for Community and Systems Impact framework can inform your practice as a changemaker. Consider using the framework for:

- **Direction** – Start anywhere and reflect. If you are just beginning, identify your principles and move right towards action. If work is already happening but it feels stalled, move left to assess what skills may be missing or what guiding principles may be under-used.

- **Developing Capacity** – Assess your organization's/collaborative's proficiency in each of the five core skills and plan for the areas that need strengthening.

- **Diversifying** – Broaden your toolkit with different methods to achieving change.

- **Grounding** – Identify which principles are important to your work. How are you applying those principles if you plan to?

- **Conversation** – Use it as a dialogue tool and reflect on your work with stakeholders.

The mindsets, approaches, and skills of individuals, organizations, and collaborative partners influence the degree of our success in achieving community and systems impacts. This framework can be a starting point, no matter where you are in your process, for direction, conversation, reflection, and more.

If you would like to explore any of the above principles, skills or methods, visit www.tamarackcommunity.ca to learn more.

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