

TAMARACK INSTITUTE TOOL
COMMUNITY PATHWAYS

Community Pathways maps the collaboration journey of successful community change initiatives that transform systems and improve outcomes that matter locally. Applying the tool to collaborative work fosters community ownership, cross-sectoral engagement and accountability, and action toward closing equity gaps.

Community Pathways reflects the wisdom gained from Tamarack's more than 20 years of supporting communities to advance large-scale change. Functioning as a self-assessment, reflection and planning tool, it depicts a highly effective phased approach that collaboratives can use to assess where they are at, prioritize goals, take action, and share progress. The tool helps teams to ensure that they integrate the skills and perspectives necessary to cultivate a whole-community response to a complex issue.

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS

Collective Leadership:

How do we organize and share responsibility to lead change?

Community Engagement: How do we ensure the people closest to the issues are contributing and leading?

Collaborative Strategy: How do we mobilize diverse sectors and organizations to advance a shared strategy?

Community Innovation: How do we generate, test, and scale new approaches?

Evaluating Impact: How do we assess our impact and strengthen our effectiveness?

BUILD READINESS

What is happening now and what is our appetite for large-scale change?

MOBILIZE FOR COMMUNITY- WIDE ACTION

What is the change we want to see and what is our shared plan for action?

IMPLEMENT AND ADAPT

What are we learning and what progress are we making?

SUSTAIN AND RENEW

How are we refining and re-fueling for improvement and sustainability?


MAIN IDEAS

Community Pathways depicts a powerful pathway that community partners can use to guide their collaboratives through developing successful, impactful, and sustainable collaborations.

The tool is designed to support community collaboratives to take stock of where they are at, prioritize and plan for where they'd like to get, and track and share progress in tangible, measurable ways.

The graphic provides a snapshot of the four Phases (columns) and five Essential Skills (rows) that are braided into the Community Pathways tool. The tables below provide additional details on the Essential Skills, and map milestones for each Phase, across each Essential Skill.

The four Phases with key questions to be answered within the Community Pathways journey are:

- 1 Build Readiness:** What's happening now and what is our community's appetite for large-scale change?
 - 2 Mobilize for Community Wide Action:** What is the change we want to see? What is our shared plan for action?
 - 3 Implement and Adapt:** What are we learning? What progress are we making?
 - 4 Sustain and Renew:** How are we refining and refueling for improvement and sustainability?
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Community Pathways reflects Tamarack’s decades of experience catalyzing community change, both within and across communities. It was informed by conversations and work with community convenors who are implementing local collaborative efforts across a range of issue areas.

The tool captures Tamarack’s latest thinking around the patterns of how place-based change unfolds, by incorporating key resources we have developed, including: [Collective Impact 3.0](#), our role as a [Field Catalyst](#), our recognition of the [power of place](#) as the origin of [innovation](#), change and transformation, appreciation of the needed [skills of changemakers](#), our strategy for [Equity, Anti-Racism and Reconciliation \(EAR\)](#), and [10: A Guide for Building a Sustainable and Resilient Collaboration](#).

TAMARACK DEDICATED SUPPORT

Tamarack provides dedicated support to collaboratives – via membership, coaching, consulting, and by sharing resources, tools and contacts – to work through the Community Pathways self-assessment, reflect on and prioritize milestones, and plan for and take action to achieve them. Reach out to tamarack@tamarackcommunity.ca if you are interested in working with us – we’d love to help!



GETTING STARTED

Community Pathways can be completed by the full collaborative as a meaningful group exercise, or by a single member who takes the lens of the full collaborative.

The tool begins with an overview of the Community Pathways journey and its five Essential Skills. It then embeds one checklist for each of four Phases, where collaboratives can self-assess their baselines. Next, it funnels to a reflection exercise where collaboratives can celebrate progress, note areas where they are ahead and behind, flag challenges, prioritize milestones to achieve, and identify what resources will be needed. Last, it presents a template where collaboratives can plan for how they will achieve their priority milestones.

Steps:

- 1 Review **Community Pathways: At-a-Glance** (page 7) to gain a high-level overview of the tool. Identify which of the four Phases best fits where your collaborative is currently at, noting that there is no right or wrong place to be.
- 2 Review **Community Pathways: Five Essential Skills** (page 8) to learn more about the tool's five Essential Skills.

- 3 Dive into the **Self-Assessment checklist** (page 10) that best aligns with the Phase you are at (1, 2, 3 or 4). Work through the Milestones under each Essential Skill, checking off the option (Not Started, In Progress, Ready for Next Phase, or Not Applicable) that fits best. Use these prompts as a starting point, but add your own thoughts and ideas as they come up.
- 4 Work through **Community Pathways: Reflecting on Skills and Milestones** (page 18), jotting down progress to celebrate, Milestones where you are on track vs. behind, and challenges experienced or anticipated. Name Milestones you'd like to achieve this year, while considering your collaborative's capacity, and where you might need external support.
- 5 In **Community Pathways: Planning for This Year** (page 19), copy in the Milestones you identified as priorities for this year. Draft an initial action plan that includes who will be responsible for what actions, by when, and what resources will be needed.

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS | AT-A-GLANCE

		PHASE I Build Readiness	PHASE II Mobilize for Community-Wide Action	PHASE III Implement and Adapt	PHASE IV Sustain and Renew
		KEY QUESTIONS	KEY QUESTIONS	KEY QUESTIONS	KEY QUESTIONS
Essential Focus	Focus	Journey Milestones			
Collective Leadership	<i>How do we organize and share responsibility to lead change?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's happening now? What's the community's appetite for large-scale change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's the change we want to see? What's our shared action plan? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are we learning? What progress are we making? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are we refining and refueling for improvement and sustainability?
		Convene community leaders, secure resources, and agree on how we'll work together	Develop a collaborative governance structure	Formalize backbone infrastructure, secure resourcing, confirm leadership, and launch Action Teams	Initiate leadership renewal
Community Engagement	<i>How do we ensure the people closest to the issue are contributing and leading?</i>	Explore the shared issue from multiple perspectives using an equity lens	Deepen understanding of shared priorities	Deepen community engagement and expand partner network	Continue building public awareness, hope, commitment, and contributions
Collaborative Strategy	<i>How do we mobilize diverse sectors, organizations and groups to advance a shared strategy?</i>	Develop an aspirational vision and identify shared priorities	Launch a whole-community plan	Implement community plan to achieve short-term wins and systems changes that close equity gaps	Refine strategy based on a review of priorities and progress
Community Innovation	<i>How do we generate, test, and scale new approaches?</i>	Cultivate a mindset for innovation	Identify opportunities for prototyping	Implement and assess innovation prototypes	Scale successful prototypes and embed into existing systems
Evaluating Impact	<i>How do we assess our impact and strengthen our effectiveness?</i>	Source data to measure and understand our issue and how to address it	Create a shared measurement framework to track progress	Reflect on and share information re: progress and learning	Iterate and improve on what we do and how we do it

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS | AT-A-GLANCE

Essential Focus	Focus
Collective Leadership	<i>How do we organize and share responsibility to lead change?</i>
Community Engagement	<i>How do we ensure the people closest to the issue are contributing and leading?</i>
Collaborative Strategy	<i>How do we mobilize diverse sectors, organizations and groups to advance a shared strategy?</i>
Community Innovation	<i>How do we generate, test, and scale new approaches?</i>
Evaluating Impact	<i>How do we assess our impact and strengthen our effectiveness?</i>

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS: FIVE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Collective Leadership

Goal	To engage a network of diverse leaders to share responsibility for leading change.	Questions to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we established processes that support us to work well together? • How are we continuing to involve the “right” people and to nurture a diversity of relationships? • How do we keep people connected to our shared work?
Description	Uniting people through collaborative governance processes, practices, and infrastructure centres equity and ensures representation of diverse perspectives, especially of those closest to the issues. It establishes equitable relationships, prioritizes trust-building, and transforms power structures.	Indicators of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have clarity on how we work together have established a high degree of trust • We have a set of values and principles that guide our shared work • We have created shared ownership and leadership for this work

Community Engagement

Goal	To ensure that a diversity of perspectives – especially those closest to the issues – are contributing and leading.	Questions to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who have we involved in this work? • Who benefits from how things are now? • Who else needs to be involved on this issue? • How do we nurture shared ownership of this work?
Description	Bringing people with multiple perspectives together to share knowledge, assets, and resources, and to co-create solutions, builds energy, hope, and commitment for a better future. It ensures that those closest to the issues contribute meaningfully to leadership and decisions.	Indicators of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a deeper and shared appreciation for our issues, current activities, and assets • We are cultivating a diverse network of connections, and are growing awareness, hope and will • We have agreed to work together over the long-term to address our shared issue

Collaborative Strategy

Goal	To mobilize diverse sectors, organizations, and groups to work collaboratively to advance a shared strategy.	Questions to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the shared aspirational vision that guides our work? • What can we accomplish together to change circumstances for those impacted by these issues? • What high-leverage, systems-focused actions will we take together to realize our aspiration? • How have we framed the problem in a way that reveals new possibilities?
Description	Working together to co-create high-impact, whole-community solutions to complex issues advances equity. It creatively mobilizes and coordinates actions to activate and honour the contributions of many.	Indicators of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a shared commitment to collaborate • We have clarified the issue/opportunity we want to address • We have a strategy informed by evidence and experience that considers programs and systems

Community Innovation

Goal	To generate, test and scale new approaches.	Questions to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have we nurtured the mindset, skills, and readiness needed for innovation? • What processes support us to learn, iterate, and improve innovations? • Where have we shown leverage points for positive change in the broader system?
Description	Looking beyond proven practices generates solutions that are meaningful to the community. It supports design and testing of solutions that are distinct from – and more ambitious and uncertain – than the current.	Indicators of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have identified and begun to prototype small-scale innovations • We are learning from and are improving our innovation prototypes • We have processes to sustain, embed, amplify, and accelerate successful prototypes

Evaluating Impact

Goal	To deepen our learning, monitor our progress, assess our impact, and strengthen our effectiveness.	Questions to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are we making lives better for people? • What are we learning and how is our community capacity growing? • What impact have we had changing outcomes, policies, culture, and systems? • How effectively are partners working collaboratively?
Description	Communities wanting transformational change on complex issues require different ways to monitor, recognize progress, learn together, and celebrate impact.	Indicators of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have processes to capture and share our learnings, and to use them refine our strategy • Evidence of progress and impact is regularly documented and communicated • Unintended consequences (both positive and negative) are intentionally captured and shared

PHASE 1

BUILDING READINESS: SELF-ASSESSMENT

<i>Collective Leadership</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
Leadership from multiple perspectives has been engaged to work collaboratively on a shared issue				
Principles and practices that guide how we work together have been endorsed and are reflected in practice				
We have secured and/or contributed resources (human, in-kind and financial) that enable us to advance this work				

Comments:

<i>Community Engagement</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have learned about our issue from multiple perspectives, including from those with lived/living experience				
We have agreed on a community-wide aspiration and on the shared priorities we will need to advance to achieve it				
We have secured a diverse leadership team – including those closest to the issue – to jointly steward this work				

Comments:

<i>Collaborative Strategy</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have gathered and discussed qualitative and quantitative data to deepen our understanding of our issue				
We have identified and framed the issue we want to solve – one that will close equity gaps in our community				
We have a shared understanding of the assets, resources, gaps, and inequities tied to our issue, given our local context				
Comments:				
<i>Community Innovation</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have cultivated a mindset and have built capacity for innovation across our community				
We have begun to identify and prioritize potential opportunities for innovation				
We have learned about promising practices, both from within and outside of our community				
Comments:				
<i>Evaluating Impact</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have clarified the purpose and audience(s) for evaluation and learning				
We have created an inventory of data and data holders related to our issue				
We have determined what data is most relevant in helping us to track progress				
Comments:				

PHASE 2

MOBILIZE FOR COMMUNITY-WIDE ACTION: SELF-ASSESSMENT

<i>Collective Leadership</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have co-established a governance structure, Terms of Reference (ToRs), Accountability Matrix, and MoUs with partners				
Participating organizations have endorsed, are contributing resources, and are active in our initiative				
We have secured staff to assist the Leadership Table to advance its work				
Comments:				

<i>Community Engagement</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have validated and confirmed shared priorities with a diversity of people, including those with lived experience and subject-matter expertise				
We have ensured that we have included priorities that are high-leverage and systems-focused				
A shared narrative for our work is emerging and we are communicating it broadly				
Comments:				

<i>Collaborative Strategy</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have confirmed scope and scale of our initiative including geography, equity gaps, root causes, and population-level goals				
Our framing of the issue and theory of change (including shared aspiration, priorities, and data) have been widely endorsed				
We have assessed and confirmed the roles and contributions across a diversity of partners				
Comments:				
<i>Community Innovation</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have engaged the community in proposing and participating in the development of innovation prototypes				
We have identified innovations to prototype that are linked to our shared vision and strategic priorities				
We have confirmed implementation partners and are developing prototypes				
Comments:				
<i>Evaluating Impact</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have developed an evaluation framework and have established a tracking system to monitor progress				
We have created any needed data-sharing agreements needed to support our evaluation framework				
We have established a culture of continuous reflection, and use insights to iterate and improve on our strategy				
Comments:				

PHASE 3

IMPLEMENT AND ADAPT: SELF-ASSESSMENT

<i>Collective Leadership</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
The Steering Committee has recruited people and has established Action Teams to advance its strategic priorities				
Action Teams have developed initial work plans and have shared with the Steering Committee for endorsement and support				
The Steering Committee ensures alignment across Action Teams and collaboration with other community efforts				

Comments:

<i>Community Engagement</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
Stories of impact and our evolving understanding of our issue are being captured and shared				
Ongoing community engagement – including with relevant system and policy leaders – is generating growth and momentum				
Evidence is showing that trust in our initiative and public will for our issue are being built				

Comments:

<i>Collaborative Strategy</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
Progress on our Action Plan is being made and quick wins are being celebrated				
Regular communication is building trust, aligning work, and ensuring that partner contributions are mutually reinforcing				
Facilitation around reflection, learning and sensemaking are informing our plan and are guiding our next steps				
Comments:				

<i>Community Innovation</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have launched innovation prototypes and have established a rapid learning and improvement process for them				
Results have enabled us to determine which prototypes to stop, revise, or continue, as well as which opportunities to scale				
We have documented and shared the results and learnings from innovation prototypes widely; these are building excitement				
Comments:				

<i>Evaluating Impact</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We are regularly reviewing data from our evaluation framework and are making sense of results				
We are documenting how our work has contributed to changes in behaviours, processes, practices and impact				
We have created an impact report and have shared it broadly with partners and across the community				
Comments:				

PHASE 4

SUSTAIN AND RENEW: SELF-ASSESSMENT

<i>Collective Leadership</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
The Steering Committee has assessed our collaborative’s sustainability factors and is incorporating findings into its work plan				
The Key Milestones Report, partner agreements, and governance structure are being reviewed and upgraded as needed				
The initiative’s budget is being reviewed and updated as needed				
Comments:				

<i>Community Engagement</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We are engaging partners to make sense of our progress, capture insights, recognize contributions, and celebrate impact				
Partners are using insights from our collaborative work to guide their own organizational strategies				
The community’s capacity and confidence to collaborate for positive change is growing and is being recognized				
Comments:				

<i>Collaborative Strategy</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
The initiative’s progress is being assessed, strategy being refined, and plan for sustainability and renewal being incorporated				
Partners are demonstrating flexibility and willingness to adjust their strategies and tactics to advance our common agenda				
We have developed a policy/advocacy agenda (if relevant) and are nurturing partner understanding and support around it				
Comments:				

<i>Community Innovation</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We are supporting the scaling of promising innovations				
We have secured resourcing and partnerships to embed innovations within existing systems				
We are leveraging innovation prototype results to build awareness and change policies and mindsets				
Comments:				

<i>Evaluating Impact</i>	Not Started	In Progress	Ready for Next Phase	N/A – Not Applicable
We have a shared understanding about what our findings are telling us about our work and our issue				
We are updating our evaluation framework to align with our revised strategy				
We are building commitment and rigour with partners to share data, and to use it for planning, iteration and improvement				
Comments:				

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS: REFLECTING ON SKILLS AND MILESTONES

Essential Skill	Skills/milestones that we have achieved and can celebrate	Skills/milestones where we are on track and/or are making progress	Skills/milestones where we are behind and/or are stalled out
Collective Leadership			
Community Engagement			
Collaborative Strategy			
Community Innovation			
Evaluating Impact			
Essential Skill	Challenges we are experiencing or anticipating	Milestones we'd like to prioritize to achieve this year	Areas where we may require external (e.g. Tamarack) support
Collective Leadership			
Community Engagement			
Collaborative Strategy			
Community Innovation			
Evaluating Impact			

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS: PLANNING FOR THIS YEAR

	Who is responsible?	By when does this action need to happen?	What resources will be needed?
Collective Leadership	Priority milestone to achieve:		
Action:			
Action:			
Action:			
Community Engagement	Priority milestone to achieve:		
Action:			
Action:			
Action:			
Collaborative Strategy	Priority milestone to achieve:		
Action:			
Action:			
Action:			
Community Innovation	Priority milestone to achieve:		
Action:			
Action:			
Action:			
Evaluating Impact	Priority milestone to achieve:		
Action:			
Action:			
Action:			