

## Collective Impact Backbone Structures - PROS AND CONS

As Collective Impact efforts evolve over time, there are a variety of different structures that are emerging in this work. Below are six examples of different structures, and a description of the positive and negative factors impacting each structure. This is a document in process. Please feel free to share your thoughts and ideas about backbone structures.

| CI is Stand Alone Charity or Non-Profit with Backbone Staff   |  | Backbone staff housed in another organization (Fiscal Sponsor)  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p><b>PROS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board of directors with clear governance structure as identified in charitable and non-profit models</li> <li>• Mission and vision aligned with the leadership table</li> <li>• Ability to provide a charitable number for funding purposes</li> <li>• Board of Directors assumes risks: hiring/firing staff, financial oversight, etc</li> </ul> | <p><b>CONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support two leadership structures which might be in competition, board and leadership table</li> <li>• Partners might perceive that funding is going to support the stand alone charity</li> <li>• Requires own infrastructure – accounting, back office, office space, etc</li> <li>• Partners might perceive that the charity is in competition with other charities in the community</li> <li>• More complicated ‘to go out of business’ when the goal has been achieved</li> <li>• Board member terms might be shorter than leadership table member terms</li> </ul> | <p><b>PROS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiscal sponsor assumes risks: hiring/firing staff, financial oversight, etc</li> <li>• Fiscal sponsor may provide infrastructure support – office space, accounting, financial management, HR management</li> <li>• Fiscal sponsor may have credibility to bring influential partners to the table (funder, large organization, business, government)</li> <li>• Role clarity between the fiscal sponsor and the Leadership table is helpful (MOU)</li> </ul>   | <p><b>CONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An additional layer or layers of accountability for backbone staff reporting both to the leadership table and to the fiscal sponsor CEO and Board of Directors</li> <li>• Conflicts may arise between the fiscal sponsor mission and the CI mission/common agenda</li> <li>• Fiscal sponsor may only be committed to this support role for 3 – 5 years thereby requiring the CI Leadership table to find a new fiscal sponsor</li> </ul> |
| Backbone staff housed across multiple organizations   |  | Leadership table takes on the backbone functions with no staff  |  |
| <p><b>PROS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement of multiple leadership table partners in the role of the backbone</li> <li>• Risk is shared across a variety of organizations in a way that no single partner assumes all the risk</li> <li>• Role clarity amongst the partners is required when multiple organizations are involved</li> </ul>  | <p><b>CONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion for staff about who is accountable to who or which organization for what</li> <li>• Greater ability for conflicts to emerge when one partner thinks it is doing more than the other partners</li> <li>• Allows for duplication and requires greater collaboration across backbone staff team</li> </ul>  | <p><b>PROS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership table members deeply engaged in the collective impact effort</li> <li>• Backbone functions shared across multiple organizations and leaders in the community</li> <li>• Risk is shared across a variety of organizations in a way that no single partner assumes all the risk</li> <li>• Role clarity amongst the partners is required when multiple organizations are involved</li> <li>• May be a useful approach for small communities</li> </ul> | <p><b>CONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective impact effort may become a side of the desk activity because the individual organizational outcomes have priority</li> <li>• Greater ability for conflicts to emerge when one partner thinks it is doing more than the other partners</li> <li>• Allows for duplication and requires greater collaboration across backbone staff team</li> </ul>  |

| Backbone hosted by a United Way, Community Foundation or other Funding Body   |  | Backbone Hosted by Government or Government Department<br>(Municipal, Provincial, State)  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p>PROS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funder brings credibility and contacts to the collective impact effort</li> <li>• Funder is able to bring influential champions to the table from different sectors</li> <li>• Has the capacity in place to host, hire and support backbone staff and infrastructure</li> <li>• Often has a stable work environment</li> </ul> | <p>CONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some partners may be at the table only to access funding</li> <li>• Potential for confusion between the mission of the host and the common agenda of the collective impact effort</li> <li>• Will have to work within the funding cycle of the host</li> <li>• Potential for confusion by donors or investors as to whether their support is going to the host organization or to the collective impact effort</li> </ul> | <p>PROS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government partners has the credibility and contacts which can enhance the collective impact effort</li> <li>• Greater ability to shift or impact the policy agenda</li> <li>• Government has the capacity in place to host, hire and support backbone staff and infrastructure</li> <li>• Government may provide a more stable work environment</li> <li>• May move forward more quickly if a priority of government</li> </ul> | <p>CONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective Impact effort might be pressured to follow the election cycle thereby making it vulnerable should leadership shift</li> <li>• Some partners may only be at the table to access funding or credibility</li> <li>• The pace of change may be slower due to the accountability mechanisms and processes within government</li> <li>• May be impacted by elected official interference</li> <li>• May limit the individuals invited to the table to previously engaged partners</li> </ul> |
| Additional Example of a Backbone Structure  |  | Additional Example of a Backbone Structure  |  |
| <p>PROS</p>   | <p>CONS</p>  | <p>PROS</p>   | <p>CONS</p>  |

This document was developed by Liz Weaver, Vice President, Tamarack Institute. Please send your reflections, comments to [liz@tamarackcommunity.ca](mailto:liz@tamarackcommunity.ca).

