



# CASE STUDY | Montréal: Collective Impact and the Power of Place

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Montreal’s Collective Impact Project demonstrates the impact of mobilizing multiple funders, diverse sectors, and resident leaders from 17 neighbourhoods in a united, long-term effort to reduce the multifaceted challenges of poverty.

## OVERVIEW

Montreal’s [Collective Impact Project](#) (CIP), which launched in 2015, is an innovative and inspiring example of Collective Impact at the neighbourhood level. Recognizing that “persistent and complex social problems require a comprehensive and integrated approach as well as innovative solutions” the CIP was envisioned as “an accelerator of community change aimed at increasing the impact of collective action while achieving measurable and significant outcomes to reduce poverty.” (Centraide of Greater Montreal, 2020)

By embracing a focus at the neighbourhood scale and a clear long-term goal of reducing poverty, the CIP empowers local neighbourhoods to generate changes “that are designed by and for their own community” with a focus on generating “lasting impacts on many dimensions of poverty, such as food, housing, social inclusion, academic success and employment, along with community infrastructure and facilities.” (Collective Impact Project, 2020, p. 5)

A fundamental principle in the design of the CIP was that “communities should be able to articulate what kinds of outside supports they need, based on priorities for change that local stakeholders and residents have established together.

PROJET  
IMPACT  
COLLECTIF

COLLECTIVE  
IMPACT  
PROJECT

**An innovative collaborative model**

**9 FOUNDATIONS**

- Foundation of Greater Montreal
- Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation
- Marcelle and Jean Coutu Foundation
- McConnell Foundation
- Mirella & Lino Saputo Foundation
- Molson Foundation
- Pathy Family Foundation
- Silver Dollar Foundation
- Trottier Family Foundation

**3 STRATEGIC PARTNERS**

- Coalition montréalaise des Tables de quartier
- Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal
- Ville de Montréal

**1 PROJECT OPERATOR**

- Centraide of Greater Montreal

**A major investment**

<p><b>\$23 M</b> over 6 years</p>	<p><b>\$3.2 M</b> invested in 2019-2020</p>
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## A UNIQUE FEATURE: MONTRÉAL'S NEIGHBOURHOOD ROUNDTABLES

Montreal's unique approach to Collective Impact intentionally builds upon a rich tradition of and infrastructure for collective action. One of the most significant of these are the 30 Neighbourhood Round Tables that have been in place since the late 1980s and cover most of the city's older neighbourhoods in the urban core as well as some in more suburban neighbourhoods which range in size from 10,000 to 100,000 residents. In fact, the city's Round Table model is a unique one that began in Montréal.

The Neighbourhood Round Tables Coalition is a federation of the Montreal Neighbourhood Round Tables. The Coalition works at the city-wide scale to address common social issues impacting all the neighbourhood round tables. Many of the Round Tables play local "backbone" roles "supporting the development of a shared vision for their neighbourhood and then leading a joined-up action plan that served as a guidepost to help local organizations align their own actions with collectively-determined priorities." (Pole & Bérubé, 2019, p. 56)

Each Round Table is its own local cross-sector and multi-network consultation body. Each Round table has its own way of working and its own identity - just like each neighborhood. The aim of all Roundtables is to help improve the conditions and living environments of their local population. Their role is to bring together "as many neighborhood stakeholders as possible from various backgrounds: community organizations, institutions, the cultural community, the business community, and, above all, citizens." (The Neighbourhood Round Tables Coalition, 2012). Through its work, each Round Table creates a common understanding of their neighbourhood and its concerns; builds consensus around local priorities; and, then coordinates residents and other local stakeholders to take action together.

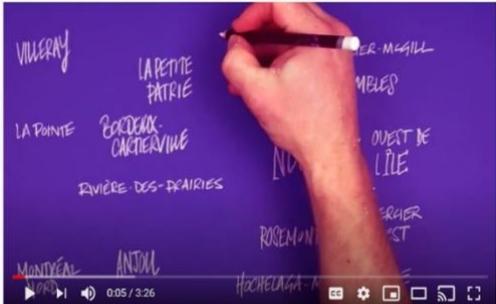
## FUNDER COLLABORATION: AN ALIGNED LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

One of the unique features of the CIP is its collaborative funding model which includes 10 philanthropic partners – Centraide of Montréal as the Project Manager – and nine other grantmaking foundations who have jointly contributed to create CIP's \$23 million dollar, six-year budget. This has enabled the CIP to distinguish itself from other existing programs or funds. Instead, CIP describes itself as "a new form of support for community development that reinforces but does not supplant Centraide's normal funding methods."



### Montréal's Coalition of Neighbourhood Roundtables

The [Neighbourhood Round Tables Coalition](#) is a federation of Montréal's 30 neighbourhood round tables. The Coalition works at the city scale on common social issues that impact all the neighbourhood round tables.



The neighbourhood roundtable model: A world first that started in Montreal

Each Neighborhood Table brings together and leverages the collective capacity of local stakeholders for the betterment of their neighbourhood. They do this by bringing together stakeholders from community organizations, institutions, the cultural community, the business community, and, above all, citizens. Together, stakeholders draw a portrait of the neighborhood; identify local concerns and determine action priorities in different areas such as: housing, urban planning, food security, environment, transport, etc.

In fact, a key hypothesis that is intentionally being tested in the design of the CIP is that, “...the action of a certain number of funders, if it is well-organized and coordinated, will allow for greater local and regional coherence and consistency and will have a more powerful collective impact than the isolated outcomes achieved so far.” (Pole & Bérubé, Centraide’s Collective Impact Project: Poverty reduction in Montréal, 2020)

Would the CIP’s funding and strategic partners be able to influence practices and policies that were negatively impacting local neighbourhood poverty-reduction efforts? At the project’s half-way point, there is evidence to suggest the answer is yes as evidenced by several promising new funding, strategies and partnerships that positively impact the work underway in many neighbourhoods – including those involved with the CIP. This includes attracting new partners and resources to assist CIP neighbourhoods to lead the redevelopment of abandoned sites; the exploration of opportunities to establish public-private-philanthropic investment for building and renovating community infrastructure spaces; and, the alignment of funding strategies to fill gaps and better support local food systems work that is now underway in almost half of the CIP neighbourhoods.

Despite the obvious benefit of having secured a significant, long-term investment to support the CIP, the power of this collaborative funding model is not without its challenges. Over time one tension that emerged was that each funder approached its investment in the CIP from its own specific frame of reference and interests. As the project has matured, these different frames of interest and interest amongst funders led to different funders in the partnership having different needs and expectations of the CIP and the neighbourhoods. To address this, changes were made in the project’s governance and operations by the project’s mid-point to allow for differing levels of engagement and needs amongst funder participants.

## CIP: A CATALYST FOR GREATER REGIONAL IMPACT

An important aspiration of the CIP is that, together, the funders’ collaborative, strategic partners and neighbourhoods would be well positioned to do more than address poverty reduction efforts at the local level. Those involved with the CIP at all levels also hoped that that the momentum and impact of their collective work across the seventeen neighbourhoods would make it easier and more effective for them to tackle systemic barriers that often impede the best efforts of neighbourhoods alone.

Another strategic hope shared by the designers and leaders of the CIP is that the project would have a ripple effect that would enable it to be a catalyst for greater alignment between public institutions across the city. The fact that many of the partners in CIP are also participants in several regional initiatives focused on issues related to housing, homelessness, the built environment and education, combined with the fact that many of these regional initiatives have themselves been calling for greater cross-sector institutional alignment, makes this hope that much more likely that the CIP will indeed fulfil its vision to serve as a significant contributor to a broader regional commitment to change.

“ The ripple effect of the CIP may also create the conditions for greater alignment between public institutions across the city. ”

The fact that three of the CIP's non-funding strategic partners – The Coalition of Neighbourhood Round Tables, The City of Montreal and Montreal's Public Health Department – contribute to the overall governance of the project also adds another strategic dimension to the likelihood of the CIP serving as a catalyst for broader change across its region. As major public sector institutions, both the City and Montreal's Public Health Department, have played a role, together with the project's funders, in leveraging opportunities and addressing systemic barriers that are beyond the capacity of the local neighbourhoods to influence alone.

## LOCAL DIVERSITY WITH A SHARED COMMITMENT TO POVERTY REDUCTION

A real strength in the design of the CIP is its appreciation of and support for local diversity and experimentation across its neighbourhoods. Communities receiving CIP funding each set their own goals and targets for change. Neighbourhoods have championed a diversity of projects such as: improvements to community engagement processes and dynamics; improvements to living conditions and quality of life in the neighbourhood; and systemic issues that affect the welfare of local residents.

The visual on the right illustrates how CIP neighbourhoods have embraced an understanding of poverty's impact on many dimensions of life. As a result, CIP neighbourhoods have championed a broad array of poverty-reduction strategies.



The impact on poverty being generated by CIP neighbourhoods through the combined efforts of their various strategies is significant. As outlined in the visual above, these impacts include both measurable improvements for people living in poverty as well as greater knowledge and understanding both about the challenges being faced by those living on low income; as well as promising neighbourhood-based solutions. Some of the impacts generated by the CIP Project in 2019-20 include:

- 7,000 people had improved access to healthy affordable food through activities in 8 neighbourhoods
- 1000 acts of support to 120 tenants in 1 neighbourhood which resulted in 66% experiencing improvements in their housing conditions; 33% receiving support to move and 200 families being educated of their rights as tenants
- 83% of participants who attended Soupe Locale, a series of soup dinners designed and hosted to strengthen social capital in one neighbourhood, reported that the dinners made them want to get involved in their neighbourhood
- 500 immigrant families in one neighbourhood benefitted from an effort to provide them with support to understand and navigate their children's school system and 80% of school staff reported seeing an improved parental involvement in their child's academic success

## A COMMITMENT TO CAPACITY-BUILDING AND ONGOING LEARNING

The CIP has been intentionally designed as a learning project. Neighbourhood projects have access to capacity-building supports that are provided primarily by a small dedicated CIP staff team and 8 planning and development advisors with support from staff in Centraide du Grand Montréal's community impact department. Neighbourhood projects also have specific evaluation support through [ÉvalPIC](#) – a partnership between CIP and Dynamo – to strengthen the collective evaluation skills within the neighbourhoods through training, tools and tailored supports. This helps to ensure that “evaluation, knowledge mobilization and knowledge transfer activities are designed to occur within and across funded neighbourhoods, as well as within and across neighbourhoods, and funding partners.” (Pole & Bérubé, Centraide's Collective Impact Project: Poverty reduction in Montréal, 2020, p. 269)

In addition to the focused evaluation and learning that is occurring within the neighbourhood projects, a second, cross-cutting evaluation of the CIP Project overall is being conducted by an independent, third-party group. This evaluation documents the changes within the project based on the five conditions of Collective Impact. Highlights from this evaluation are depicted in the visual on the right.

Four areas of attention that have been identified from the cross-cutting evaluation of the CIP include:

1. **Taking Ownership of Collective Impact** – It's important for projects to support ongoing learning beyond their leadership circle
2. **Being Stretched Too Thin** – There is a risk to project stakeholders of trying to do too much at once or underestimating what they can accomplish with their current resources.
3. **Ensuring Approaches Last** – It is important that the successful neighbourhood projects being implemented are able to survive beyond their initial start-up and are designed with sustainability in mind.
4. **The Challenge of COVID-19** – The realities of COVID-19 have required the adaptation of projects and also demanded new thinking for how citizen engagement and participation can be maintained.



## CONCLUSION

Montréal's neighbourhood focused Collective Impact project has demonstrated that people's proximity to the issues that affect their lives makes positive action more practical and tangible. Embracing a design that balances neighbourhood uniqueness and self-determination within a common poverty-reduction framework has generated a sense of shared ownership across a broad and diverse set of stakeholders while also achieving significant impact.

There are many important elements in the overall design of the CIP that play an important role in the project's success. These include:

- The decision to leverage the incredible asset of the city's Neighbourhood Round Tables
- The securing of a funders collaborative willing to establish a significant long-term funding investment
- The leadership and engagement from three strategic partners -- the Coalition of Neighbourhood Roundtables, the City of Montréal and Montréal Public Health – who share a city-wide reach and focus; and,
- Designation of Centraide du Grand Montréal – a known and trusted partner of the neighbourhoods – as the overall project manager and provider of the comprehensive support infrastructure needed for the project to thrive

The willingness of the CIP's funding and strategic partners to embrace an adaptive approach and engage in a learning journey of their own is both courageous and innovative in its own right. Furthermore, the founding partners' understanding of their own role and the importance of considering the CIP's capacity to serve as a catalyst for broader regional systems-change was quite visionary and demonstrates how local innovations can be leveraged to create the conditions for lasting change at a much larger, city-wide and/or regional scale.

Funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnership Program.

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