



CASE STUDY | MOBILIZING INDIGENOUS WISDOM & LEADERSHIP WITH COLLECTIVE IMPACT

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What becomes possible when the leadership and wisdom of an entire community intentionally works together to ensure the best possible future for all? This is the question at the heart of a unique Collective Impact project in Kahnawà:ke – an Indigenous community just outside Montréal – that is mobilizing community and sector leaders to address social and economic challenges while nurturing a strong connection to its culture, identity and traditions.

OVERVIEW

In 2015, several community leaders attended a Tamarack Learning Event to learn about Collective Impact as a possible framework for mobilizing their community to address its social and economic challenges.

Traditional Kanien'kéhaka ways include working together for the interests of the collective and the benefit of future generations. Similarly, the Collective Impact approach intentionally cultivates shared leadership across sectors and perspectives to deepen shared understanding and assumes the need for aligned action by many to achieve impact. These similarities led the community of Kahnawà:ke to embrace Collective Impact as a viable framework to mobilize leadership across the community on a shared plan to ensure the best possible future for all.

[Skátne Teionkwakà:nere – Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact](#) (KCI) formally launched in 2017 and has received ongoing consulting support from Tamarack in adapting the Collective Impact framework to their unique context.

About Skátne Teionkwakà:nere – Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact (KCI)

[Skátne Teionkwakà:nere – Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact](#) (KCI) is a long-term grassroots movement launched in 2017 to foster greater collective action in addressing social and economic issues for this Indigenous community of approximately 6,000 just south of Montréal.

The Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) name for the KCI Initiative – Skátne Teionkwakà:nere – translates to mean “**Together, we look ahead.**”

KCI's common agenda is **to support positive change that nurtures a thriving Kanien'kéhaka community rooted in a connection to our culture, identity and traditions.**

Four key organizations came together to champion the formation of KCI and launch the Collective Impact effort. The four organizations are:

- Kahnawà:ke Shakotia'akehnhas Community Services
- Kahnawà:ke Education Center
- Tewatohnhi'saktha (Kahnawà:ke Economic Development)
- Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke

[Skátne Teionkwakà:nere – Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact](#) (KCI) officially launched in 2017 after engaging more than 300 members of the community – including business owners, elders, residents, community groups, youth, organizations, spiritual leaders – to raise awareness about the changing economic realities impacting Kahnawà:ke, share statistics about the community's socio-economic conditions, and build consensus on opportunities for shared action.

Shared community ownership and leadership has always been central to the development of Kahnawà:ke's approach to Collective Impact. Soon after the launch, a Steering Committee of diverse community leaders was formed to determine the strategy for KCI's Collective Impact process. The KCI Roundtable of 4 organizations who were the original catalyst for the initiative continue to serve as an advisory Roundtable to the initiative.

HOW WE WORK: THE KANIEN'KÉHA:KA PERSPECTIVE

The KCI Steering Committee felt strongly that its approach to Collective Impact needed to reflect a Kanien'kéhaka perspective in which the culture is passed down through the art of storytelling. Kanien'kéhaka people are known as visual storytellers. Our ways of working together reflect our culture, identity and traditions. Respecting our ways of working together would also be key to making long-lasting, positive change.

The Steering Committee members understood that success was possible only if their work was grounded in a connection to their culture, identity, and traditions. This meant that an important part of the early work on KCI involved reaching agreement on what was important about HOW they intended to do their work. The visual on the right highlights the principles that the Steering Committee agreed should be central to how KCI would implement its Collective Impact Initiative and, listed below are the commitments they believe would guide how they worked together and reached decisions:

- Make decisions that consider the impact on: peace, nature, and 7 generations into the future
- Contribute to the overall well-being and success of the community



- Embrace a wholistic approach
- Encourage intergenerational impact
- Honour Mohawk culture and beliefs
- Welcome, listen deeply, and learn from diverse perspectives
- Utilize community strengths and assets
- Use concrete data (draw upon local data, evidence, and expertise)

FROM A COMMON AGENDA TO A COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

The common agenda for KCI's Collective Impact initiative is **to support positive change that nurtures a thriving Kanien'kéhaka community rooted in a connection to our culture, identity and traditions.** One of the first challenges faced by KCI's Steering Committee was how to translate the countless ideas and input gathered from various events across the community into a clear and compelling plan of action. Several early meetings of the Steering Committee focused on reviewing background data and learning more about the work and priorities of various community organizations. After considerable reflection and dialogue the Steering Committee ultimately narrowed its initial list of seventeen potential community priorities down to a short-list of six for possible collective action.

The members of KCI's Steering Committee learned through this early work how much dialogue and deliberation they invested to reach consensus on their short-list of six possible priorities. The next dilemma that the Steering Committee confronted was the realization that they would not likely achieve the success and impact that they hoped for if they tried to launch action plans around all six of the short-listed priorities at the same time. They also felt strongly that it would be very important for them to obtain input from a broad cross-section of the community to help prioritize which of the potential priorities they had short-listed should be implemented first. This decision made the Steering Committee's next task very clear: How could they describe each of the six community priorities in a clear and tangible way so that the community could see, understand, and ultimately want to be part of, making it a reality?

The members of the Steering Committee divided themselves up, and where necessary recruited other community members, to form six, time-limited Research Teams. The job of each team was to be able to describe their priority in a clear, easy and compelling way that could be shared with the community.

Steering Committee Considerations

- *The community will mobilize around the opportunity*
- *Ideas can be translated into collective action and impact*
- *Our work will identify and bring attention to emerging opportunities and/or gaps not currently being addressed*

THE STEERING COMMITTEE'S SIX POTENTIAL PRIORITIES FOR KAHNAWÀ:KE



Each Research Team focused their research to address the following four topics:

1. **Describe This Priority** – This work involved describing the priority and why it matters in Kahnawà:ke; who in this community it is particularly relevant to; and, who might not support it.
2. **The Current Reality of this Priority in Kahnawà:ke Today** – This involved outlining what currently DOES exist in the community related to this priority; what has worked as well as what's changed related to this priority in the community; and, what we understand is not working and why.
3. **Ideas from Other Communities** – This involved finding out how other communities have addressed this priority and what ideas and inspirations that offers for what Kahnawà:ke might do; and, what we understand is not working and why.
4. **Our Proposed Action Plan** – This included describing the team's recommendations for how Kahnawà:ke might take action on this priority; highlighting some possible "early-wins" for this priority area; what is needed to make it happen and an invitation to help make this idea better.

RESEARCHING POSSIBLE PRIORITIES: DEVELOPING A PLAN ON A PAGE

With the Steering Committee Research Teams underway, the staff support team at KCI began working with Tamarack to consider how best to consolidate and communicate the research about each of the six priorities for action in a way that was clear and easy to understand. The solution was to use Tamarack's [Plan on a Page Tool](#). This tool tells the story of your CI Initiative's purpose, goals &

THE PLAN ON A PAGE TOOL

A Plan on a Page is a concise, one-page synthesis of the key design elements of the collective impact approach. It tells the story of your CI Initiative's purpose, goals & achievements.

achievements in a concise, one-page format that synthesizes the key design elements of the Collective Impact approach.

Each Research Team developed several drafts of their Plan on a Page. During this time, Steering Committee meetings were used to enable Research Teams to meet, develop draft plans and then share these drafts with one another for feedback, input and refinement.

An Open House was being planned where the six Plans on a Page could be shared and the community would be invited to give input, prioritize and consider becoming involved in the work ahead.

The example on the right is just one of the six completed Plans on a Page. Each was blown-up to a large poster size for sharing at different stations set-up throughout the Open House.



CONTINUING TO BUILD SHARED OWNERSHIP: OUR COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

KCI began planning to host a Community Open House in the Fall of 2019. The Open House was hosted as a “drop-in” event that ran for 2 full days until 8:00 p.m. Community members were encouraged to come together and bring their children as well. Food and childcare were available for all. The drop-in format encouraged participation, engagement, conversations and fun. Additional opportunities to give input were also hosted both online and throughout the following week as well. The goals of the Open House were:

- To share information about Skátne Teionkwakà:nere – Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact
- To highlight opportunities for community action on the priorities that have been identified previously with community input
- To get feedback from members of the community about these possible ideas; and,
- To invite you to become involved – by contributing your time and talents to help bring the priorities that the community endorses into action





The space was designed with a woodland theme with each priority having its own station hosted by members of that Research Team. Campfires were created around each of the Plans on a Page profiled and participants were invited to join in a conversation to learn more about that priority, ask questions, provide feedback and consider whether they would be interested in being part of a future Action Team for that priority. In Indigenous tradition, people gathering around a fire are considered family. This helped to create comfortable safe spaces for ideas and opportunities to be explored by people of all ages. At the end of the Open House, participants were given three stickers and asked to “voice their choice” for the priorities they were most keen to see move forward first.

Close to 200 participants attended the Open House and shared their feedback on the research done on the six priorities for action.

PLANS ON A PAGE DISPLAYED AT KCI'S COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE



THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The Plans on a Page were the perfect discussion starters at the various stations at the Open House. The Steering Committee members and other volunteer facilitators were able to engage the community informally, while educating and collecting important feedback and data about each priority.

Participants were highly engaged as demonstrated by the amount of time given to each priority and the responses to “voicing their choice.” On average, participants stayed two hours! The feedback indicated

“The hours were excellent and very accessible to others with varying work schedules. I really appreciate all the hard work and thought that was put into this. I can tell it is a labor of love for those involved. The free food was greatly appreciated.”

- Open House Participant

KCI's decision to be intentional about adapting the Collective Impact framework in ways that respect the culture, identity and traditions of the people into HOW the work unfolds has been instrumental to its overall success and nurtured the involvement and commitment of its community to champion the emerging priorities and become involved in helping to move them forward into action.

LEARN MORE:

- Learn more about [Skátne Teionkwakà:nere – Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact](#)
- View the [Full Report](#) and the [2-Page Summary](#) from KCI's Open House
- Access Tamarack's [Plan-on-a-Page Tool](#)