CHANGING HOW I THINK ABOUT COMMUNITY CHANGE
A MULTISOLVING APPROACH

SYLVIA CHEUY

> *"We need a new worldview to navigate this chaotic time. We cannot hope to make sense using our old maps. It won't help to dust them off or reprint them in bold colors. The more we rely on them, the more disoriented we become. They cause us to focus on the wrong things and blind us to what's significant. Using them, we will journey only to greater chaos."*
>
> - Margaret J. Wheatley

Many traditional approaches for addressing a complex issue like poverty, health & climate action have, until recently, emphasized siloed, single-sector approaches that focus on a specific set of achievable strategies. The field of community change is maturing and the growing global network of changemakers working across multiple scales, in innovative ways to address an array of intractable problems. This network of changemakers continues to be a source of inspiration and hope.

We at the Tamarack Institute have been studying and supporting local change efforts across a spectrum of community issues and experiences since our inception in 2002. Over the intervening 17 years we have watched changemakers build and evolve their skills with a specific emphasis on broadening the array of tools and approaches needed to effectively address the complex issues they are confronting within the ever-changing context of communities.

TAMARACK'S FIVE INTERCONNECTED PRACTICES: A COMMUNITY CHANGEMAKER'S CURRICULUM

In 2016, Tamarack's Co-CEO, Paul Born wrote a paper entitled *Our Community Can Change* (Born, 2016) which first outlined five core practices of community change: collaboration and collective impact; community engagement; collaborative leadership; community innovation and evaluating impact. He identified these practices after reflecting on several successful community change efforts, including Tamarack's own leadership of Vibrant Communities – Cities Reducing Poverty, an international network of more than 70 cities working collectively to reduce poverty locally and build capacity to scale systems change together.

Since then, Tamarack's Learning Centre has continued to refine Paul's initial thinking and we now recognize these five core practices of community change as our curriculum for equipping community leaders with the skills they need to strategically advance their community change agenda. We also recognize that our Learning Centre can and does play a valued field-builder role by observing and reflecting on patterns and trends in the work of community change and making it easier for community changemakers to effectively do their work by:

- Ensuring easy access to the latest thinking from the field;

- Offering a platform where promising practices can be celebrated and shared; and

- Creating an array of opportunities that connect changemakers, both virtually and in-person, to learn from one another and from thought-leaders from around the world.

A core assumption that underpins both the five interconnected practices of community change, as well as Tamarack's own role and focus is that we — and the work we are trying to achieve — cannot be done alone. We need one another. Community change is a team sport. It is only by working well together that we will succeed in creating the positive change that we and our communities are hoping for.

This paper will explore an approach for thinking and working together to address an array of complex issues simultaneously. That approach is called Multisolving. Multisolving is a framework developed by Elizabeth Sawin and her colleagues at Climate Interactive that offers changemakers a novel way of re-imagining how communities can effectively champion positive change. This paper will then reflect on Multisolving, as one of several promising approaches for affecting large-scale community change, to offer five insights about how the practice of community change is changing.

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR INTERDEPENDENCE

The power of multi-sector approaches lies in their ability to harness a diversity of different sectors and perspectives to think together so that sector-specific "blind spots" and assumptions can be made visible. This is how we begin, as Einstein urges, to see things differently and discover new, previously unimaginable solutions to the issues we are most wanting to solve. Often, multi-sector collaborations have the added benefit of attracting and mobilizing previously untapped resources to support the implementation of the new, innovative strategies that they have generated.

Growing interest in the Collective Impact framework stems, in part, from its demonstrated effectiveness at achieving results using an approach that recognizes that it is virtually impossible for a single sector, working alone, to generate an adequate response to a complex issue. Collective Impact's emphasis on the importance of multi-sector collaboration also facilitates a focus beyond the programmatic solutions of individual organizations to intentionally incorporate strategies that also address the need to change the systems that often unintentionally contribute to keeping a complex issue in place.

For many changemakers, the capacity to work across sectors and adopt a systems-change lens is not one that has been well developed. Further, the work of systems change often requires supports and infrastructure that is not well suited to the single sector and/or single organizational paradigm that is dominant in our field. Another challenge to embracing a systems-change approach is that, because we are "part of the system," we are often blind to our own role within it and therefore may find it extremely difficult to clearly see the ways in which we may be contributing to the very problem we are trying to solve.

> **Because we are part of the system, we are often blind to our own role within it.**

Interestingly, the innovative solutions that our communities need are most likely to be found by embracing precisely this way of seeing, thinking and acting. As changemakers then, we must then commit to developing the ability to work differently together – within ourselves and with others. Fortunately, there is a new promising approach for developing this capacity. It is called Multisolving.

MULTISOLVING: AN APPROACH FOR ACHIEVING MULTIPLE BENEFITS ACROSS DIVERSE SECTORS

Multisolving is a framework emerging from the field of climate action that offers a new approach and an array of helpful tools to those of us wanting to deepen our capacity to harness the power of multi-sector approaches to address our community's most complex issues.

Multisolving is "a strategic approach to solving the interconnected problems facing the climate and human society" by focusing simultaneously on achieving multiple benefits in justice, equity, resilience, health and well-being through systemic solutions that protect the climate. (Sawin, Mwaura, & Gutierrez, 2018, p. 5). Multisolving leverages the power of cross-sector collaboration "to design and implement projects that improve local health, produce financial savings and advance long-term climate goals all at once" in order to "deliver improvements in multiple sectors for the same investment of time, money or political will, thus saving money, meeting multiple needs and empowering diverse constituencies." (Sawin, Mwaura, & Gutierrez, 2018, p. 2)

TransformTO, the City of Toronto's Climate Action Strategy, which was collaboratively developed by the City of Toronto and The Atmospheric Fund, offers an excellent case study of Multisolving in action. Not only does their strategy intend to reduce Toronto's greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, their plan has stated that they refuse to fragment environmental issues from other pressing issues such as housing, employment, and transit and intend to "positively contribute to health, the local economy and social equity at the same time." (Cheuy, 2019, p. 1)

While multisolving is still a relatively new approach, a 2018 scan found more than 100 multisolving projects in action in 52 countries across the globe. These projects operate on an array of different scales and having been initiated by, and involve, a wide diversity of sectors. In spite of the variety across project examples, common benefits of multisolving projects include:

TAMARACK INSTITUTE

- Multisolving initiatives typically generate more savings than costs – Many Multisolving projects start small, are often low-tech and were inexpensive. Instead, they rely on creativity, generate new behaviours or use existing resources in new ways. Projects that did quantify the benefits of their work often reported significant benefits. For example, Warm Up New Zealand showed a $3.90 benefit for every $1 invested in insulating homes. Similarly, a Walk-to-School Outreach Project in Durham County U.K. found that their community generated $7.64 in benefits for every dollar invested in its program. (Sawin, Mwaura, & Gutierrez, 2018, p. 38)

- The diversity of benefits generates champions across diverse constituencies – The wide array of sectors and groups often engaged in multisolving projects often engages a broad array of different interest groups and delivers a diversity of benefits. This often generates a strong constituency of support for the work.   As one example, TransformTO, which embraced a multisolving approach, has seen that "local community organizations continued to demonstrate a high degree of ownership and involvement in the implementation of the strategy once it was approved." (Cheuy, 2019, p. 5)

- Multisolving projects encourage positive community change AND address climate action – Multisolving projects align current community needs with the need to protect against long-term climate change concerns. In this way, local community issues are solved in ways that also protect against global climate change.

- Multisolving fosters a more beautiful, connected, resilient, just and healthy world – While multisolving projects tend to emphasize benefits to health and climate, several examples also demonstrated evidence of relationship-building, behaviour change, and/or culture change as well. For example, "projects that turned busy streets into pedestrian walkways for festivals or promoted a plant-based diet did not rely on new, sophisticated, technological breakthroughs, instead they required new thinking and slow, steady and deliberate interventions to support new habits and mindsets." (Sawin, Mwaura, & Gutierrez, 2018, p. 40)

Multisolving addresses community concerns in a way that challenge many of the traditional ways that I have been taught to think about — and address — complex issues. What multisolving shares with other multi-sector collaborative efforts is that it generates new solutions, in part, by inviting those eager to make change to consider how the solutions they are seeking, are often discovered by challenging how we might think and work differently, together.

SIX OBSTACLES TO MULTISOLVING

What I find inspiring about multisolving — as well as other approaches for engaging diverse sectors to work collaboratively for positive change — is the innovation that is generated by bringing diverse perspectives together and how it acts as a catalyst for varied yet aligned actions by multiple contributors. Paradoxically however, a consistent barrier faced by such innovative approaches that engage a diversity of non-traditional partners is the skepticism that such approaches often generate because they are NOT historically how these issues have been addressed.

Sadly, the skepticism of approaches that challenge the status quo is often a significant barrier that prevents promising innovations from moving to the mainstream. In her article, *Supporting Pioneering Leaders as Communities of Practice,* Meg Wheatley identifies this challenge as a common one faced by

"paradigm pioneers": those whose focus is NOT on process improvement (helping existing systems work more efficiently and effectively) but rather on process revolution (the development of radically new processes and methods and new systems, based on new assumptions.) She notes, paradigm pioneers do "double-duty": they simultaneously invent new approaches while at the same time they are working to solve the challenges created by the previous paradigm. What makes this work particularly challenging, Wheatley notes is that, "Past habits of practice exert strong pressures. When crises mount and people feel fearful and overwhelmed, we default back to practices that are familiar, even if they are ineffective." (Wheatley, 2002, p. 4)

The report *Multisolving at the Intersection of Climate and Health* provides an in-depth look at the practice of multisolving. Development of the report involved a global scan which identified more than 100 multisolving projects operating, on a range of scales, in more than fifty-eight countries and included ten in-depth case studies. This analysis identified six primary obstacles that can limit implementation of a multi-solving approach. The six obstacles are:

> **There are many brave pioneers experimenting with new approaches for resolving the most difficult societal problems, they practice consistent innovation and courage, they naturally think in terms of interconnectedness, following problems wherever they lead, addressing multiple causes rather than single symptoms. They think in terms of complex global systems and yet also understand this world as a global village.**
>
> - **Meg Wheatley**
> **Supporting Pioneering Leaders as Communities of Practice**

1. **Disciplinary Silos** – The ability to effectively implement a multisolving approach requires the combining of knowledge that often crosses disciplinary boundaries. Multisector collaborative work can also be hampered by the absence of a shared language or differing ways of demonstrating or measuring success.

2. **Budgetary Silos** – Often funding to support multisolving projects comes from one sector, while benefits can mostly accrue in a different sector. This can make it difficult to secure or sustain the needed resources for the project.

3. **Jurisdictional Silos** – The holistic approach embraced by multisolving initiatives often requires participation and collaboration across multiple jurisdictions. It may also require collaboration by groups who typically operate at different scales. And yet, examples of transformation within communities and social systems are often characterized by "relatively sudden breakthroughs (that occur) when multiple systems or scales align in a cascade of novelty." (Westley, Zimmerman, & Quinn Patton, Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed, 2006, p. 205)

4. **Weak Community Engagement Skills** – Many successful multisolving initiatives involve vulnerable communities as partners who contribute their ideas and time to the design and implementation of projects. This requires skills and experience in community engagement and multisector collaboration which technical experts often lack. And yet, as TransformTO's experience with community engagement illustrates, because community residents rarely view issues in the same siloed, issue-specific ways that organizations and subject matter experts do, it led TransformTO to recognize that, "Achieving emission reductions is an important opportunity

AND we need to understand community priorities and design climate actions to address them as well." This shift, in turn, set the stage for greater collaboration with a diversity of partners and ultimately built much greater public support. (Cheuy, 2019, p. 6)

5. **Challenging the Paradigm of Funding Prevention Versus Care** – Historically the lion's share of investment and funding is available and directed towards immediate and pressing issues and problems, with considerably less funding and attention being allocated to prevention and/or addressing root causes. This dominant paradigm often negatively impacts multisolving initiatives, which tend to emphasize prevention and the addressing of root causes.

6. **Long-Term Benefits Within Systems Oriented to Short-Term Decision-Making** – Our existing organizations measure cost and benefit within their area of focus and with an emphasis on short-term results. In contrasts, the benefits of multisolving initiatives may unfold over longer timeframes and across multiple sectors.

Multisolving is an approach which is "pioneering a new paradigm" in how we think and act to address complex community challenges. As the obstacles listed above highlight, securing and sustaining support for a non-traditional way of thinking and acting should not be underestimated.

Speaking at Tamarack's 2015 Collective Impact Summit, the late Brenda Zimmerman, coined the term "snapback" to describe the resilience of the existing system and the tendency for it to "bounce back" to the old way of doing things. She also noted that "snapback" is something that can appear at a variety of levels within the system – with individuals, organization, a collaborative or even at a societal level. Brenda went on to propose six actions that changemakers could embrace to mitigate against snapback. These actions are:

1. **Embrace Unknowability** – and let go of the expectation that there is one "right" answer that, once it is found, will work forever;

2. **Relationships Are Key** – This work encompasses (keeping the faith, enhancing the attractors for your innovation and/or dampening attractors of dominant system

3. **Ensure Community Ownership of Actions and Measurement** – This action emphasizes the essential role of building trust and keeping the voice of the community central to the change effort;

The Capacities of a Multisolver

Rooted in Place
Knowledge of place enables multisolvers to see connections between issues that others miss.

Persistant
Seeing a complex big picture with entwined root causes, multisolvers know that change will take time and effort.

Creative
Multisolvers generate solutions by combining tools and ideas in new ways.

Connectors
Multisolvers are emotionally intelligent & visionary. They connect people across sectors & organizational silos.

Systems Thinkers
Multisolvers have an intuitive sense of interconnection. They look for leverage points & opportunities to link action across scales.

Reframers
Multisolvers define problems in ways that engage and see success as optimizing many variables not maximizing only one variable.

Adapted from Climate Interactive

TAMARACK
I N S T I T U T E

4. **Invest in Ongoing Engagement** – Many change initiatives include engagement in the start-up of their change effort, but don't often build in mechanisms and resources for regular engagement throughout their lifecycle. It's very important not to "starve" initiatives' ability to continually engage their stakeholders;

5. **Be Strategic Thinkers Not Just Strategic** Planners – This action reminds us that it's important to anticipate and include mechanisms that enable innovators to adapt their plans over time and recognize that systems-change work is often iterative and requires well-developed pattern recognition skills; and,

6. **Don't Confuse "Quick Wins" With "Quick Fixes"** – In the long-term work of community change, a focus on celebrating milestones of progress is essential fuel for the success and sustainability of the change effort. However, it's important to be able to distinguish a quick-win on the pathway to the longer-term victory from a "quick-fix" that doesn't contribute to the long-term goal. Brenda also reminds us that success is NOT a destination since our systems are dynamic. To help prevent mistaking a quick fix for a quick win, Brenda also recommends being willing to experiment with safe-fail experiments and emphasizes the importance of engaging both content AND context expertise. (Zimmerman, 2015)

Given the paradigm-changing nature of multisolving it is not surprising that two of the three practices embraced by multisolving practitioners involve "documenting benefit and measuring impact across a wide array of benefits" and "storytelling of what is possible and what is already being achieved…especially when the stories incorporate data about the diverse benefits of the project." (Sawin, The Magic of Multisolving, 2018, p. 2)

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE MULTISOLVING

While the obstacles to multisolving are real, the benefits are also very compelling. Not only do the economic benefits of multisolving projects often exceed their costs, they often are an important source of new connections as well. Furthermore, multisolving projects are often a catalyst for generating behavioural or culture change – factors that often lead to more lasting, sustainable change. So, what does it take to develop a successful multisolving project?

The *Multisolving at the Intersection of Climate and Health* report identifies six elements that are consistently found in successful multisolving initiatives. These are:

1. **Champions** – In the same way that engaging influential leaders has been identified as one of three pre-conditions for successful Collective Impact efforts, successful multisolving initiatives acknowledge the importance of a few committed individual, organizational, and community leaders who are willing to mobilize their personal networks and connections to join them.

2. **Cyclical Learning and Growth** – Successful multisolving initiatives tend to grow and expand their focus over time. To do this well, the diverse partners need to be willing to stay in dialogue, be persistent and yet patient as their initial ideas evolve and change through the input of others. Over time, it is not uncommon for multisolving initiatives to expand their scale and reach, fueled by the

TAMARACK INSTITUTE

passion and power of volunteers. Finally, as partners learn and work together, and results from their collaborative effort is demonstrated, many multisolving initiatives tend to see growth in the scope and scale of their work.

3. **Community Engagement** – Effective community engagement and ongoing communication with partners, collaborators and the communities being served by a multisolving initiative is a key ingredient of successful multisolving initiatives.

4. **Measuring Multiple Benefits** – Research, data and powerful stories of possibility and impact are essential for successful multisolving initiatives. In fact, the ability to demonstrate and communicate about benefits beyond a single sector is one of the factors that enables successful multisolving initiatives to continue to grow their partnerships, scale and reach.

5. **A Strong Financial Plan and/or Low-Cost Design** – Many multisolving initiatives required little or no financial investment. Instead, the focus was on inspiring or facilitating changes in behaviour, culture and/or policy. For those that did require financial resources, these funds were sometimes secured by researching and communicating the initiative's multiple benefits and securing a funding partner or champion for each benefit, thereby securing resources from a diversity of sources.

6. **Anticipating and Confronting Resistance to Change** – Resistance to change is a common experience for multisolving initiatives, even the successful ones. Strategies used by successful multisolving initiatives to proactively address such resistance have included: being diligent about documenting and quantifying benefits and capturing stories of impact; investing in communicating about the initiative's impact and learnings; and using external evaluators to quantify a range of benefits and estimate their monetary value.

Successful multisolving Initiatives, like other systems-focused, multi-sector, collaborative efforts to advance positive change, are guided by similar principles and values that include a willingness to:

- Work across sectors and silos to pool knowledge and resources;
- Learn together and experiment with new approaches that use an iterative approach;
- Measure and document progress that reflects a diversity of benefits; and,
- Communicate regularly with stakeholders and communities about progress and impact

The spirit embodied by this approach highlights the ingenuity and creativity of human beings in finding ways to tackle whatever challenges are before them and reminds us that how we work together is as important as the work we choose to do.

STRATEGIES FOR EMBRACING A MULTISOLVING APPROACH

Elizabeth Sawin, Co-Director of Climate Interactive and a thought-leader behind the practice of multisolving, has identified ten strategies for cultivating a multisolving perspective. These strategies help to create the necessary conditions to identify opportunities to achieve multiple benefits across a diversity of sectors with the same set of actions (Climate Interactive, 2016).

The 10 strategies are:

1. **Broaden the Circle of Decision-Makers** – "To find multiple benefits you need multiple perspectives. Take the time to learn each other's language and cultivate curiosity about the blind spots within each discipline."

2. **Reframe Success as Optimizing Benefit for Many Variables** – Rather than focusing on maximizing benefit within a single sector, multisolving initiatives aim to identify and celebrate a multitude of benefits that generates wins across the entire system.

3. D**iscover What Co-Benefits Matter to People** – Don't assume you know what co-benefits matter most to people. Reach out and explore the obstacles that various stakeholders are facing and then see if you can envision ways to address those obstacles that also achieve climate action goals.

4. **Focus Beyond Benefits to Consider Their Distribution** – As important as paying attention to the multiple benefits that a project can generation it is very important to pay attention to WHO benefits. True multisolving designs for equitable outcomes. This requires intention, planning and diligence.

5. **Don't Be Limited by Existing Analytic Tools** – Always remember that existing analytical and/or measurement tools may not yet capture the full and diverse benefits and impact of your multisolving effort. This shouldn't limit your exploration and may also require you to develop new ways to quantify and capture the full impact of your collaborative, cross-sector efforts.

6. **Recognize Not Everything that Matters Can Be Measured** – Given the limitations of many numerical and analytical tools, whenever possible it is valuable to also capture and share stories that help illustrate the scope and breadth of impact that your actions are generating.

7. **Remember that Multiple Benefits Don't Happen by Accident** – Create frameworks and templates that help you to explore and illustrate the multiple benefits you are anticipating through your multisolving initiative. Climate Interactive has created a FLOWER (Framework for Long-Term, Whole-System, Equity-Based Reflection) Tool as one great example of how to do this.

8. **Weaken Jurisdictional Silos** – In multisolving initiatives it is not unusual for benefits to accrue in a different department or sector than the one which made the initial investments. It takes discipline and effort to ensure that credit is shared and that incentives exist to celebrate the accomplishments achieved together on behalf of the whole system.

9. Sh**are Power and Resources with Local Levels** – It is not uncommon for synergies between the multiple goals of a multisolving initiative to be most easily identified at the local level; this highlights the importance of considering impact across a variety of scales, and sharing decision making power and financial resources with local implementers.

10. **Track Progress Towards Multiple Benefits Carefully** – Be sure to intentionally design and invest in efforts to track, document and communicate your collective progress on multiple benefits. This includes starting with as much baseline data collection as you can afford, in order to allow you to demonstrate progress. Such effort will contribute to the growth and sustainability of your collective action.

The ten strategies documented above certainly apply to the work of multisolving. However, anyone who has invested time and energy in developing and implementing a multi-sector, collaborative effort to generate community change will no doubt see in the list useful reminders and strategies that are relevant to their work as well.

FIVE INSIGHTS THAT ARE CHANGING HOW I THINK ABOUT COMMUNITY CHANGE

I have come to believe that discovering and becoming skilled at new ways of working together is very much at the heart of what it means to be a changemaker. Canada's renowned social innovator, Al Etmanski, makes this case well when he observed that:

> "Many of our toughest social and environmental challenges have had time to develop deep roots that are resistant to just about everything we throw at them. Furthermore, these roots are intertwined with related problems that are just as entrenched…Each challenge is complex enough on its own. Together, they are impossible for any one individual, group, institution or sector to tackle. If we are to be innovative about anything in the future, it must be about how we work together. Yes, social innovators have to be dedicated and creative problem-solvers. But they also have to be wise travelers. Social innovation spreads through sharing, not selfishness…It is only through generous, respectful, interactions across sectors, expertise and roles that social innovation achieves lasting impact." (Etmanski, 2015, pp. 24-25)

This in-depth exploration of the promising approach of multisolving has provided an opportunity to better appreciate what it has in common with Collective Impact and other multi-sector approaches to community change that focus on achieving large scale impact. The commonalities shared by these approaches have been instrumental in identifying five insights, which I believe, illuminate how the work of community change is changing.

INSIGHT #1 – WORK BEYOND ORGANIZATIONS TO LEVERAGE MULTI-SECTOR NETWORKS AND BUILD MOVEMENTS FOR CHANGE

Increasingly changemakers are recognizing that working collaboratively across sectors and perspectives is the most effective way to generate new, innovative solutions to many of the intractable issues that communities are confronting today. High quality programs can and do make positive contributions but are limited in their effectiveness at tackling the root causes that create these issues in the first place. Additionally, the resources and knowledge needed to generate promising solutions often lies with those who, historically, have not been part of creating solutions: Those with the lived experience and local context knowledge needed to translate promising theories into effective strategies that are tailored to the specific local context where they are being implemented.

In *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact* the authors observe that "for much of the 20th century, the organization was the go-to structure for how collective energy was marshalled to get things done." By the 1990s however, a new organizing structure – the network – was gaining recognition. In today's interconnected world, "the network has become a favored unit of action for people who want to make nearly any sort of difference in the world" and provides social change agents with "a fundamentally distinct and promising organizing principle to achieve ambitious goals." (Plastrik, Taylor, & Cleveland, 2014, p. 2)

At the same time networks have been gaining attention as alternate organizing structures for coordinated action, interest has also been growing about the power and possibility of movements to harness, mobilize and unleash grassroots power to affect change. In 2016, my colleagues Liz Weaver and Mark Cabaj co-authored the [Collective Impact 3.0](#), a paper which reflected on the past five years of experimentation with the Collective Impact framework to offer some recommendations for how the practice of Collective Impact could evolve from a management-building paradigm to a movement-building one with an "emphasis on reforming (even transforming) systems…and brings together diverse stakeholders to build a vision of the future based on the common values and narratives." (Weaver & Cabaj, 2016, p. 4)

Today's highly interconnected world is one dominated by an eroding sense of organizational loyalty; a decline of trust in institutions; and, a growing desire for individuals to choose, customize and co-create. A very real paradox for changemakers is, that while it has never been easier to mobilize support around ideas, the complexity of the issues combined with a scarcity of funding and shrinking public attention spans, have made the work of advancing change more difficult than ever. At the same time, there is no denying the power and appeal of grassroots movements as a vehicle for social change. In writing about its new initiative, [Weave: The Social Fabric Project](#), the Aspen Institute noted that, "Social movements are not organized top-down anymore. These days they are radically decentralized. But there still have to be hubs – places that help provide coherence…where the common work and common faith can be hammered out and clearly articulated." (Weave: The Social Fabric Project, 2019, p. 2)

Community changemakers would be wise to build knowledge and skill in knowing how and when to embrace a lens of movement-building and cultivate the capacity to strategically leverage the power of today's networked world; and, enhance the effectiveness of their community engagement efforts.

INSIGHT #2 – IMPACT REQUIRES BOTH PROGRAMMATIC IMPROVEMENTS AND SYSTEMS CHANGE INNNOVATIONS

Alongside the growing recognition of the effectiveness of multisector collaborative efforts to champion community change there is increasing awareness that the nature of today's interconnected and intractable social and/or environmental challenges are not likely to be solved by a single focused program or set of programs. Karen Pittman, Co-Founder of the Forum for Youth Investment, offers one of the best explanations to illustrate the distinction between programmatic interventions and systemic ones. She says, "programmatic interventions help people to beat the odds while systemic interventions seek to change the odds for everyone." Changemakers know that true impact is created when both programmatic AND systemic strategies are implemented and aligned.

One of the reasons that multisector, collaborative approaches to change have been gaining recognition is that they are often far better suited than organizationally-driven approaches to develop and implement strategies aimed to address the systemic factors that often contribute to the issues people are keen to address. Multisector collaborative approaches are much better suited to identifying and addressing systemic issues than individual organizations because of

> **Multisector collaborative approaches are much better suited to identifying and addressing systemic issues than individual organizations because of the diversity of perspectives that they bring together**

TAMARACK
I N S T I T U T E

the diversity of perspectives that they bring together. In their paper *The Water of Systems Change*, John Kania, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge note that, "Attempting to foster systems change without building the capacity to "see" systems leads to a lot of talk and very little results…Real learning—developing a capability to do something we could not do before— demands deep commitment, mentoring, and never-ending practice. The same is true for capacity building among collective actors such as performing arts ensembles or high-performing sports teams. This is no different when it comes to fostering systems change." (Kania, Kramer, & Senge, 2018, pp. 15-16)

And yet, as noted at the opening of this paper, the capacity to work across sectors and adopt a systems-change lens is not one that has been as well-developed as programmatic and/or organizationally-driven approaches to change. Furthermore, the supports and infrastructure needed to support change efforts is still predominantly designed with a bias for the single sector and/or single organizational paradigm which doesn't always lend itself to support collaborative efforts at systems change.

The increasing interest and support that funders have shown by funding Collective Impact initiatives suggests a growing recognition and acceptance of the need for multisector collaborative work. Increasingly, more focused attention is needed by changemakers — and those that support them — to develop and expand that range of resources and supports required to ensure that long-term, collaborative change efforts remain effective and sustainable.

INSIGHT #3 – REIMAGINING LEADERSHIP BY RETHINKING RELATIONSHIPS AND HOW WE WORK TOGETHER

One of the greatest paradoxes of the work required to champion large-scale community change is how essential trust and interpersonal relationships are to the success are to these efforts. This paradox is eloquently captured by the leaders of Weave: The Social Fabric Project, noting that, "Relationships do not scale. They have to be built one at a time, through patience and forbearance." It is through relationships, particularly with others whose experience is quite different from our own, that understanding is broadened, assumptions are questioned, and new possibilities are co-created. Over time, these relationships lay the groundwork that enable norms and beliefs to change." The leaders of Weave have also observed that, "When people in a community cultivate caring relationships and do so repeatedly in a way that gets communicated to others, then norms are established…When you create a norm through the repeated performance of some good action, you have created a new form of power." (Weave: The Social Fabric Project, 2019, p. 8)

In her paper *Making Sense of the Multiple Faces of Leadership*, my colleague Liz Weaver noted that, "While leadership is essential to the work of community change, how various leadership approaches align with and contribute to the specific work of advancing community change efforts have not always been clear." (Weaver E., 2018, p. 13) Liz then highlights five leadership principles as being essential for impactful community change and uses these to assess the contributions of various leadership approaches to the field. The five principles are:

- **Principle 1: Make the Voice of the People Central** – This principle distinguishes between content or subject-matter expertise and "context" or local/lived experience expertise and highlights the importance of drawing upon both sets of wisdom in developing effective community change strategies.

- **Principle 2: Work Across Boundaries** – This principle emphasizes the value of bringing together

- **Principle 3: Catalyze Change and Work Adaptively** – This principle acknowledges the leadership needed in situations where new opportunities are emerging and the context within which the work is unfolding is one that shifts rapidly. This leadership style is particularly useful when the community's work is focused on addressing intractable dilemmas.

- **Principle 4: Engage in Systemic Thinking and Action** – This leadership principle recognizes that often, the work of community change is focused on influencing and shifting systems and requires an ability to consider how the system is and is not contributing to the issue as well as working with others to co-create a different future.

- **Principle 5: Be Courageous** – This principle acknowledges that leadership in the context of community change can be uncomfortable and challenging and requires the capacity to navigate tensions and operate in an environment of uncertainty.

These principles transcend any specific leadership approach and confirm how important leadership is in community change efforts. They also highlight how important it is for changemakers to be knowledgeable about, and capable of drawing from, an array of different leadership approaches in order to have the capacity to adapt their leadership style to meet the dynamic needs of their community change effort.

INSIGHT #4 – ADDRESS COMPLEXITY AND SCALE WITH THE POWER OF SIMPLE RULES AND SMALL ACTIONS

When the issues that we are wanting to change are large and complex, thinking about how to make change happen can seem overwhelming. Debates about where to invest time and energy; which priorities to focus on; or, how to leverage your collective resources for maximum impact are often counterproductive because they perpetuate the belief of a single "silver-bullet" solution that can foster a divisiveness that prevents the successful alignment of multiple efforts.

The lens of complexity however offers a different perspective that is helpful in enabling us to view things differently.

- First, the parts within a system interact and are interdependent. Therefore, any change within the system, however small, impacts the system. Often, a big change is the result of several small changes coming together. People's individual actions create new norms, which demonstrate their collective will, and, in turn, can be a catalyst that leads institutions to change.

> **I believe that systems shift most effectively when change is happening at multiple levels with some sort of loose congruence. I also think change is held back when a preponderance of effort Is focused at a single layer of the system and other layers are frozen in place or even changing in an opposite direction.**
>
> - **Elizabeth Sawin**
> **Climate Interactive**

TAMARACK INSTITUTE

- Second, chunking is the term used to describe the strategy of breaking a goal into a series of smaller, more discrete, wins. The path to long-term community change is more often achieved by linking together a series of "quick wins" than by achieving one significant change. These "little victories" are also an important source of inspiration that can help to fuel continued collective action.

- Third, the dynamics of a complex system are often shaped by observable patterns that are governed by a few simple rules. A cascade of change can be unleashed throughout a system when a small change is made to a rule that holds the current system in place. Different rules generate different patterns in the system.

In her work with multisolving, Elizabeth Sawin of Climate Interactive has observed that "Powerful change happens when the rules that give rise to patterns change at several levels within a system in parallel." She also notes that "Similar simple rules at play in different contexts create patterns we recognize as somehow similar." (Sawin E., 2019)

 For example, the simple rules that accompany a dominator worldview might include beliefs like: "take all you can get;" "the winner takes all;" or "survival of the fittest." These rules can be seen to play out at many different scales and issues: interpersonal violence, systemic racism and/or sexism; energy consumption, to name a few. In the same way, simple rules that emphasize equity, health, balance and sustainability — such as "use only your fair share;" and "ask for what you need and offer what you can" — have the potential to give rise to a cascade of positive change.

INSIGHT #5 – RECOGNIZE INTERCONNECTION: MOVE BEYOND DEBATE AND CHAMPION EQUITY

Today, our communities are confronting issues that are qualitatively different. These issues are more complex, more interconnected, and more difficult to understand than ever before. Therefore, it is not surprising that the approaches used to tackle the issues that communities are facing cannot rely on proven practices of the past. In fact, many modern-day dilemmas share common characteristics that are not well suited to either-or thinking or debate. Rather, they require a deliberate effort to generate shared understanding from multiple perspectives before possible solutions can be considered. These characteristics include:

- They are hard to clearly define
- They have many contributing factors which are often inter-related and interdependent
- They are often dynamic and evolving in nature
- Potential solutions are often impossible to verify, involve compromises, generate unintended consequences, and, will likely fail to satisfy everyone

This contributes to the sense of urgency to discover and refine our collective capacity to think, act and work together in new ways that harness our shared knowledge to support collaborative problem-solving. In *[The Power of 'Co': The Smart Leaders' Guide to Collaborative Governance](#)*, the authors suggest that the pathway from a complex problem or dilemma to an enduring solution is built upon four elements:

1. An appreciation of the value of all stakeholders working together;
2. Strong relationships based on conversations, positive experiences and trust;

TAMARACK INSTITUTE

3.   A shared understanding of the complexity of the dilemma from all stakeholder perspectives; and,
4.   A solution-finding process and decision-making structure that has been designed in partnership

In fact, the process of collaboration often builds the foundation needed to enable successful implementation and delivery of the solutions being created because, successful implementation utilizes the commitment and energy generated by process to fuel the actions required to make it happen.

If collaboration offers the best way to find workable solutions to our communities' most complex dilemmas and trust and mutual respect are essential to working well together, then it is difficult to imagine how community change efforts cannot naturally champion the need for equity and inclusion as central to their work. For example, many multisolving initiatives often involve partnerships with vulnerable communities and observe what John A. Powell refers to as "targeted universalism" where the efforts to increase equity or meet the needs of the vulnerable also generate positive benefits not only those individuals and communities but the broader population as well.

As I reflect on how the field of community change is changing, the words of the Sufi poet Rumi come to mind: "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself." I am particularly struck by how much the work of community change requires changemakers to be willing to look inward and consider how we need to change ourselves while, at the same time, encourages us to stay open to discovering and incorporating new frameworks for how to mobilize diverse partners work together in new and ever-effective ways to make positive community change happen.

TAMARACK
I N S T I T U T E

PEER REVIEW

This paper was peer reviewed by Liz Weaver, Lisa Attygalle, Pamela Teitelbaum, and Elizabeth Sawin. I would like to thank them for the comments, feedback and direction that they have incorporated into the paper.

REFERENCES

Born, P. (2016). *Our Community Can Change: When We Work Together Well.* Waterloo: Tamarack Institute. Retrieved from https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/316071/Events/Multi-Day%20Events/Community%20Change%20Institute%20-%20CCI/2016%20CCI%20Toronto/CCI_Publications/Our_Community_Can_Change_FINAL-1.pdf

Cheuy, S. (2019). *TransformTO: Multisolving in Action.* Waterloo: Tamarack. Retrieved from http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/transform-toronto-multisolving-in-action

Climate Interactive . (2016). *Ten Strategies for Capturing Multiple Benefits in Climate Action Plans .* Retrieved from Climate Interactive : https://img.climateinteractive.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/10-strategies-for-multisolving.pdf

Etmanski, A. (2015). *Impact: Six Patterns to Spread Your Social Innovation.* Vancouver , B.C., Canada : Orwell Cove. Retrieved from http://aletmanski.com/books/

Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). *The Water of Systems Change.* Boston: FSG: Social Impact Consultants . Retrieved from https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change

Plastrik, P., Taylor, M., & Cleveland, J. (2014). *Connecting to Change the World .* Washington D.C.: Island Press .

Sawin, E. (2018). The Magic of Multisolving. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 4. Retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_magic_of_multisolving#

Sawin, E. (2019, March 4). Individual Carbon Footprints or Collective Systemic Change? Both! Corvallis, OR, United States of America: Resilience. Retrieved from https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-03-04/individual-carbon-footprints-or-collective-systemic-change-both/

Sawin, E., Mwaura, G., & Gutierrez, M. J. (2018). *Multisolving at the Intersection of Health and Climate: Lessons from Success Stories.* Washington D.C.: Climate Interactive. Retrieved from https://www.climateinteractive.org/programs/multisolving/multisolving-at-the-intersection-of-health-and-climate/

Tamarack Institute. (2012). *Inspired Learning: An Evaluation of Vibrant Communities" National Supports 2002-2012.* Retrieved from https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/992ENG.pdf: https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/992ENG.pdf

Twyford, V., Waters, S., Hardy, M., & Dengate, J. (2012). *The Power of "Co": The Smart Leaders' Guide to Collaborative Governance.* Wollongong, NSW: Twyfords Consulting .

Weave: The Social Fabric Project . (2019). *The Relationalist Manifesto.* Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute . Retrieved from https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/the-relationalist-manifesto/

Weaver, E. (2018). Making Sense of the Multiple Faces of Leadership. 15. Retrieved from https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/making-sense-of-the-multiple-faces-of-leadership

Weaver, E., & Cabaj, M. (2016). Collective Impact 3.0. Retrieved from http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/collective-impact-3.0-an-evolving-framework-for-community-change

Westley, F., Zimmerman, B., & & Quinn Patton, M. (2006). *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed.* Toronto: Random House Canada.

Westley, F., Zimmerman, B., & Quinn Patton, M. (2006). *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed* . Toronto: Random House Canada .

Wheatley, M. J. (2002). *Pioneering Leaders as Communities of Practice: How to Rapidly Develop New Leaders in Great Numbers.* Retrieved from www.margaretwheatley,com: http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/supportingpioneerleaders.html

Zimmerman, B. (Writer). (2015). *Preventing Snapback* [Motion Picture]. Waterloo, Canada . Retrieved from https://youtu.be/cnXRX0Y9io8