



# READY, SET, GO

## BUILDING READINESS FOR COLLABORATIVE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

LIZ WEAVER

There are times when we dive into community change projects and initiatives without truly understanding whether the community is ready and whether we have the appropriate set of skills and capacities to take on this change work. The Tamarack Institute has been involved in community change for over 15 years supporting cross-sector community efforts to reduce poverty. We have seen some collaborative tables succeed, while others fail, but over that time we have learned many valuable lessons about what works and what does not. Perhaps the first and most important lesson learned is to pay attention to the readiness of the community to take on the challenge.

This paper will explore community readiness from several different perspectives. It is designed to provide practitioners with insights about community readiness. It will also explore different approaches when considering community readiness. Finally, the paper will include links to tools and resources which could be used to assess and build readiness for collaborative and community impact.

### A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

#### UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY RHYTHMS: THE HARWOOD INSTITUTE

Taking the pulse of your community is an important step. The Harwood Institute provides a useful framework for understanding different stages called [\*Community Rhythms: The Five Stages of Community Life\*](#). Understanding these different rhythms or stages of community life can help explain why some communities adopt change at a faster pace than other communities.

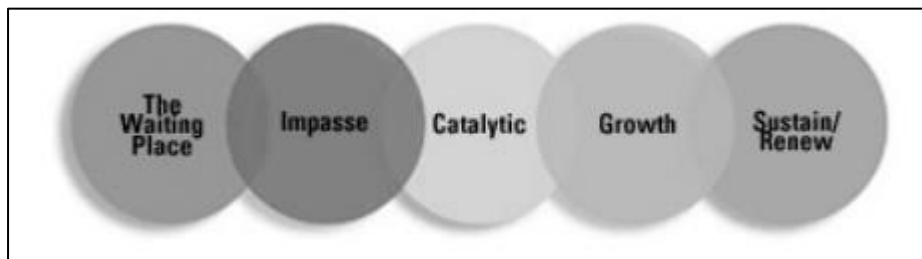


Figure 1 The Harwood Institute - The Five Rhythms of Community Life

Communities that find themselves in a **waiting place** are waiting for someone or something to come along to solve their current problems. These community members often feel disconnected from the problem. The community is fragmented with limited leadership. By waiting, they are looking for someone else to step up to the plate with the answer. These communities seem, in part, to have given up hope for a different future.

Those communities that are at an **impasse** have hit rock bottom; but, the community's members are stuck and don't really know the path forward. There is a lack of leadership in this type of community and while people are frustrated, no one individual or group is willing to step forward to break the impasse.

**Catalytic** communities show a lot of promise. These communities can seed real change because the citizens understand that there is a problem, are energized, and are willing to act. There is the appropriate leadership in place to move from inertia to action.

Communities in the **growth** stage are making progress on their community problem or issue. There is a sense of community spirit and connection. People can name key community leaders and speak with pride about the common purpose and direction.

A community in the **sustain and renew** phase might have achieved their initial goal, but are now struggling to maintain momentum. It is at this point when the leadership needs to draw lessons and insights from the past and determine the path forward. There is a danger in the sustain and renew phase to lose momentum and head back to the waiting place.

Diagnosing the rhythm or stage your community is in can be helpful when considering whether there is the right capacity and willingness to take on the challenge of community change. The Harwood Institute identifies that communities move from one rhythm to the next and that there are times when significant changes move communities quickly through the stages. If your community is in a waiting place or at an impasse, it may take longer to build the right strategic capacity and leadership. They say that timing is everything and Harwood illustrates why this is so important to consider before jumping into change.

## THE LOCAL CONTEXT: COMMUNITY NARRATIVE, DATA, MAPPING, AND LEADERSHIP

### UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY NARRATIVE

All communities have narratives. The community narrative is the story that citizens tell each other about living and working in that community. Narratives can have positive and negative components to them. There are communities that are ‘lunch bucket’ which often means that there is a heavy industrial base driving the economy and that people just get on with the work. Other communities are considered ‘bedroom communities’ where a large portion of the population commutes from the community to work daily. There are government towns and university towns which are dominated by those two pillar institutions. Some communities are dying. Industry is shuttering and citizens are moving away. And other communities are growing, the reverse is happening.

Like Harwood’s five community rhythms, understanding the narrative of your community can be a critical component to understanding community readiness. There are many sources in the community to uncover the community narrative:

- **LOCAL MEDIA** – What are the dominant stories about the community?
- **DATA AND STATISTICS** – What are the dynamic trends and what pressures are these putting on the community?
- **LOCAL GOVERNMENT** – What is in the mission statement and core strategies of the municipality?
- **ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS** – What are key anchor institutions (university, college, hospital, library, etc.) doing? Are they growing, contracting or staying the same? What pressures are these institutions facing?
- **BUSINESSES** – How is the business landscape? What trends are you observing?
- **VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS** – Are voluntary sector organizations collaborative or working in silos? Are they positive about the community?
- **CITIZENS** – What are citizens saying when they call into talk shows? Are citizens participating in community gatherings? Are there different voices engaged in the conversation or is the conversation about the community dominated by one voice?

“Are there different voices engaged in the conversation or is the conversation about the community dominated by one voice?”

Understanding the narrative of your community can be important to shifting this narrative. It also speaks to readiness. If your community has a negative narrative, don’t let this stop you, but consider that it will likely take more steps to turn a negative narrative into a positive narrative.

The United Way of Central Iowa, in advance of launching their poverty reduction strategy, spent several months hosting 40 community listening sessions which engaged more than 140 local citizens. These community listening sessions contributed to a deeper understanding about the issue of poverty and the perspectives of citizens from across the region as to whether this issue could be tackled. During the Central Iowa community listening sessions, the United Way team and its partners uncovered the community narrative and built their poverty reduction strategy based on community engagement. This approach of deeply listening to the community narrative led to significant early results. In just over a year, [the poverty strategy in Central Iowa](#) reported moving 11,000 individuals on the journey out of poverty.

## COMMUNITY DATA

It is one thing to discover the community narrative, next the community narrative needs to be verified by data. Many of us have a data phobia. It is confusing, and we are not always sure how to make sense of the different data points that exist in our community.

In Canada, many community foundations have made community data more accessible by publishing community Vital Signs reports. These are important reports for understanding what data trends are critical to the community and how the community is responding. Other communities have key institutions with staff who are deeply conversant in data and data trends. These individuals can be found across the community in municipal government offices, in universities and colleges, in chambers of commerce and in social planning councils. They might bring different perspectives to issues but they have access to data and most are willing to share their expertise.

It's important to note that community data can be both qualitative and quantitative. Collecting data through interviews, stories and case studies (to name a few examples) can be just as important as the quantitative data you may pull from a Vital Signs report. Communities should work to look for ways to harmonize multiple sources of data and allow both stories and numbers to inform a community narrative.

Understanding community data helps clarify what you have learned about the community narrative. In some cases, it may also uncover that people are concerned about an issue when the data proves there is no need for concern.

## PERSONAL ASSET INVENTORY TOOL

Many community change efforts begin by mapping the community's mix of services and programs which could support the community change effort. Why not begin by mapping the skills, interests and assets of the collaborative network? Community change efforts usually come to fruition by a group of citizens or organizations who are interested in shifting the current context.

The [Personal Asset Inventory tool](#) was developed by the Tamarack Institute to deepen the

collective understanding of the group about its own assets and skills. It also enables different resources to be drawn into the effort and supports a variety of leadership skills and styles.

This simple tool invites all members of the collaborative table to share their own interests, skills and passions and why they are committed to working collaboratively on the change. We have also found that use of this tool can be an important way of building trust among the diverse participants of a collaborative process. As noted in my paper [Turf, Trust, Co-Creation and Collective Impact](#), authentic community change moves at the speed of trust.

## COMMUNITY MAPPING

Mapping existing programs and services in the community is another important step for understanding and building community readiness. There are many approaches to build a community map. The [Sustainable Communities – A Guide to Community Asset Mapping](#) identifies that communities have six different assets available to them.

These include:

### 6 ASSETS AVAILABLE TO COMMUNITIES

1. **NATURAL ASSETS** found in the natural environment including water, wood, minerals, wildlife, and fertile soil.
2. **BUILT ASSETS** are physical structures like buildings and public infrastructure such as recreational facilities and roads, etc.
3. **SOCIAL ASSETS** are the values and culture of the community including the traditions and attitudes of sharing, cooperation and mutual support.
4. **ECONOMIC ASSETS** include local jobs and businesses which provide livelihood to the community.
5. **PUBLIC ASSETS** are services such as hospitals, educational institutions and municipal services.
6. **INTANGIBLE ASSETS** include the undiscovered skills, expertise and willingness of leaders and volunteers to work toward the common goals of the community.

*A Guide to Community Asset Mapping* provides a simple tool for engaging citizens and organizations in the process of uncovering the assets that can be found in any community. Uncovering the assets that exist in a community can be foundational for any community change effort. Rather than building new initiatives, the community asset mapping effort might uncover the fact that folks are already working on the area of concern and would likely benefit from additional focus and resources.

Another useful way of building a community asset map is to reach out to the local information service centre in your community and ask them to provide a map of the services and programs in the community. Many information service centres can provide a GIS map which identifies where services and programs are located across the community and how accessible these services might be to existing transit.

The Toronto Youth Suicide Prevention Network connected with a local community information service to map youth-serving programs, secondary schools, health care institutions, mental health support services and transit lines. This community map showed both locations across Toronto where services were clustered and also where there were service gaps.

## COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

A critical community asset, highlighted in both Harwood's *Five Rhythms of Community Life* and in *A Guide to Mapping Community Assets* is that of community leadership. David Chrislip, in *The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook* calls this the collaborative leadership premise.

“If you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community.”

- David Chrislip, *The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook*, Page 50.

Community leadership is an integral component of community readiness. Engaging the appropriate leaders willing to advance an issue and bring their resources to bear can drive the issue from idea to execution.

There are several considerations that Chrislip highlights in the collaborative leadership premise. These include engaging ‘appropriate leaders’. Not every leader needs to be involved or needs to hold traditional power, but rather community change efforts need to engage a diversity of leaders who bring different assets to the table – whether it be willingness, influence, resources, or knowledge. When thinking about community leadership, many types of leaders should be engaged, from those who hold traditional leadership roles in the system (e.g. leaders of non-

**Community asset mapping efforts might uncover the fact that folks are already working on the area of concern and would likely benefit from additional focus and resources.**

profits, philanthropy, government agencies) to leaders with lived experience who may hold other forms of power within their community to advocate for change.

Chrislip also notes that these leaders need good information including a deep understanding of the community narrative, data and community assets. It is only when they are informed that they can create authentic visions and strategies for their community.

## COMMUNITY READINESS ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

### THE COMMUNITY TOOL BOX, UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

The University of Kansas has developed a comprehensive online resource called [the Community Tool Box](#). The Community Tool Box is a widely accessed tool for community-based groups and collaboratives to learn new skills by accessing tools and resources which help assess community needs, engage stakeholders, and build effective community change approaches.

A section of the Community Tool Box focuses on understanding and assessing community readiness. A critical component of community readiness is the awareness of the community about the issue and their willingness to engage.

The Community Tool Box defines community readiness as ‘the degree to which a community is ready to take action on an issue’. This focus on the issue is an important consideration in this framework. This definition of community readiness is issue specific which means that if the community has limited or lack of an awareness of the issue and its context, it will be challenging to move the community forward.

The Community Tool Box highlights six dimensions of community readiness. The site also provides a tool for evaluating and scoring readiness by community members along the six dimensions which are described as follows:

- **COMMUNITY EFFORTS:** To what extent are there existing efforts, programs, and policies that address the issue?
- **COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE OF THE EFFORTS:** To what extent do community members know about existing local efforts and their effectiveness? Are the efforts accessible to all segments of the community?
- **LEADERSHIP:** To what extent are appointed leaders and influential community members supportive of the issue?
- **COMMUNITY CLIMATE:** What is the prevailing attitude of the community toward the issue? Is it one of helplessness or one of responsibility and empowerment?
- **COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE ISSUE:** To what extent do community members

#### THE COMMUNITY TOOL BOX 8 STAGES OF COMMUNITY READINESS

1. No awareness
2. Denial/resistance
3. Vague awareness
4. Pre-planning
5. Initiation
6. Stabilization
7. Confirmation/expansion
8. High level of community ownership

know about the causes of the problem, consequences, and how it impacts your community?

- **RESOURCES RELATED TO THE ISSUE:** To what extent are local resources – people, time, money, space, etc. – available to support efforts?

Source: [The Community Tool Box](#)

Focusing on community readiness can contribute to the successful implementation of a community change strategy. Understanding the degree to which the community is aware of the problem, its engagement with the issue and the local community context can save time and resources in building a community change effort.

**WILDER COLLABORATION FACTORS INVENTORY**

Another useful tool for assessing collaborative efforts is the [Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory](#). The Collaborative Factors Inventory is built on an in-depth review of collaboration research and is a free online assessment tool for collaborative efforts to understand the factors which improve outcomes. There are 20 factors identified in the inventory.

The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory assessment can be implemented many times during the collaborative process. Individual members or the whole collaborative group can use the tool to rate itself before initiating the effort to determine initial collaborative readiness. Then, at regular intervals, members of the collaborative can use it to assess what is working well and what pain points might be developing.

**20 FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION – WILDER COLLABORATION FACTORS INVENTORY**

History of collaboration or cooperation in the community	Collaborative group seen as legitimate leader in community
Favourable political and social climate	Mutual respect, understanding and trust
Appropriate cross section of members	Members see collaboration is in their self-interest
Ability to compromise	Members share a stake in both process and outcome
Multiple layers of participation	Flexibility
Development of clear roles and policy guidelines	Adaptability
Appropriate pace of development	Open and frequent communications
Established informal relationships and communication links	Concrete, attainable goals and objectives
Shared vision	Unique purpose
Sufficient funds, staff, materials and time	Skilled leadership



## BUILDING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE – COLLABORATIVE READINESS

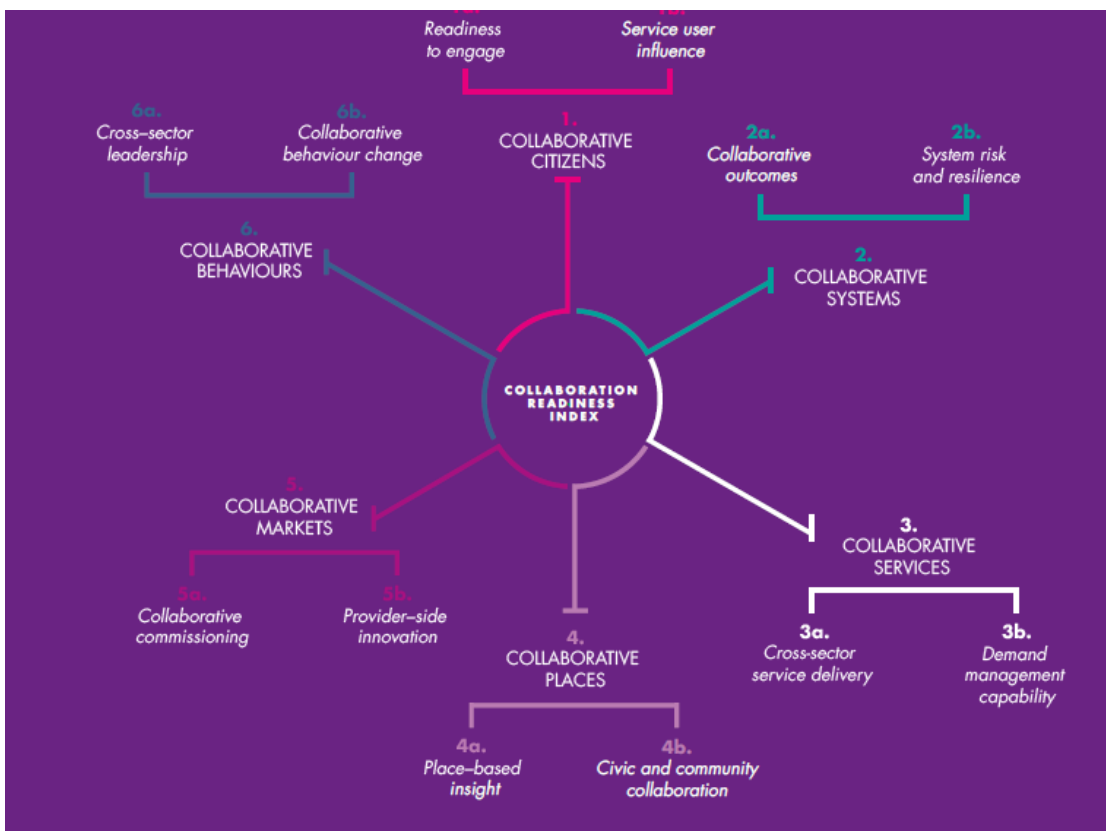
“There’s no collaboration without readiness...”

This is the simple introduction to a resource written by Dr. Henry Kippin and Sarah Bulliald of the UK’s Collaborate called [Collaboration Readiness – Why it Matters, How to build it and Where to Start](#). This resource looks at building collaborative readiness in a systems change context. While the context of the document is the health care system in the UK, there are some useful and relevant elements of this resource for building collaborative readiness.

There is no transformation without collaboration and no collaboration without readiness. Community change is about influencing and altering systems which are not working. Building collaborative readiness is about focusing on outcomes rather than provider needs; shifting the community narrative to focusing on human capital and building the practice of effective collaboration through shared outcomes and delivery readiness.

The Collaboration Readiness Index has six components with two indicators per component. The six components build the structure and are the conceptual framework. The authors of the Collaboration Readiness Index identify that those using the index need to be in tune with and adapt to their local context.

### COLLABORATION READINESS INDEX



The 12 indicators identified in the Collaboration Readiness Index are drawn from the work of existing collaborative efforts in the UK. This index is a useful lens into understanding how to move toward systems influence and systems change.

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT READINESS ASSESSMENT AND FEASIBILITY FRAMEWORK

For those considering systems change using a Collective Impact (CI) approach, the Collective Impact Forum has developed two resources that are helpful for unpacking readiness. The first is a [Collective Impact Readiness Assessment tool](#). The CI Readiness Assessment has three sections and it is intended that collaborative groups discuss each of the sections in sequence.

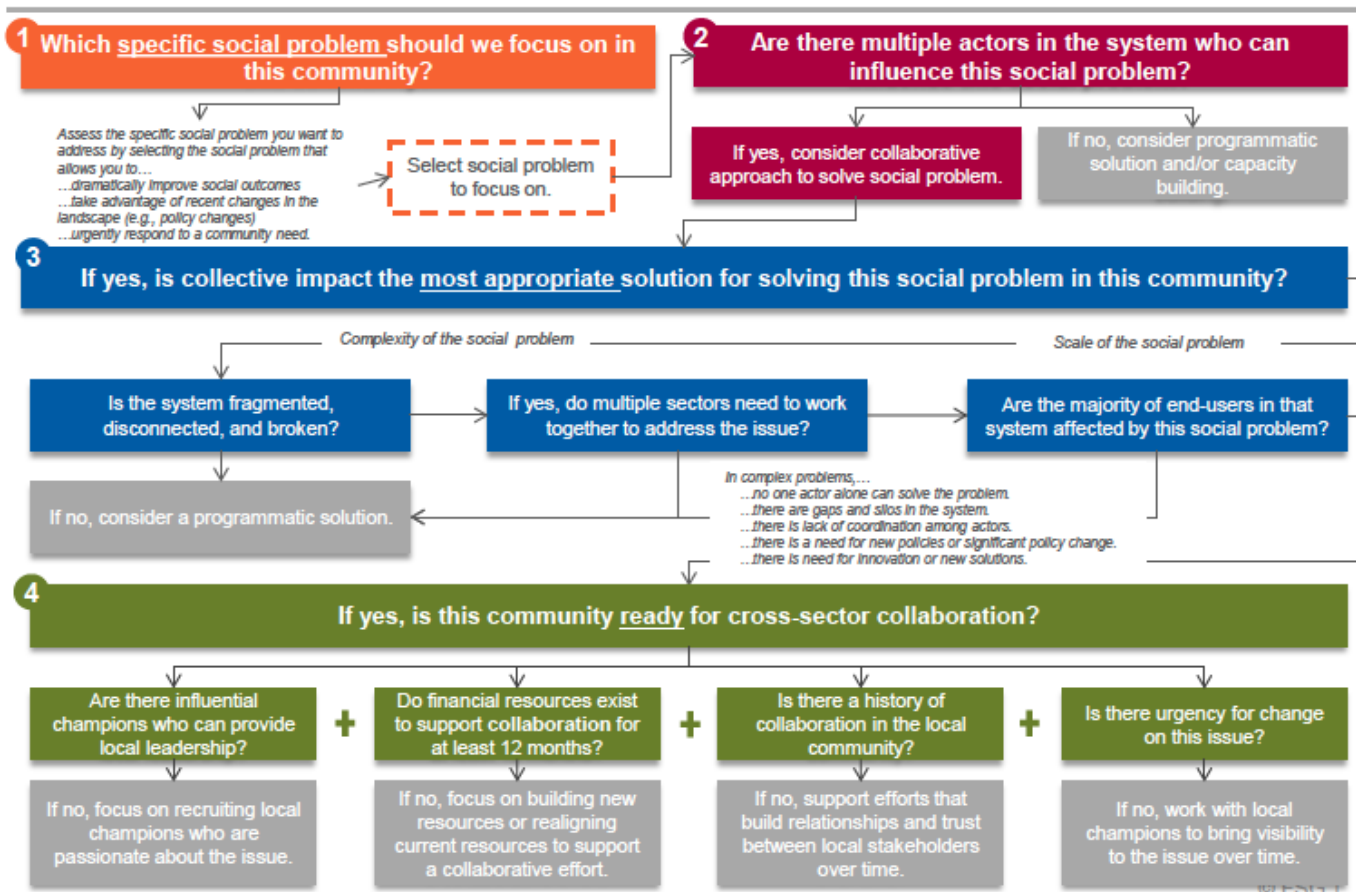
The first section asks groups to consider whether Collective Impact is the right approach for the community change effort. We have learned that Collective Impact efforts require time, process and resources to implement effectively. Collective impact is also a useful framework for complex issues requiring a system change lens. Determining appropriate fit is helpful.

The second section asks if the collaborative effort has considered the pre-conditions of Collective Impact including engaging influential champions; determining the urgency of the issue being addressed and obtaining adequate human and financial resources to drive the change forward. The pre-conditions set a firm framework upon which to build a Collective Impact effort.

The final section of the CI Readiness Assessment asks if the nuts and bolts for Collective Impact are already in place. This includes having a history and culture of collaboration in the community; engaging a neutral, respected convener to host the initial work; creating or engaging a backbone structure to move the collaborative effort forward; engaging cross-sector leaders and stakeholder commitment to using data to drive toward the shared outcomes identified in the common agenda.

The second resource is the Collective Impact Feasibility Framework which is on the following page. The Framework provides a flow chart approach incorporating the key questions and decision points required to move from idea to action. Collaborative tables considering a Collective Impact approach for their community issues should work through the feasibility framework. The CI Feasibility Framework will provide structure and a firm foundation to build upon.

# Collective Impact Feasibility Framework



## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Community readiness is something that few consider and yet it is integral to early design, building momentum, and ultimately strong execution. This paper brings together some of the key tools, approaches and frameworks to consider when building community readiness. There are many elements which overlap across the different approaches and frameworks. Collaborative leaders might want to consider which of the tools, approaches or frameworks is best suited to their local context and issue.

It is important to pay close attention to these three elements: people, process and local context. Community change and impact work is challenging. It moves us from considering our individual programs and services to focusing on a pathway to change community outcomes. Getting ready for this change is as important as the change itself.

All the tools, approaches and frameworks identify that investing in readiness will pay dividend when the collaboration is moving to execution.

## ABOUT LIZ WEAVER

Liz Weaver is the Co-CEO of Tamarack Institute where she is leading the Tamarack Learning Centre. The Tamarack Learning Centre has a focus on advancing community change efforts and does this by focusing on five strategic areas including collective impact, collaborative leadership, community engagement, community innovation and evaluating community impact. Liz is well-known for her thought leadership on collective impact and is the author of several popular and academic papers on the topic. She is a co-catalyst partner with the Collective Impact Forum and leads a collective impact capacity building strategy with the Ontario Trillium Foundation.



Liz is passionate about the power and potential of communities getting to impact on complex issues. Prior to her current role at Tamarack, Liz led the Vibrant Communities Canada team and assisted place-based collaborative tables develop their frameworks of change, and supported and guided their projects from idea to impact.

From 2006 – 2009, Liz was the Director for the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, which was recognized with the Canadian Urban Institute's David Crombie Leadership Award. In her career, Liz has held leadership positions with YWCA Hamilton, Volunteer Hamilton and Volunteer Canada. In 2002, Liz completed a Masters of Management, McGill University. Liz has been awarded Queen's Jubilee Medals in 2002 and 2012 for her contributions to volunteerism in Canada and in 2004 was awarded the Women in the Workplace award from the City of Hamilton.

## FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES

- Community Rhythms: The Five Stages of Community Life, The Harwood Institute - <https://www.livingcities.org/blog/737-community-rhythms-the-five-stages-of-community-life>
- Community Tool Box, University of Kansas - <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>
- Personal Asset Inventory Tool, Tamarack Institute - <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/personal-asset-inventory-tool>
- Case Study – United Way of Central Iowa's OpportUNITY Plan, Vibrant Communities, Tamarack Institute - <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/central-iowa-case-study>
- A Guide to Community Asset Mapping, Sustainable Communities - <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/A%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Asset%20Mapping%20Sustainable%20Communities.pdf>

- Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory, Amherst H Wilder Foundation - <https://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Research-Services/Pages/Wilder-Collaboration-Factors-Inventory.aspx>
- Collaboration Readiness: Why it Matters, How to Build it and Where to Start, Dr. Henry Kippen and Sarah Billiald, Collaborate – <http://wordpress.collaboratei.com/wp-content/uploads/Collaboration-Readiness-Digital.pdf>
- Collective Impact Readiness Assessment Tool, Collective Impact Forum - <http://collectiveimpactforum.org/readiness-assessment>
- Turf, Trust, and Co-Creation, Liz Weaver, Tamarack Institute - <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/turf-trust-co-creation-collective-impact>