



FIVE INTERCONNECTED PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

At the Tamarack Institute, we have been observing local change efforts across a spectrum of community issues and experiences since 2002. As communities drive towards improved population level outcomes, we have learned that changemakers need to build their skills in five interconnected practice areas to generate significant impact.



FIVE INTERCONNECTED PRACTICES

The five interconnected practices identified by Tamarack are: Collective Impact; Community Engagement; Collaborative Leadership; Community Innovation and Evaluating Impact. Building competency in any one of these practices individually is beneficial but building collective competency across the practices can lead to more deep and durable impact.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

How can we mobilize across sectors for systems change?

One of the biggest challenges facing community change leaders is to move beyond programs to consider how to also impact systems and policies to improve the well-being of citizens. In 2011, FSG Social Impact Consultants defined an approach to large-scale, system-wide community change called Collective Impact. The Collective Impact framework contains five conditions including: building a common agenda; employing a shared measurement approach to determine progress; leveraging mutually reinforcing activities; engaging in continuous communications to ensure that the collective network is informed and engaged; and, investing in a backbone infrastructure to provide support to move the community change effort forward.



Since the launch of the Collective Impact framework, thousands of community changemakers have been using this approach to tackle some of the most complex

challenges facing their cities. Tamarack collaborates with colleagues in Canada, the United States and internationally to intentionally build the field of practice in Collective Impact and collaborative community change efforts.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

How can we bring the community together to be part of the change?

Community Engagement is the process by which citizens are engaged to work and learn together on behalf of their communities to create and realize bold visions for the future. Community Engagement includes informing the community about your initiative, inviting their input, collaborating with them to generate solutions, and partnering with the community from the beginning to tackle community issues. When seeking to shift systems, we believe that Community Engagement is essential.



Community Engagement increases community cohesion and allows for the community to contribute to – and have ownership over – the outcomes that will ultimately impact them. It is about building relationships, building capacity, and having community-informed decision making. When done authentically, the voice of the context expert is elevated, the role of the community is clearly and collaboratively defined, the process is mutually beneficial, and the contributions from community members impact the outcomes.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

What approaches to leadership are required for community change?

The premise of Collaborative Leadership says: 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 and community.



Each component of the premise is important:

1. You must bring the appropriate people together – the collaboration must be broadly inclusive
2. You must bring people together in constructive ways – design the process so that it can deal with different understandings of the issues, varying degrees of trust, and so that the process encourages people to work together
3. Good information is critical to good decision-making – Involve experts in the process as informers, rather than drivers of the process

The traditional concept of leadership is that of the heroic leader – they have a vision, they assert it, they persuade us, and they gain followers. Collaborative Leadership turns that concept upside down simply by saying that if we bring good people together in constructive ways, we will be able

to make conscious, inclusive decisions. When collaboration works, it reproduces and builds the characteristics of civic community, allowing us to deal with future issues in constructive ways.

COMMUNITY INNOVATION

How can we create, test, and scale new approaches?

Community Innovation is: Change, for good, with and within a community. In other words, Community Innovation is a place-based, community-championed change with benefits that are meaningful to the community. As dynamic ‘living labs’, communities offer the perfect container for innovation.



Through our experience with community change, we have come to understand that to be effective, innovation requires an appreciation of both the issue one is hoping to address, as well as a deep understanding of the unique characteristics of the community – the place and the people within it – where the innovation will be implemented. Unlike other forms of Social Innovation, the work of driving Community Innovation allows us to draw upon all the assets of the community in the process. These assets are often seen as afterthoughts or as ‘nice-to-haves,’ but they are core to the work of Community Innovation.

EVALUATING IMPACT

How can we assess impact and apply what we have learned to our work?

Community change requires new approaches to how we are evaluating the impact of our work. For us to progress, we must monitor, document and share evidence of change. Evidence is an essential building block building a strong foundation for community change, as it can contribute to strengthening participation, commitment and capacity. Conventional evaluation approaches typically focus on discrete programs and services and are carried out by external evaluation professionals. Traditionally evaluation practices were narrowly concerned with “operational” and “return on investment” of their organization rather than the perspective of outcomes for the entire community. Neither is suitable on their own for the scale and complexity of community impact.



At Tamarack, we are experimenting with new ways of measuring change, exploring who is responsible for outcomes, developing methods that adapt to the pace of community change activities, creating alternative approaches for getting changemakers involved in the actual assessment process, and using the results to drive new thinking, better strategies and deeper impact.

Evaluating Impact can be challenging for community changemakers. It can require the sharing of information and it can also lead to making some tough decisions about focus. However, with the

right questions and the right set of evaluation principles, values and tools, communities can make impressive progress on the challenges they are facing.

BUILD YOUR CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

The work of community change is challenging and complex. It requires changemakers to build their individual and collective leadership capacities. Tamarack has approached community change by identifying the five interconnected practices and deepening our understanding of the contributions and synergies of each to be able to drive change forward at a pace that is both dynamic and agile. Building knowledge and skills in the practices of Collective Impact, Community Engagement, Collaborative Leadership, Community Innovation and Evaluating Impact are important steps forward for each and every changemaker.

Learn more and build your capacity for change at:

www.tamarackcommunity.ca