

# Developmental Evaluation – 2020 Report

## Mandate:

The mission of the Tamarack Institute is to “collaboratively create vibrant communities by engaging learning leaders. When we are effective in strengthening community capacity to engage citizens, lead collaboratively, deepen community and reduce poverty, our work will contribute to the building of a more equitable, prosperous, and peaceful society.”

In 2018, Tamarack received funding from Employment and Social Development Canada to increase our innovative role bringing together knowledge and practice and strengthening community capacity. As part of this funding, Tamarack engaged Mark Cabaj, a developmental evaluator, to support Learning Centre and Vibrant Communities staff in identifying evaluation questions and engaging in agile evaluation sprints to determine the scope and impact of our work.

## History:

In 2019, Tamarack teams were formed to engage in a series of evaluation sprints to determine the impact of the organization on our learners and members. In preparing for these evaluation sprints, primary and secondary users of the evaluation were identified as well as their key questions.

	QUESTIONS	USE
<b>Tamarack Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the results of our work?</li> <li>• Do they meet our expectations?</li> <li>• What are ways we can increase our impact and efficiency?</li> </ul>	To make ongoing improvements and adaptation of the organization’s design and mix of supports.
<b>Tamarack Board</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are we meeting our basic fiduciary responsibilities?</li> <li>• Are we fulfilling our mission?</li> <li>• What does the field of community building need?</li> </ul>	To provide input into strategy and organizational design.
<b>Funders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the organization delivering on what it promised in its proposal and funding agreement?</li> <li>• Is the investment worth the effort?</li> </ul>	To sustain, expand or discontinue their investment into the organization.

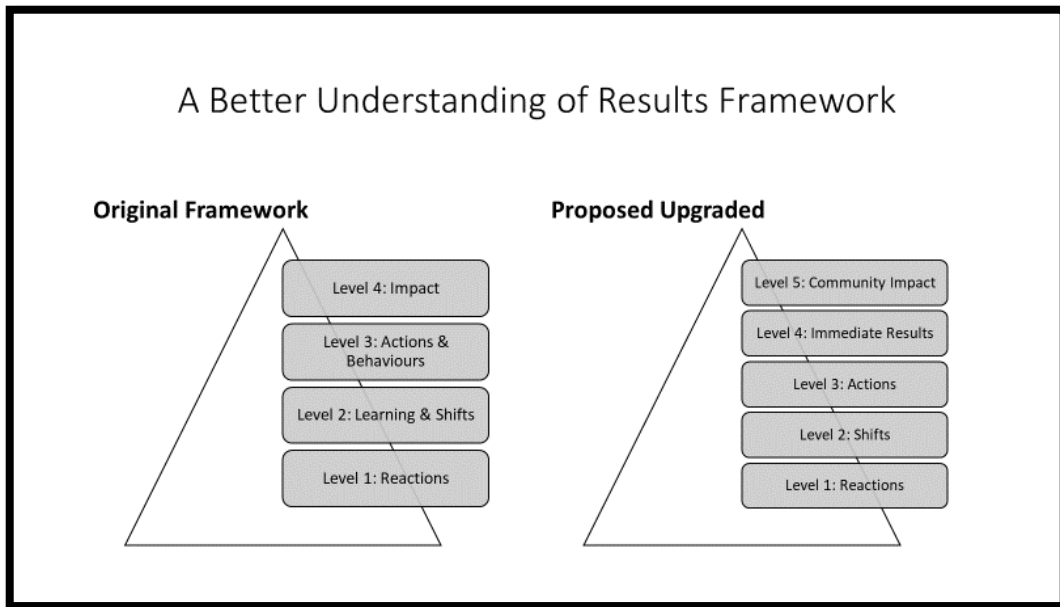
From these questions, A results framework was developed which looked at Tamarack impact from the perspective of reactions, shifts actions and impacts. The evaluation sprints were designed to probe these four levels of impact.

The Learning Centre engaged in four sprints in 2019. The first sprint was to identify user personas, generating a deeper understanding of the individuals who access Tamarack online and face to face resources. The second sprint was focused on learners considered to be hyper-users through a positive deviance lens. The third sprint focused on competitors and deepening our understanding about the distinct role and contributions of the Tamarack Learning Centre. The final sprint looked at the quarterly marketing results to gain a deeper perspective on the data we are reporting.

Vibrant Communities engaged in a sprint which developed the capacity of Cities Reducing Poverty members to better capture and articulate their community impact through the development of Impact Reports.

Together, we reviewed the evaluation sprint outcomes. In a sense making session, we observed that Tamarack has different levels of impact on our members and learners.

### Current State:



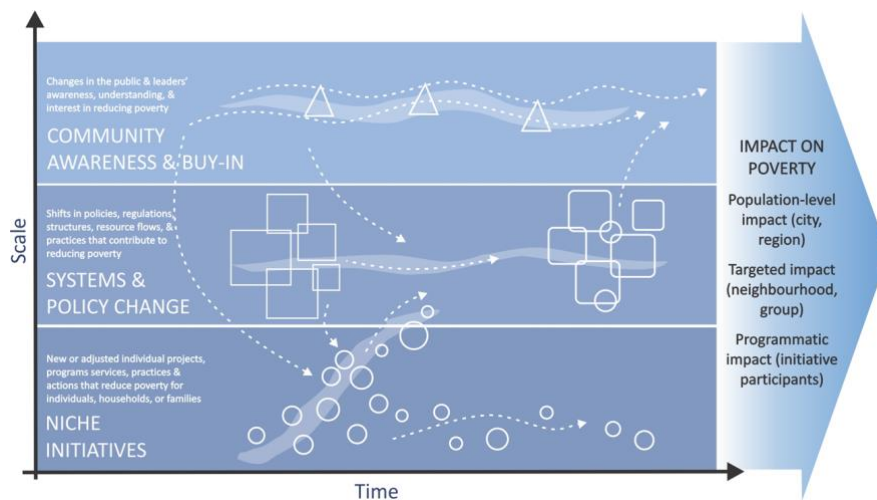
Collectively, we identified five levels of impact generated by Tamarack efforts. This starts with level one which are reactions by users to our work and leads all the way to generating a level five community impact. Learners were able to articulate outcomes at many of the levels and share how Tamarack programs, services and supports had helped them and their communities achieve these outcomes.

- Level 1: Includes creating increased focus, providing practical supports, providing variety and open access, building experience and skills, connecting learners to networks and validating their experiences and work
- Level 2: Includes learners expressing increased confidence, building broader networks and connections, having access to new ideas and approaches and implementing practical tools or building skills
- Level 3: Includes learners engaging in new actions and behaviours
- Level 4: Includes members being able to build bolder community visions, access increased funding and other resources, build social capital and trust, have a coordinated and faster response or address issues through new policies and regulations
- Level 5: Includes reduced poverty levels in communities, increased educational and other community outcomes, enhanced neighbourhood outcomes, etc

In addition, the Learning Centre developmental evaluation sprints revealed some interesting insights about Tamarack Learners.

- Positive Deviance Interviews – surfaced six ways that Tamarack LC adds value including an increased focus for the work; providing practical advice and resources; sharing experience and skills and providing validation for the work at the community level
- Client Archetypes – confirmed we have diverse members, one size does not fit all, and we need to adjust our work to fit their unique needs and journeys
- Competitor/Cooperator Analysis – tested a framework for understanding how we compete and cooperate with other intermediaries in our field

An outcomes framework was also developed for Cities Reducing Poverty members which identifies three levels of interventions and impact. These levels include community awareness and buy in; systems and policy change and the role of niche initiatives all leading to an impact on poverty. Vibrant Communities partners are currently developing impact reports to test this design.



The evaluation sprints were useful in probing the key relationships between Tamarack and its learning community members. In this first year of evaluation sprints, Tamarack was able to broaden and deepen its understanding of results and impact frameworks. As we move into year two, we will dive deeper into our understanding of how Tamarack resources, supports and coaching makes a difference for our learners.

### To Consider:

5 Risks facing Tamarack	5 Opportunities for Tamarack
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Lack of time to engage</b> in evaluation sprints, this is often done from the side of the desk and other priorities divert attention.</li> <li>2. <b>Lack of response from our learners</b> to engage in evaluation sprints, there will be more pressure on organizations post COVID.</li> <li>3. <b>Development of two different impact frameworks</b> for Tamarack learners which might lead to confusion.</li> <li>4. <b>Decreased interest</b> by the staff team in evaluation sprint methodology.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Weave in the results</b> from the external evaluation to see where there might be synergies between the evaluation sprints and the external evaluation.</li> <li>2. <b>Compare the frameworks</b>, the Impact framework with the Cities Reducing Poverty framework to determine synergies.</li> <li>3. <b>Deepen our understanding of our members</b> and their commitment to Tamarack and the impact that Tamarack makes on them.</li> </ol>

5 Risks facing Tamarack	5 Opportunities for Tamarack
5. <b>Lack of integration</b> of evaluation sprint results into current and future work at Tamarack.	4. <b>Evaluation sprints are a short-term opportunity</b> to probe different issues and relationships. 5. <b>Conduct an evaluation sprint</b> on the topic online learning.