TOOL | BUILDING A COLLABORATION IMPACT STORY

WRITTEN BY: LIZ WEAVER AND MIKE DES JARDINS

TOOL SUMMARY

10 KEY FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE COLLABORATION

7 STEPS TO DEVELOPING AND REFINING YOUR COLLABORATION IMPACT STORY

OUTCOMES

THIS TOOL WAS DESIGNED TO HELP COLLABORATIONS CONSIDER THE IMPACTS THEY ARE HAVING TO DRIVE PURPOSEFUL CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY.

OVERVIEW

In January 2023, Tamarack published [10: A Guide to Build a Sustainable and Resilient Collaboration](#). The Guide is a deep dive into the ten (10) factors which, when deployed effectively by collaboration tables, create the conditions for the longer-term viability of the work.

In the Guide, the ten (10) factors for sustainability are divided into four (4) core drivers of collaboration efforts. This resource is designed to help collaborations **build their Impact story** by showcasing the ten **sustainability factors** that make up the four core drivers.

SUSTAINABILITY DEFINED

Sustainability incorporates many factors, including leadership, funding, community engagement, and the ability to influence policy and systems that lead to program or a collective impact. Sustainability is effectively resourcing a collaboration (with people, processes, resource investments and focusing on impact) to have the power and capacity to continuously respond to identified community issues and create a lasting impact.

Resilience is the internal health and well-being of a collaboration (and its members) including the ability to adapt to emerging opportunities and to respond to unanticipated challenges.

The concepts of sustainability and resilience are tied together and impact one another. Successful and sustainable collaborations are ones in which every actor in a partnership has a role to play and ensures that the sustainability of their collaborative efforts is shared. This includes conveners, community members, backbone partners, and partners representing different sectors. All of these contribute to the collective outcome.

THE TEN SUSTAINABILITY FACTORS

People Factors	Resource Factors	Process Factors	Impact Factors
• Equity & inclusion embedded in design • Strong ties between partners • Broad community engagement	• Adequate human and financial resources • Partners contribute to shared outcomes	• Compelling case drives work • Ongoing reflection and learning	• Data and evidence inform approach • Progress and impact are tracked and reported • Influence policy and systems change

There are ten factors which contribute to building a sustainable collaboration. These factors include a focus on people, process, resources, and impact. While each factor can stand on its own, collectively, the factors create the baseline conditions for sustainability. They are also the conditions to create a powerful collaboration impact story. This tool is designed to help your collaboration consider its achievements and the impact that they are having to drive purposeful change in the community.

Learn more about each of these 10 sustainability factors in 10: A Guide to Build a Sustainable and Resilient Collaboration.

BUILDING A COLLABORATION IMPACT STORY

There are seven (7) steps in building and refining a collaboration impact story. We suggest that this story is built collectively with members of the collaboration. By co-creating the collaboration impact story, the team will be able to learn together and recognize their accomplishments. The co-creation process might also reveal anticipated and unanticipated outcomes. Collective efforts are designed to enable change, and this can happen at many levels. Inviting in the perspectives of the collaboration partners will likely reveal shifts and changes across the partners and the community.

Impact stories can be developed at all stages of a collaboration. While early-stage efforts may not have as many details to share, they can celebrate the early contributions of the partners and recognize that funding has been received. An early-stage collaboration impact story can also share with the community the proposed impact that working collectively will achieve. Later-stage collaboration impact stories will highlight successful achievements, changes, and impact. Collaboration impact stories can also be developed incrementally and over the lifespan of the collaboration to demonstrate growth and change. In this way, collaboration impact stories can be used as journey maps to document the history and core steps of the collaboration journey.

THE SEVEN STEPS TO DEVELOP A COLLABORATION IMPACT STORY

Step 1: Build the commitment to contributing to the collaboration impact story

It is useful to create commitment to the development of the collaboration impact story by all partners of the collaboration. This can be achieved by engaging the collaboration members early in the process. To effectively build commitment, consider the following starting list of questions. There may be additional questions that the collaboration partners identify as important to them.

- Why is a collaboration impact story needed?
- Who is the audience for the collaboration impact story?
- Whose voices need to be included in the telling of the collaboration impact story?
- Where and how might the collaboration impact story be used?

- What might we learn by writing a collaboration impact story?
- How do we recognize the contributions of the collaboration partners through the collaboration impact story?
- Other questions useful to this collaboration?

Step 2: Engage collaboration partners in identifying shifts which have taken place.

The second step in this process is to engage the collaboration partners in identifying the shifts that have taken place as a result of the contributions made by the partners over a period of time. For collaborations that have completed the Sustainability Self Assessment Tool, this step will be easier. The Sustainability Self Assessment Tool is an evaluation tool which invites collaboration partners to consider each of the ten sustainability factors in detail.

There are some collaborations which might not have the time to complete the Sustainability Self Assessment Tool and are pressured to develop their collaboration impact story. The following table will help collaboration partners to identify the shifts which have taken place.

There are some shifts that will directly involve collaboration partners. For example, in the people factor category, each of the partners has committed to the change effort. Describing this commitment is useful because it recognizes that impactful change requires the contributions of many diverse partners and voices.

Below and on the next page is an example of how this might be written.

Collaboration Factor	Questions to Consider	Collaboration partner Shifts	External Community Shifts
People Factors	▪Describe the types of partners engaged and the connections between partners ▪Describe how equity has been embedded in the design ▪Describe how the community has been engaged in the collaboration		

Collaboration Factor	Questions to Consider	Collaboration Partner Shifts	External Community Shifts
Process Factors	• Describe the theory of change or compelling case that drives the work of the collaboration. • Describe the data and/or research that is informing the work of the collaboration. • Describe the intended outcomes defined by the collaboration. • Describe what is being learned by the partners in the collaboration.		
Resource Factors	• Describe the contributions being made by collaboration members – convening the collaboration, volunteer hours, financial contributions, growth in # or diversity of collaboration membership etc. • Describe how the collaboration partners are contributing to the shared outcomes – sharing information, creating changes in their organizations, contributing funding, etc.		
Impact Factors	• Describe how progress and impact is being tracked. • Describe useful data or evidence (quantitative & qualitative) that is shifting and changing – for example, the number of individuals accessing services, changes in understanding re: the issue, growing community awareness and/or capacity, personal impact stories by individuals accessing services etc. • Describe any policies changes that have occurred as a result of the collaboration influencing change – for example adoption of new practices, changes in funding flows, changes in policy etc. • Describe any systems which might have been positively impacted – for example, a non-profit changing their internal practices or a government department becoming more open and transparent in-service delivery models		

Step 3: Create an opportunity for review and reflection

An important step in the process of creating a collaboration impact story is to build in time for review and reflection. Often, important insights and contributions are missed without building in a reflection step. We suggest that two sessions be organized. The first session is an opportunity for the collaboration partners to complete the table above. The second session, often held a few days or a month later, is an opportunity to invite further reflections by collaboration partners. Prior to the second meeting, share the table and results of the first meeting. Ask partners to identify any additional items that could be included. The goal of steps two and three is to generate as many ideas as possible. In writing the collaboration story, not all ideas will be needed but the generation of ideas might reveal patterns of impact for the collaboration to advance in future efforts.

Step 4: Write the Collaboration Impact Story

An ideal collaboration impact story highlights the key design and impact resulting from the collective work. A short (3 – 5 page) collaboration impact story will have the most impact. The following design might be used to frame the collaboration impact story. Collaboration impact stories can be powerful when they include examples and quotes from key partners engaged in the collaboration, individuals who have benefited from the outcomes of the collaboration or system actors who have changed their practices in meaningful ways.

The table on the following page can help you plan. Out your impact story.

Write the Collaboration Impact Story

Title	Develop an engaging title for the story.
Introduction	Highlight the reason for writing the collaboration impact story and provide an overview of the content of the story.
People	Describe who is involved and why they are involved in the collaboration, be sure to identify how individuals most impacted by the problem are engaged in the change effort.
Process	Describe how the theory of change was developed, the data and outcomes the collaboration will achieve.
Resources	Describe the human and financial resources that are being invested in the shared effort.

Impact	Describe the impact achieved to date – this might include leveraging resources, engaging the community, engaging individuals, achieving funding goals, influencing policy change, etc.
The Future	Highlight the hopes for the future of the collaboration and what it will take to achieve deep and durable change. Consider including a "call to action" inviting others to join and/or suggesting ways readers can contribute to the work going forward.
Recognition of Partners	At the end of the collaboration impact story, recognize and name all the partners and funding sources contributing to the success of the collaboration.

Step 5: Test the Collaboration Impact Story and revise as needed

Once the collaboration impact story has been written, it is useful to test the story with trusted partners. Testing the story with the collaboration partners is the first step and ask them to consider whether the story reflects their contributions and the achievements of the collaboration. It might also be useful to test the collaboration impact story with a few community allies. Testing the story with 3 – 5 community allies will provide a valuable community perspective about the potential impact of the collaboration.

Here are some questions which might be asked in the review process:

- Is the story the correct length?
- Did you learn something new or unexpected about the collaboration?
- Does the story create movement and motivation?
- What suggestions do you or others have to improve the collaboration impact story?

Once the story has been reviewed, use the feedback received to revise the collaboration impact story content.

Step 6: Share the Collaboration Impact Story with key partners and funders.

In this step, we encourage you to share the collaboration impact story with key partners and investors in the collaboration effort. This may include the senior staff and board members of partner organizations, local government, business, and funding partners. The collaboration may want to also share the collaboration impact story with local media or publish the story as an article in partner newsletters.

Sharing the collaboration impact story is an opportunity to create excitement about the work, to recognize the achievements of the collaboration and to continue building momentum.

As noted earlier, collaboration impact stories can occur at any stage of the collaboration and may be something the collaborative does at regular intervals. While early-stage efforts may not have as much content to share, they can celebrate the early contributions of the partners to the work. Later-stage collaboration impact stories should focus more on results and impact.

Step 7: Imagine the Future for the Collaboration

The final step in the collaboration impact story is to use the story to imagine the future for the collaboration. Many collaborations are focused solely on the immediate work and spend less time considering how to improve or change. The collaboration impact story process supports partners in reflecting on their accomplishments so far. Build an hour or two into this process and invite the collaboration partners to look forward. Here are some questions the collaboration partners might consider:

- What have we learned about working together by creating this collaboration impact story?
- What are our most successful achievements and impacts?
- Where did we miss the mark?
- How can we leverage our collaboration to achieve greater impact?
- When will we know that we have achieved all that we can, and we need to wrap up the collaboration?
- What is next for the community?
- What other questions should we ask ourselves?

ADDITIONAL IDEAS WHEN DESIGNING A COLLABORATION IMPACT STORY

This tool is designed for organizations and collaborations to produce a written collaboration impact story. But some of you might consider alternative forms of storytelling. The steps described in this process can be applied to visual storytelling modes as well. You can build PowerPoints, videos, and podcasts by following the seven steps described in this tool. Visual storytelling is powerful. We encourage you and your collaboration partners to consider the type of storytelling approach that is most suitable for your audience. We invite you to be creative.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There are many levels of impact achieved by collaborations that are often missed when reporting out results. 10: A Guide to Building a Sustainable and Resilient Collaboration illustrates the essential factors in building sustainability. These ten factors provide a useful reference for building the Collaboration Impact Story which looks beyond simple numerical results but also includes a focus on the people, process, and resources that are foundational to collective success and impact.

We hope this tool is useful to collaborations. Please share your collaboration impact story with us at Tamarack. We would love to hear from you!

Share your stories with us by tagging us on Linkedin or Facebook or send us an email at tamarack@tamarackcommunity.ca .