An Analysis of the Collective Impact Lens for Lane County's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan

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UNIVERSITY OF OREGON | **Institute for Policy Research and Engagement**

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About the UO – Lane County Policy Lab

The University of Oregon's School of Planning, Public Policy and Management and the government of Lane County started a partnership in 2018 to provide applied learning experiences for students, applied research settings for faculty and staff, and technical assistance to the Lane County government.

Land Acknowledgement

The University of Oregon is located on Kalapuya Ilihi, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Kalapuya people. Following treaties between 1851 and 1855, Kalapuya people were dispossessed of their indigenous homeland by the United States government and forcibly removed to the Coast Reservation in Western Oregon. Today, descendants are citizens of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians of Oregon, and continue to make important contributions in their communities, at UO, and across the land we now refer to as Oregon.

IPRE operations and projects take place at various locations in Oregon, and wishes to acknowledge and express our respect for the traditional homelands of all of the indigenous people of Oregon. This includes the Burns Paiute Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Coquille Indian Tribe, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, and the Klamath Tribes. We also express our respect for all other displaced Indigenous peoples who call Oregon home.

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Executive Summary

Lane County's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan puts forth three strategic lenses including Financial Stewardship, Equity, and Collective Impact. This report focuses on the implementation of the Collective Impact lens by exploring and presenting significant aspects of relevant literature, best practices for the use of collective impact, examples of collective impact projects, and specific recommendations to Lane County based on these findings.

Collective Impact is an innovative way to foster cross-sector collaboration to address the most complex societal problems using data and performance-based measures to track progress (Stachowiak, et al., 2018). The collaboration should include government entities, nonprofits, and for-profit organizations. It is implemented through five principles: having a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support (Kania and Kramer, 2013). In addition to establishing the five principles for a collective impact initiative, three pre-principles have been put forth as important considerations prior to establishing the initiative. They are influential leaders, sufficient financial resources, and an urgency for the issue. The support of these pre-requisites fosters the successful establishment of collective impact. In addition to better understanding the purpose and creation of collective impact, it is important to see the challenges and criticisms of the practice that have come out of the research. There are three challenges highlighted in the literature that hold particular relevance to Lane County. First, while collaboration is not a new concept, the collective impact framework needs to be mindfully applied with all of the principles intact in order to develop sustainable solutions to complex problems. The two other notable challenges are that the nonprofit sector faces significant barriers to entering collective impact efforts, mostly due to limited resources, and the necessary consideration as to whether collective impact is the appropriate approach to a given problem.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The research on collective impact has put forth a handful of best practice tips on the implementation and use of collective impact. Here are a few highlights:

- Strong backbone institutions are particularly important for securing and maintaining the engagement of nonprofits

- Organizations should enter the collaboration without any self-interested goals and an understanding that progress may take time to achieve

- Local context matters

The following are recommendations to Lane County regarding how best to implement their Collective Impact strategic lens based on the reported analysis of collective impact literature and selected case studies:

- Collaborate with "backbone institutions" to make collective impact more equitable

- Focus energy on collective impact efforts with complex community problems like homelessness or emergency preparedness

- Respect the experience and insights from other organizations as they may have more experience working with particular populations

- Continue to refine the shared goals and shared measurements of collective impact and decide these with relevant stakeholders

- Continuous communication must transcend the "backbone" organization, keeping the entire community informed on collaborative projects

Introduction

The practice of Collective Impactis described as an innovative way to foster cross-sector collaboration in order to address complex societal problems using data and performance-based measures to track progress (Stachowiak, et al., 2018). The goal of the initiative is to create systems-level change, incorporating collaborators from across sectors, including government, for-profits, and nonprofits, to come together and build solutions to identified problems. The general framework of collective impact rests on five principles: common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support (Stachowiak et al., 2018). These five principles form the foundation for an efficient collective impact initiative; without them, trust and shared power among collaborators can easily be compromised. The five principles of collective impact should be relatively familiar at this point. In order to implement and develop this collaboration, however, it is necessary to have an understanding of what types of projects are well-suited for cross-sector collaboration, some of the challenges and criticisms of the practice, and which practices best foster success in the face of these challenges. The following report will present this context for collective impact implementation and real-life examples of collective impact projects. Based on this information, we will provide Lane County with recommendations for their own collective impact implementation and practice.

Literature Review and Best Practice

Before addressing some of the challenges of collective impact, it is helpful to establish what some collective impact research has deemed "pre-principles." These pre-principles are necessary prerequisites to the full implementation of the five principles of collective impact. The pre-principles include influential leaders, sufficient financial resources, and an urgency for the issue (Weaver, 2014). The pre-principles help to ensure that all the organizations involved can enter the collaborative effort with equal footing and matching enthusiasm. This is significant as the collective impact process can be long and strenuous while observable changes are often lagging. Without skillful leaders, necessary resources, and enthusiasm from collaborators, the collective impact framework may fail before the project has even begun.

Challenges of Collective Impact

As with any new process or initiative, there are challenges to consider. The criticisms of collective impact inhibit its success and create barriers to cross-sector collaboration. The process requires thoughtful consideration to ensure that organizations do not fall into bad practice.

One of the first challenges of collective impact is the perception that it really is not that different from "collaboration" efforts made across sectors in the past. The literature presents this challenge in a couple ways.. First, collective impact is criticized for being too

"top-down." While upper level management and CEOs can be helpful resources, both financially and in their realm of expertise, it is easy to dismiss the voices of institutions with less historical legitimacy, namely nonprofits, and the specific needs of the community being served (Wolff, 2016). In this way, it promotes efficiency and strategy over the relationships and inclusion of all collaborators (Kania, Hanleybrown, Splansky Junter, 2014). Second, the priorities of a "top-down" approach tend to minimize the concerns of community partners, resulting in the root causes of a problem to be easily overlooked (Wolff, 2016). In this sense the collaboration efforts appear to be more for show than with tangible outcomes in mind leaving systems unchallenged and society unchanged. Thoughtfully implementing the five principles of collective impact and ensuring the three pre-conditions are met, are significant to change the direction, and success rate, of previous collaboration efforts.

Another significant challenge that seems to be particularly relevant is that the structure and perception of nonprofits innately makes it difficult for them to acquire a meaningful role in collective impact initiatives. For starters, collective impact work requires significant resources. Either the nonprofit does not have sufficient funds to invest in the collective impact work, or sufficient personnel to focus solely on the collaborative project (Cooper, 2017). In addition to simply not having enough funds, nonprofits typically have many projects relying on short-term grants for funding; this is incongruent to the long-term work and goals associated with collective impact (Weaver, 2014).

The lack of access to significant and accurate data in the nonprofit sector is another complication, specifically in regard to establishing shared measurement across sectors. Unlike the public sector, access to meaningful and complete data for nonprofits is hard to achieve (Cooper, 2017). This discrepancy across sectors should be strongly considered when making a decision on measurement scales for the collective.

A final barrier many nonprofits face in this type of collaboration is an unequal power delegation. Nonprofits are commonly dismissed as illegitimate when government agencies or private sector collaborators are at the table, perhaps due to their asymmetrically low contribution of resources to the initiative (Cooper, 2017). In these instances, the collective impact work is derailed, and the nonprofit has no voice in the effort. The role of nonprofits in collective impact is significant and recognizing the barriers they face in entering the collaboration is necessary to encourage and support their efforts.

One final thought in the criticisms of collective impact is that it is genuinely not the best solution for everything. It takes extensive time and resources to foster the success of collective impact. In that sense, it should be reserved for the most complex and deeply rooted issues of the community (Weaver, 2014). Being intentional and thoughtful in the projects that most need the work of collective impact will be a better use of the necessary resources for successful collective impact projects.

Review of "Best Practice" Literature

The research on collective impact has some recommendations for specific aspects to focus on when implementing a collective impact project. The first is the consideration of the backbone institution principle of collective impact. It is vital to have a strong

backbone institution, which helps to mitigate some of the challenges previously described. The backbone institution should be a collective of leaders from various sectors with deep investment and understanding of the issue at hand (Weaver, 2014). Early on, the institutional framework of the backbone should be agreed upon by all members expected to take part in the collective impact action (Weaver, 2014). It should be a collective of players from across sectors. This is particularly important to ensure the nonprofits in the collaborative are supported, heard, and have the resources they need to be a part of the backbone. The literature presents a few other important mentalities that organizations should have when entering into collective impact. The first is that any self-interested goals need to be eliminated (Weaver, 2014). The collective impact structure will not work if organizations are coming to the table with their own goals in mind -- it entirely contradicts the notion of having a shared common goal that is one of the five principles. Second, much of the negotiation should take place early on in the process, and communication needs to occur regularly (Weaver, 2014). Early negotiation and clear communication of the goals and roles of those in the collaboration help establish the strong backbone and make intentions of the work very clear from the beginning. Finally, recognizing that an effective collective impact could take years to build. The progress can be measured in short, regular evaluation, but the overall goal and effective collaboration may not fully take fruition for years (Weaver, 2014). Going into the collaborative effort, all parties should acknowledge it is not a short-term process and commit to taking the time necessary to build relationships among the organizations. When considering implementation, it is necessary to recognize that local context really informs the implementation. Having a good understanding of the community and their needs, the actors involved in the issue, and those most affected is significant in using collective impact to effectively fulfill the needs of the community (Kania and Kramer, 2013). Although the literature is grounded in the necessary execution of the five principles of collective impact, it is important to note that there is no such thing as a true panacea. Altering implementation and execution of collective impact initiatives, while utilizing the five principles as the core, will support the objective of collective impact and reap the greatest outcomes for the community.

Case Studies

Emergency Management in Florida

As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts the stability of everyday operations across our entire community, the strategic lens of collective impact has taken on a new and urgent dimension. With the notion that one should "never waste a crisis," the lens of collective impact and cross-sector collaboration in the realm of emergency management will now be explored. Research conducted in Florida examining the extensiveness and perceived quality of cross-sector collaborative relationships is particularly relevant (MacManus and Caruson, 2011). MacManus and Caruson surveyed county and city officials and found that county officials were more likely to report higher quality and more extensive collaborative relationships with both government partners (cities, counties, state, and federal) and private entities including local nonprofits and businesses (2011). Since county governments encompass broad communities, they are already in the best

position to utilize their networks with nonprofits and businesses to maximize their community impact. The authors argue that since local officials tended to have the same number of emergency management partnerships at the time of the study, that perhaps strategic collaboration has been elevated since Hurricane Katrina deeply impacted Florida's community (2011). Following this logic, the COVID-19 emergency presents an excellent opportunity to strengthen Lane County's collective impact lens, as collaborations have never been more important than for this complex and multifaceted pandemic.

Service Delivery in Philadelphia

Another case study that is particularly relevant analyzed collective impact regarding service delivery to Philadelphia residents with limited English proficiency (Wilson 2012). In this community, nonprofits and local government agencies rely on each other in a cohesive network, and the government relies on nonprofits to build trust and rapport in immigrant communities. The nonprofits thrive because the government provides financial support and a welcoming political attitude towards immigrants (Wilson 2012). Nonprofits in the area help to garner political support and a backbone structure for collective impact by developing coalitions like the "Grassroots Business Development Task Force" (Wilson 2012). The local government agencies and nonprofits did an excellent job of consolidating goals, and developing shared measurements of these goals, as well as both sectors hiring bi and multilingual staff members to meet the needs of limited English proficiency residents (Wilson 2012). Another key takeaway from Philadelphia was that both sectors stressed the importance of immigrant integration and language accessibility as a public good that needed a "fully formed community engagement approach" (Wilson 2012). This case study is particularly relevant to Lane County's strategic initiative 2c, to "Enhance equity and access in service delivery and representation in governance" (Lane County, 2019).

East Bay Economic Development Alliance

The East Bay Economic Development Alliance (East Bay EDA) is a large-scale collaborative effort between the public, private, and non-profit sectors of San Francisco Bay's eastern bloc. Founded in 1990, the East Bay EDA was put together out of the foresight that for the region to reach its true economic potential, there would have to be a lot of coordination among the relevant stakeholders throughout the communities. This is a common story, but not one that typically achieves the success seen by the East Bay EDA. The East Bay EDA is comprised of 155 separate entities, with the public sector accounting for 65 entities, and the private and non-profit sector accounting for 45 apiece. This shows a fairly even proportion of representation amongst the three sectors, which is a common baseline goal for collaborative organizations such as this one. The organization has been able to take a comprehensive and well-researched approach to regional economic development, creating five different committees to bring certain facets of economic development into greater focus. The aforementioned committees are as follows: Business and Employer Resources, Economic Development Directors' Council, International Trade and Investment, Land Use and Infrastructure, and Marketing and Public Relations. The organization also produces annual economic outlook reports, dissecting the region's economic performance in the previous year, as well as what

should be expected in the upcoming year. This consists of summarized economic data and trend analysis of labor force patterns, capital investment, taxes, foreign trade, etc., as well as a brief overview of national fiscal policy, with a specific focus on interest rates and currency inflation. This is a perfect embodiment of Key Strategic Initiative 2a of Lane County's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan: Invest in a resilient, diverse, and sustainable regional economy (Lane County, 2019). If Lane County is truly interested in building a powerful and integrated regional economy, the East Bay EDA may serve as a larger scale blueprint for their ambitions.

Tillamook County Housing Commission

In January 2019, Tillamook County held the inaugural meeting for the county's Housing Commission. Ravaged by a vast undersupply of housing stock, Tillamook County put this commission together to unite the community's different stakeholders and attempt to take a consolidated approach towards the county's housing solutions. This commission holds solely advisory powers and serves as a point of communication between the community itself and the Board of Commissioners. The commission is comprised of 13 voting seats, and one non-voting seat for a county liaison, currently represented by County Commissioner Bill Baertlein. Among those 13 seats are representatives from all sectors, including small and large employers, and public representatives from north, south, and central county. As with the East Bay EDA, the Tillamook County Housing Commission (TCHC) has made a direct effort to mirror the community in terms of representation, though it certainly concedes there is more work to be done in that regard. In 2019, the county hosted a Housing Summit, which invited all relevant stakeholders to discuss the county's housing situation. This one-off summit was meant to transcend the size and capability of the TCHC, allowing for a much larger range of discussion, though in a limited timeslot. From this summit arose several different priorities, as well as policy proposals. One highlighted solution was a framework for housing development tax exemptions. The TCHC has not gone without its criticisms, however. In an interview, Tillamook Area Chamber of Commerce's Executive Director, Justin Aufdermauer, voiced frustration in the commission's inability to communicate its work to the rest of the community. The county's Community Development Director, Sarah Absher, also stated the county could do a better job of sharing its work with the community. All in all, this is a good pilot version of collective impact in unison with Key Strategic Initiative 2a of Lane County's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan: Increase housing options for residents to reduce the incidence of homelessness and increase affordability (Lane County, 2019).

Occupy Medical

To gather relevant information on emergency management during the pandemic from the nonprofit side of collective impact, Sue Sierralupe, the Director of Occupy Medical was interviewed. Occupy Medical has been volunteer-run since its inception in 2011 and was funded as a direct response to the pandemic, as it exists to support the unhoused populations in the Lane County area. Some themes emerged from the conversation, including the fact that collaboration is occurring where it has not before; Sue is in close contact with folks at Lane County, and they seem to have routine visits and conversations. But, some aspects of collective impact are lacking in this relationship;

there is no backbone organization to integrate communications. Some of the other tenets of collective impact were observed to be occurring successfully. Lane County and Occupy did seem to have united goals (improving public health), and they did meet frequently to share the measurements of these goals (number of patients cared for).

Recommendations

Our recommendation is for Lane County to strengthen its relationships with coalitions that are solving complex problems that are suited for collective impact, such as emergency preparedness and housing. It would also be prudent to respect the autonomy and experience of nonprofits and private businesses, as well as hearing them out when their processes are slightly different than the county's. This was something that emerged from speaking with Sue at Occupy Medical and is fairly consistent throughout the collective impact literature. We also highly recommend the constant communication principal of collective impact transcend the meeting room, meaning any collaborative organization must convey its work to the community. This is a problem that Tillamook County has encountered during its short-lived TCHC, and one that can be easily solved with the capacity Lane County has. This allows for truer community engagement, creating a relationship between the county and its constituents that is much closer to direct, rather than representative, democracy.

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