The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations gratefully recognizes the contributions of individuals in Edmonton's nonprofit community who participated in discussions about

Accelerating Impact

ECVO has compiled highlights from these discussions into a series of five resources.

Common Agenda

All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

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Introduction

This resource is the result of a community conversation about the first condition of Collective Impact, Common Agenda. Members of the Edmonton nonprofit community participated in this conversation in December 2013. Four additional conversations, one for each of the remaining four conditions of Collective Impact will take place during 2014.

- Exploring Shared Measurement
- Mutually Reinforcing Activities
- Continuous Communications
- Backbone Organizations

The conversations explore a local Edmonton case study followed discussion questions. The responses to these questions are summarized in this resource.

" In your experience, what triggers bring individuals and organizations together to address a common issue? "

At a very basic level, participants agreed that a natural disaster or other event that put a community at risk would draw individuals and organizations together around a common agenda.

New funding or threats to funding were pinpointed as another trigger to bring groups together for joint effort.

Changes to community and client demographics, identified gaps in services and increased awareness of issues due to media reports or the release of new information were other factors

participants associated with triggers leading to the development of collaboratives.

Participants identified frustration with the status quo and the recognition that outdated models are no longer working as providing fertile ground for engaging as a collective.

Further Reading

Innovation, Austerity's Grandchild
Article by Tim Broadhead

Collective Impact: Embracing Emergence
Webinar by fsg Social Impact Consultants

" What strategies will help groups develop a common understanding of a problem? "

- ✓ Gather information using best research practices.
- ✓ Use common language.
- ✓ Apply common measurement tools.
- ✓ Identify and invite stakeholders.
- ✓ Involve community leaders.
- ✓ Engage a backbone support agency.
- ✓ Establish and maintain a paper trail.
- ✓ Ensure a balance of power.

- ✓ Build personal relationships within the group.
- ✓ Encourage stories.
- ✓ Allow time for reflection.
- ✓ Engage all members through workshops, breakout discussions, focus groups and consultation.
- ✓ Employ public awareness campaigns.
- ✓ Maintain momentum.

Further Reading
Getting to We Series

Tools for Collaboratives
The Centre for Nonprofit Excellence

" What are the repercussions when a group fails to successfully develop and maintain a common agenda? "

Individuals often no longer see the value of investing time, energy and resources when the common agenda is unclear. Roles blur and individuals may become negative or feel hopeless.

The collaborative usually ceases to be solution focused. Tension and conflict builds. Territoriality emerges particularly in regards to resources. Chaos happens and people leave the collaboration.
The issue or problem that brought the collaborative together goes unresolved and the desired outcomes are not achieved.

Further Reading

When Collaborations Go Bad
Florence Green, IdeaEncore Network

Assessing your Collaboration – A Self-Evaluation Tool

Extended Collaboration

Further reading

[Tool for Defining Shared Values](#)

[The Art of Collaborative Leadership: Building Networks of Interconnected Leaders: Audio Lecture](#)

[Guidebook: Partnerships: Frameworks for Working Together](#)

"What strategies do groups use to maintain a common understanding of a problem and a joint approach to problem solving?"

Groups that collaborate over a long period of time have to feed (literally) and sustain positive group dynamics and momentum. When discussing this question participants identified specific tools and strategies.

- Good documentation
- Grounding tools (MOUs/ Principles)
- Goals that people see themselves in
- Clear priorities
- Common language, definitions and processes
- Orientation for new members
- Exit strategy for departing members
- Succession plan
- Evaluate progress

Maintaining group buy-in was seen by many as an important factor in keeping everyone engaged.

- Stay focused on the greater good and the big picture
- Approach tasks in manageable bites – it's hard to see and do everything at once
- Share leadership e.g. share hosting and meeting chair responsibilities
- Bring in expertise when it's needed
- Have the difficult conversations
- Acknowledge successes and capture the stories
- Encourage and support honesty.

Challenges of long time participation

Collaborations can suffer from fatigue when they continue over a long period of time. Other challenges include:

- Loss of interest
- Turnover of participants
- Changes in the capacity of the group
- Funding changes
- Competing organizational agendas

Strategies for maintaining a common agenda

It's not always easy to keep the collaborative on track, but the following strategies may help:

- Include honorariums for participants
- Recognize short term outcomes
- Use a consensus model
- Strong facilitator who can handle tension
- Build a project charter
- Maintain focus on end goals
- Share common understandings
- Maintain trust by having a transparent agenda
- Accept that sometimes collaborations need to end
- Celebrate success and move on.

"How do groups maintain a common agenda during member turnover?"

Turnover of group members is inevitable when a collaborative works together over a long period of time. To safeguard the common agenda, groups should be attentive to:

- Maintaining good documentation
- Building and deploying a succession plan
- Drawing visual roadmaps
- Maintaining strong leadership
- Maximizing the contributions/skills/ personalities within the group

Individuals will bring a variety of experiences and skill sets to a collaborative. Some of the skills needed to effectively contribute to maintaining a common agenda were identified as:

- Strong communication skills
- Respect for diversity
- Facilitation skills
- Mediation skills
- A sense of curiosity
- Flexibility
- Willingness to learn

Learn More!

Book Reviews

[The Power of Collective Wisdom and the Trap of Collective Falling](#), John Ott

[Getting to Maybe](#), Michael Patton, Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman ([Podcast](#))

[Good to Great](#), Jim Collins,

[Community Conversations](#), Paul Born

[Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening and Creating New Realities](#)
Adam Kahane

[Power and Love](#), Adam Kahane

Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future, Adam Kahane
[Review # 1](#)
[Review # 2](#)

" Are there group norms, or individual skill sets that you believe better enable a group to develop and maintain a common agenda? **"**

Group norms that positively contribute to maintaining a common agenda include:

- Agreement to balance the need to represent your own agency while contributing to the larger picture
- Agreement to follow established operating guidelines

- Agreement to trust and respect
- Set guidelines that ensure a balance of power
- Set expectations regarding food – and sharing a sense of community

Further Reading: [The Ideal Collaborative Team](#)

" Do you use or know of tools or resources that will help groups to develop and maintain a common agenda? **"**

Resources

[Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations ECVO](#)

[Imagine Canada](#)

[Tamarack](#)

[Muttart Foundation](#)

[Charity Village](#)

[Leading Boldly Network](#)
Calgary United Way

[Theory U – Presencing Institute](#)

[Collaboration: What are the Real Factors for Success?](#)

[ARPA Toolkit for Community Leaders](#)

Resource Wish List

- A database of exceptional facilitators in the area of collective impact.
- Affordable facilitators
- Shared Learnings to help build capacity

" Closing Thoughts **"**

Sometimes collective impact is the most useful choice for stakeholders and sometimes it is better for stakeholders to go it alone.
Collective impact is best for complex issues e.g. long-term response or disaster recovery.
Going it alone through traditional channels is best for short-term needs or when something needs to be done quickly e.g. immediate response to disaster.

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