

Building A Collective Impact Initiative in Chaffee County: What Community Members Had to Say

Complex social issues require coordinated solutions, and collective impact is one powerful way to organize communities to implement upstream prevention efforts and achieve social change. Collective impact initiatives can advance equity for historically marginalized groups and create an environment where all individuals thrive. Building a collective impact initiative requires a sense of urgency for change, adequate financial resources, and influential champions to further the work. The following five conditions and equity practices are present in collective impact initiatives:

Common Agenda	Shared Measurement System	Mutually Reinforcing Activities	Open & Continuous Communication	Strong Backbone Organization
This means coming together to collectively define the problem and create a shared vision to solve it	This means tracking progress in the same way, allowing for continuous learning and accountability	This means integrating the participants' many different activities to maximize the end result	This means building trust and strengthening relationships	This means having a team dedicated to aligning and coordinating the work of the group

22 community members from three communities in Colorado participated in interviews in early 2023 and shared their perspectives about building collective impact initiatives in their communities. The Community Organizing for Prevention Evaluation team is grateful to the community members who participated in interviews and shared their candid experiences about power in their community. Most people were currently or previously involved in Community Organizing for Prevention (COFP) efforts, and some were familiar with COFP but not actively involved. These individuals represent different ages, racial/ethnic groups, sectors, and identity backgrounds and spoke from their perspectives. Taken together, these people told a broader story about building collective impact initiatives in three communities in Colorado.



Across all three communities, we heard similar themes:

- Official organizations or organized groups are seen as the leaders of collective impact efforts. Local Communities That Care coalitions are an example of one organized effort that is seen to be leading collective impact initiatives in local communities.
- Having a point person or staff member who is responsible for organizing collective impact efforts is imperative to the sustainability and success of the initiative.
- Appropriate resources are needed for various organizations and community groups to be able to align their processes and goals in a way that successfully supports the collective impact initiative. This includes financial resources, adequate time put towards the initiative, as well as staff and volunteers who can organize the initiative.



Here is what community members said specifically about Chaffee County:



Chaffee County community members described their community as a small, rural mountain town that is rapidly changing to meet the demands of the population's ebb and flow including an increase in permanent residents as well as part-time residents and tourists. Each person spoke to how special and tight knit the community is, and how they feel fortunate to reside in Chaffee County.



Building a Collective Impact Initiative in Chaffee County

- **Relationships in Collaboration.** Collaboration comes from relationships and partnerships that exist in the community. Part of this is rooted in the fact that the community is small, and people have pre-existing relationships with one another that cross over personal and professional lives.
- **Partnerships Lead to Success.** As it is a smaller town, many organizations and community groups naturally work together to support each other's goals. These relationships and partnerships are crucial to the success of collaborative initiatives in the community.
- **The Role of Privilege.** Privilege exists within collaborative efforts. This privilege can come from sharing identities that are seen as mainstream or can be rooted in pre-existing relationships. This privilege can carry with it the power to influence the decision-making process around issues that impact the broader community.
- **Spaces for Participation Builds Equity.** More diversity of community voices is heard when there are spaces that are created for community members and partners to participate in.
- **Using Both Formal and Informal Communication.** Formal (i.e., organizational emails, newsletters, agency announcements, Zoom meetings, public service announcements, etc.) and informal methods of communication (i.e. social media posts, informal conversations at community events, text blasts, etc.) are key to successful collaboration.
- **Dedicated Staff.** Paid staff that work across multiple organizations or initiatives is helpful to ensuring that community efforts are aligned and helps to prevent duplication of services.



Challenges in Building Collective Impact in Chaffee County

- **Wearing Multiple Hats.** Smaller communities are often overtaxed because they have fewer people to do the work and the same people participate in everything, which makes it harder to incorporate new ideas or avoid burnout. Having fewer people doing the work means that there are fewer diverse perspectives and experiences being considered in decisions that impact the community. This can lead to a lack of buy-in from the community and result in decisions that might lack important information that is crucial for the initiative's sustainability and success.
- **Not Enough to Go Around.** There is a scarcity mindset when it comes to resources. Smaller, rural communities have a harder time accessing larger funding streams, but still have most of the same demands as larger communities do when it comes to paying staff to do the work. Organizations and community groups tend to hold on tightly to their funding and don't always consider ways in which they could share resources across organizations or initiatives to reach shared goals.
- **Differing Focuses.** People talked about how sometimes there are barriers to creating a common agenda when different groups are involved. These groups can have different agendas, different passion levels, or different limitations on what to focus on.
- **Limited Data.** Smaller communities have a harder time accessing data that is useful or significant. Part of this is due to issues around confidentiality (the less people there are answering a survey, the easier it can be to identify who has responded to that survey). This can present barriers when attempting to use data to guide a decision-making process.



The Future of Collective Impact in Chaffee County

- **More Connection for All.** Community members in Chaffee County imagine a community where both ends of the county come together, seeing value in the strengths and opportunities across the county and using that to benefit all members of the community. This would include all members of the community, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, racial and/or ethnic background, religion, economic status, or position of power.
- **Getting Creative and Accepting Change.** As times change, the population in Chaffee County continues to grow. There would be more acceptance around this dynamic that would lead to more creative solutions and ways of doing collaborative work across the county that would benefit all members of the community.