

Building A Collective Impact Initiative in Cheyenne 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's what Cheyenne County residents had to say:



Cheyenne County community members described their community as having a small-town feel, where community members are part of one big family. For newer residents in this community, it can take some time to feel like an integrated member of the community, but if you're connected to someone who has resided there for some time, you're more likely to feel accepted into the community.



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- **Wearing Multiple Hats.** As a smaller town, many of the same people sit on various boards and attend the handful of collaborative meetings in the community. This benefits the work in the community, as these people are kept aware of what is going on and can connect the work being done across the community. The communication that occurs in these meetings cuts down on the need for additional meetings, which people often do not have the time for.
- **Benefits of Having an Organizer.** Those who are seen as organizers of collaborative efforts bring many benefits to the work. Organizers take charge in helping the community to identify needs, listen to what the community wants, identify resources available to support community efforts, bring people together, and bridge efforts across the community. There is a lot of appreciation for people who fill organizer roles.
- **Ease of Communication.** Given the small and well-connected community, it is easy to communicate with community members. Information often travels informally, for example by word-of-mouth, text message, and via phone calls. Other methods that have helped create awareness around collaborative efforts are social media postings, mass email distribution, and various organization's newsletters.
- **The Importance of Taking Time.** Those involved in leading collaborative efforts make sure to allow ample time to talk through important matters, work through decision-making processes, develop shared goals, and create appropriate work plans.



Challenges in Building Collective Impact in Cheyenne County

- **Limited Resources.** Resources to support collaborative efforts in the community are limited. While people who wear multiple hats can streamline communication across efforts, these individuals are stretched too thin. There is also a lack of funding to pay volunteers who are committed to community collaboration. Not having enough funding also limits the ability to effectively raise awareness around important community issues.
- **Interpersonal Conflict.** Collaboration can be challenged by interpersonal conflict, like when people hold grudges. Community members sometimes have a hard time working through conflict with other members of the community.
- **Minds Are Set.** Collaborative work around issues that impact the community tends to require that people expand the ways in which they think about problem solving. A natural reluctance to expand one's personal point of view can present barriers to the collaborative work being done across the community.
- **No More Newspaper.** Many people relied on the local newspaper to be kept informed about community needs and collaborative efforts. Not all community members have access to the internet so without the local newspaper many feel left out of important communications and conversations that impact the community.



The Future of Collective Impact in Cheyenne County

- **More Participation.** Community members in Cheyenne County envision a future where there is more interaction across various groups in the community, and more participation from those groups within collaborative efforts. All members of the community see the value of their neighbors and come together to create a healthier community, and even paying volunteers for their time and participation.
- **Keep Up the Momentum.** The collaboration train is moving, and community members won't give up! People have an understanding that collaborative efforts addressing community issues can take a long time. They are invested and committed to seeing these efforts through and celebrate the small wins along the way.



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