

Building A Collective Impact Initiative in Milliken and Johnstown: 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 Milliken and Johnstown residents had to say:



Milliken and Johnstown community members described their community as one with a small-town feel, which has even been maintained in times of growth. While Milliken and Johnstown are two separate towns with different governance structures, like separate police departments and town councils, they sometimes act as one community through formal structures, such as the school district that encompasses both the Milliken and Johnstown communities. It is a community where people feel safe and connected to one another.



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- **Wearing Multiple Hats.** More collaboration is possible because people who wear multiple hats in the community can often see where different organizations' goals could be aligned to benefit everyone. Having people who are able to sit on multiple boards or attend various community meetings helps make collaboration easier, as those people are better able to be kept in the loop as to what is happening in the community.
- **Organizer Support.** Those who are seen as organizers offer many strengths to collaborative efforts. Building off what already exists within the community, sharing information and resources, and being accessible and available to connect with others when needed are actions taken by strong organizers.
- **Shared Vision Benefits the Initiative Overall.** When organizations and groups do align the ways in which they work together towards a common goal, community members take notice. This increased attention brings more awareness and resources to collaborative efforts.
- **Effective Communication.** Using multiple forms of communication to share information is essential to the collaborative process. E-mail chains, community boards found within public spaces, and social media were mentioned as being most effective to bringing awareness to collaborative efforts in the community.
- **Everyone Cares About Youth.** Residents of Milliken and Johnstown care deeply about the well-being of youth. When folks are passionate around a similar topic or issue, collaboration is more likely to occur. Collaborative efforts focusing on youth are more meaningful and successful in this community.



Challenges in Building Collective Impact in Milliken and Johnstown

- **Who is Who and Who Gets What?** The area's population growth has led to confusion around who is considered a part of which community and how resources are allocated to equitably address needs within each community.
- **A Few People Doing the Work of Many.** While there are a few organizers who are seen to be leading the charge on collaborative efforts, more people who are in positions of leadership should consider taking on roles that build collaborative capabilities within the community. This will boost education and awareness around efforts in the community and increase the likelihood that those efforts sustain themselves over time.
- **Messages in a Vacuum.** While communication exists around collaborative efforts, oftentimes these communications are only shared out via one particular method or avenue. If someone isn't already connected to the communication source, like a school newsletter, then they are left unaware of the message and won't be included in what's happening in the community.



The Future of Collective Impact in Milliken and Johnstown

- **More Participation and Community Voice.** Community members across Milliken and Johnstown envision a future where there is more participation in collaborative efforts from all members of the community, regardless of their identity and position of power in the community. Diverse voices are not only brought into the conversation but are given equal value and consideration when making decisions that impact the community.
- **More Organizations Giving Their All.** Organizational leadership would have a solid understanding of how their work can positively impact the health of the community by coming together to work on shared activities and goals and contributing the maximum amount of what they can to collaborative efforts in the community.