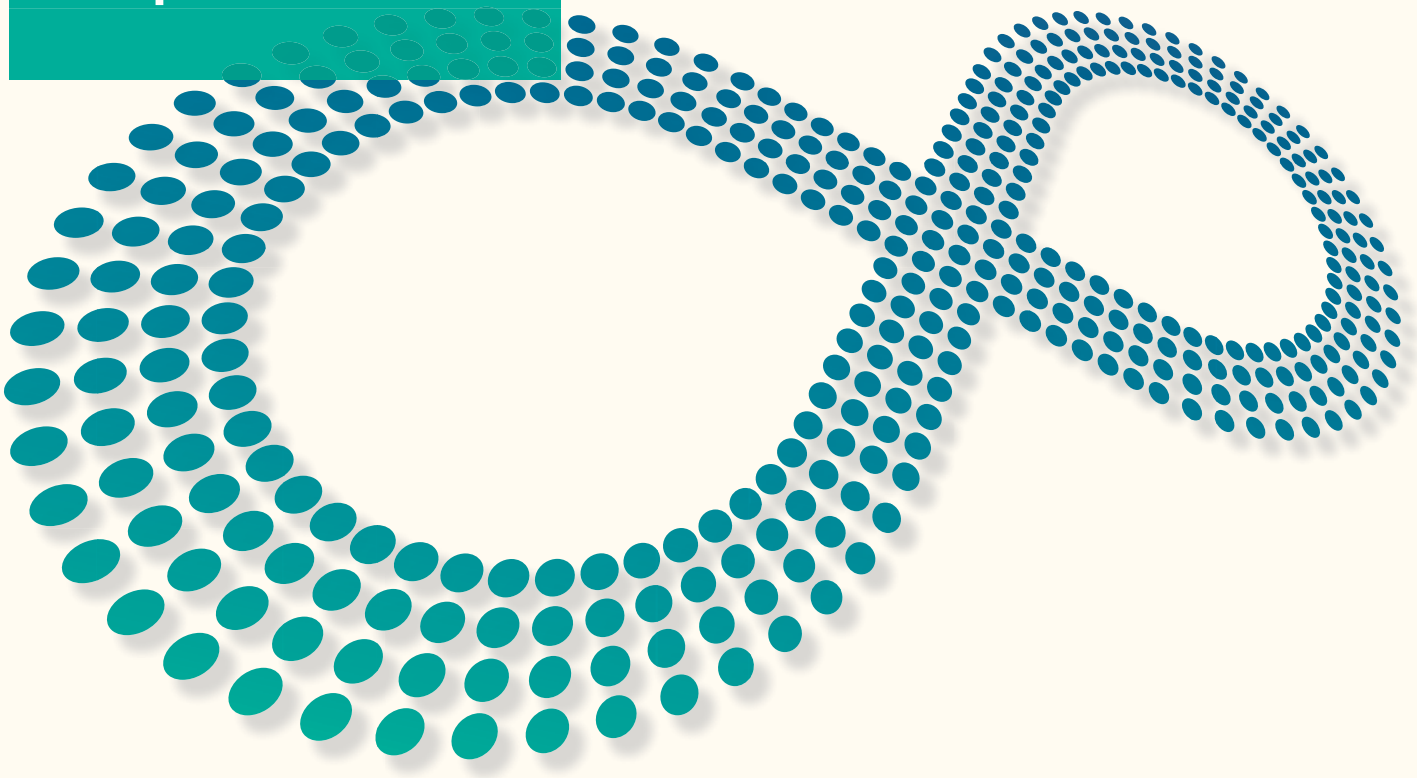
Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact

01



Learning and Evaluation in the Collective Impact Context

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COLLECTIVE IMPACT FORUM
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About the **Collective Impact Forum**

The Collective Impact Forum, an initiative of FSG and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, is a resource for people and organizations using the collective impact approach to address large-scale social and environmental problems. We aim to increase the effectiveness and adoption of collective impact by providing practitioners with access to the tools, training opportunities, and peer networks they need to be successful in their work. The Collective Impact Forum includes communities of practice, in-person convenings, and an online community and resource center launching in early 2014.

Learn more at *collectiveimpactforum.org*

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Working with many of the world's leading corporations, nonprofit organizations, and charitable foundations, FSG has completed more than 600 consulting engagements around the world, produced dozens of research reports, published influential articles in *Harvard Business Review* and *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* and has been featured in *The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Economist, Financial Times, BusinessWeek, Fast Company, Forbes,* and on NPR, amongst others. Learn more about FSG at *www.fsg.org.*

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Executive Summary

Overview of the Contents

As collective impact has gained traction across the globe, demand has grown for an effective approach to evaluating collective impact initiatives that meets the needs of various interested parties. Collective impact practitioners seek timely, high-quality data that enables reflection and informs strategic and tactical decision making. Funders and other supporters require an approach to performance measurement and evaluation that can offer evidence of progress toward the initiative's goals at different points along the collective impact journey.

The ***Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact*** responds to these needs by offering practitioners, funders, and evaluators a way to think about, plan for, and implement different performance measurement and evaluation activities.

This guide's three goals are to:

- → Discuss the role of continuous learning and adaptation in the collective impact context.
- → Present a framework for how to approach performance measurement and evaluation.
- → Offer practical guidance on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities at the initiative level, at different points in the initiative's lifetime.

The guide does not focus on evaluating individual organizations' programs.

Each part of the guide is available as a free download on the **Collective Impact Forum** *(collectiveimpactforum.org)*, an online community and centralized set of resources on collective impact. We encourage all interested users to share their feedback and experiences with the guide in the Collective Impact Forum's online community. We are particularly interested in readers' reflections about how they have used the guide, as well as their suggestions for additional questions, outcomes, or indicators that other practitioners may wish to consider. We also encourage readers to upload their own performance measurement and evaluation documents (e.g., findings, reports, presentations) to share with the field.

The guide is divided into three parts:

01

Learning and Evaluation in the Collective Impact Context

This section describes the importance of continuous learning and presents an evaluation framework to guide the design of different performance measurement, evaluation, and learning activities. The purpose of the framework is to help readers conceptualize an effective approach to performance measurement and evaluation, given their initiative's stage of development and maturity.

02

Assessing Progress and Impact

This section offers guidance on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities aimed at assessing an initiative's progress, effectiveness, and impact. It includes sample performance indicators, evaluation questions, and outcomes for collective impact initiatives in different stages of development, as well as advice on how to gather, make sense of, and use data to inform strategic decision making, how to communicate evaluation findings, how to choose and work with evaluators (when desired), and how to budget for evaluation.

This part of the guide also includes four mini-case studies.

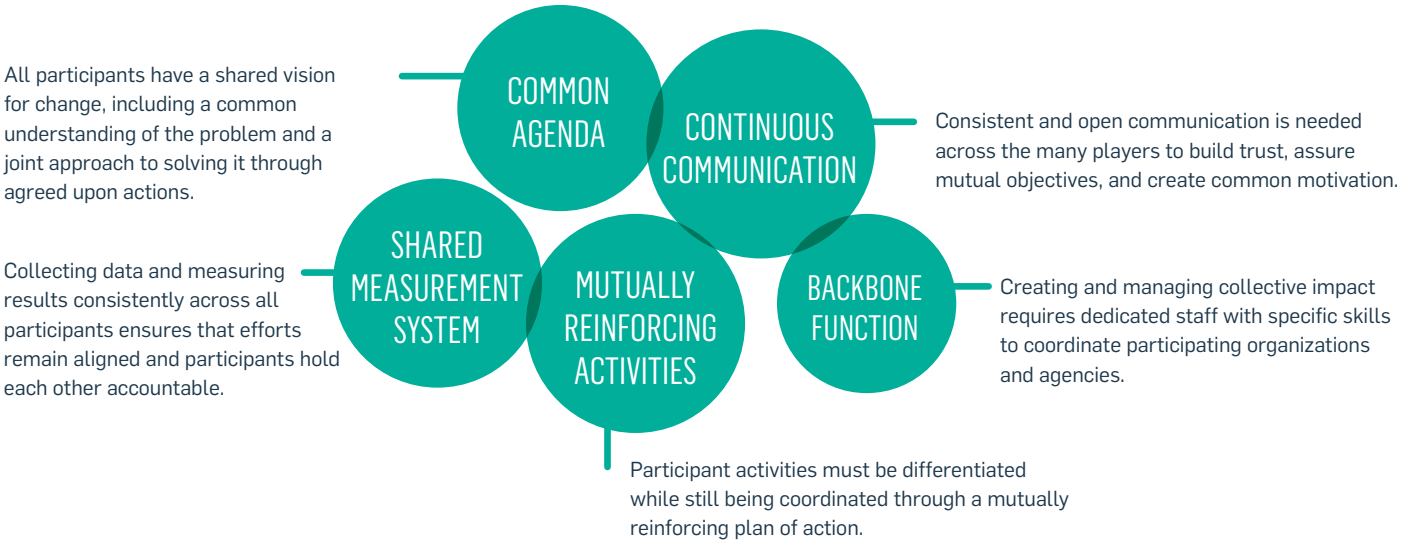
03

Supplement: Sample Questions, Outcomes, and Indicators

The final section includes a larger set of sample evaluation questions, outcomes, and indicators.

About Collective Impact

Collective impact (CI) occurs when a group of actors from different sectors commit to a common agenda for solving a complex social or environmental problem. More than simply a new way of collaborating, collective impact is a structured approach to problem solving that includes five core conditions:



Once these conditions are in place, a CI initiative's work is organized through what we have termed "cascading levels of collaboration." As described in a recent post on the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* blog,[1] this loose structure typically includes the following:

An oversight group, often called a Steering Committee or Executive Committee, which consists of cross-sector CEO-level individuals from key organizations engaged with the issue, as well as representatives of the individuals touched by the issue. This group meets regularly to oversee the progress of the entire initiative.

Working groups focused on the initiative's primary strategies. (More complicated initiatives may have subgroups that take on specific objectives within the prioritized strategies.) Working groups typically develop their own plans for action organized around "moving the needle" on specific shared measures. Once plans are developed, the working groups come together on a regular basis to share data and stories about progress, as well as challenges and opportunities, and to communicate their activities to other partners affected by the issue, so that the circle of alignment can grow. Although each working group meets separately, effective coordination by the backbone can ensure coordinated action among hundreds of organizations that simultaneously tackle many different dimensions of a complex issue.

The backbone function (as defined above) provides periodic and systematic assessments of progress attained by the various working groups and then synthesizes the results and presents them back to the oversight committee that carries the sustaining flame of the common agenda.

A graphical representation of the CI Theory of Change is included as Appendix A.

For more information about the collective impact change process, please visit the Collective Impact Forum at *www.collectiveimpactforum.org.*

Key Takeaways from Part One

Parts One and Two of this guide describe the importance of continuous learning in the context of collective impact and offer practical advice on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities aimed at assessing an initiative's progress, effectiveness, and impact over time. Key takeaways from Parts One and Two include the following.

1. Continuous learning is critical to collective impact success.

In order for CI initiatives to be successful, their leaders must understand that collective impact is not a solution, but rather a problem-solving *process.* This process requires leaders to remain keenly aware of changes in context, conditions, and circumstances; to embrace curiosity and seek opportunities for learning; to openly share information and observations with others; and, most importantly, to willingly adapt their strategies quickly in response to the ever-evolving environment. This is what it means to embrace continuous learning, which we believe is critical to CI success.

2. Collective impact partners should adopt a two-part approach to measuring progress and evaluating effectiveness and impact.

To understand *what progress an initiative is making,* CI partners can develop a **performance measurement system** that tracks a set of early performance indicators and incorporates data from the initiative's shared measurement system.

To understand *how and why the initiative is making progress,* CI practitioners and funders can use **different approaches to evaluation,** depending on their initiative's stage of development.

3. The collective impact change process typically involves three stages of development, each of which requires a different approach to performance measurement and evaluation.

The Framework for Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts illustrates, at a conceptual level, a sequence of stages that CI initiatives typically pass through in their pursuit of social or environmental change. These include the following:

The initiative's **early years** are typically focused on understanding context and designing and implementing the initiative. This includes establishing the five core conditions of collective impact, as well as the coordinated implementation of multiple programs, activities, and campaigns, according to the initiative's overarching strategy or theory of change.

- Recommended approach to performance measurement: CI partners should agree on a set of early performance indicators to track their progress in establishing key elements of the initiative's infrastructure.
- Recommended approach to evaluation: Developmental evaluation, aimed at helping CI partners understand their initiative's context and learn more about how the initiative is developing.

The work of evaluating a CI initiative's context and carefully assessing the quality of its design and implementation in its early years is critically important and should not be dismissed as mere focus on process. The successful reorganization and alignment of the system of actors that are addressing a problem is itself an important outcome of the CI change process.

The initiative's **middle years,** in which CI partners should expect to achieve some significant changes in patterns of behavior (e.g., changes in professional practice, changes in individual behavior) and in the way systems operate (e.g., changes in cultural norms, funding

flows, public policy). These changes serve as the gateway to the initiative's ultimate, population-level outcomes and are thus an important area of focus for both performance measurement and evaluation.

- Recommended approach to performance measurement: CI partners should use data from their initiative's **shared measurement system** to determine if, where, and for whom the initiative is making progress.
- Recommended approach to evaluation: Formative evaluation to help CI partners refine, improve, and fine-tune this work, as well as developmental evaluation to explore newer aspects of the initiative.

The initiative's **later years,** in which CI partners should expect to achieve meaningful, measurable change with regard to the initiative's ultimate goal(s). At this time, the initiative may be ready for a summative evaluation to assess its impact, merit, value, or significance.

4. Performance measurement and evaluation bring indisputable value to a collective impact initiative and should be given sufficient financial and logistical support.

We strongly encourage CI partners to carefully plan for how performance measurement and evaluation can support their work, and we urge all funders to embed support for evaluation into every CI initiative's budget from the very beginning.

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Part One:

Learning and Evaluation in the Collective Impact Context

Introduction

Since the publication of the article "Collective Impact" in the Winter 2011 edition of *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* collective impact has gained tremendous traction as an approach to achieving large-scale, sustainable change. For some, the term "collective impact" aptly describes the collaborative work they have been doing for years. For others, the collective impact framework provides a structure that helps strengthen their existing efforts. And yet for many others, the collective impact concept is a call to action to work differently—to bring organizations together across sectors to rigorously and collectively address a stubborn problem.

As a wave of collective impact (CI) initiatives becomes more established, the pressing question on many people's minds is shifting from "How do I launch a collective impact initiative?" to "How can we better understand our initiative's effectiveness and impact?"

This is not an easy question to answer. After all, the problems that CI initiatives seek to address—problems like poor health and education outcomes, persistent unemployment, environmental change, and many others—are not simple problems, and collective impact does not offer neat or easy solutions. Rather, CI initiatives engage practitioners and funders in a long-term, messy, and unpredictable process of complex problem solving. In this context, CI partners need an approach to performance measurement and evaluation that is as responsive and flexible as the initiative itself.

Traditional approaches to evaluation, in which an individual organization is held accountable for effectively implementing a specific program or intervention, cannot offer CI partners the robust support they need to track their progress, improve their effectiveness, and adapt their strategy over time. A different approach is needed.

Part One of this guide explains the importance of continuous learning in the CI context and presents an evaluation framework to help guide the design of different performance measurement, evaluation, and learning activities. This framework is intended to help readers understand what an effective approach to performance measurement and evaluation might look like at different phases of the initiative's development and maturity.

The Importance of Learning in the Collective Impact Context

The lack of simple solutions to complex problems requires partners in a CI initiative to accept that the CI change process is emergent in nature.[2] That is to say, successful CI initiatives typically *evolve* as they *progress:* as problem definitions become more specific and contextual variables become better understood, the initiative's interventions become more targeted, successes become more sustainable, and change becomes more tangible.

Maintaining momentum in this ever-evolving context requires constant vigilance and adaptation. To be successful, CI partners must be keenly aware of changes in context, conditions, and circumstances. They must lead with curiosity, always striving to understand what is working and what is not, and seeking opportunities for improvement. They must commit to sharing their observations with each other, assessing their options together, and

adapting their collective efforts as necessary to achieve greater impact.

In other words, they must embrace a culture of continuous learning.

In the context of collective impact, continuous learning is as much a behavior and disposition as it is a philosophy and practice. For those working in complex, dynamic, and emergent environments such as CI, **learning is:**

"The use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches— including evaluation—to inform decision making about strategy. Strategic learning occurs when organizations or groups integrate data and evaluative thinking into their work and then adapt their strategies in response to what they learn. Strategic learning makes intelligence gathering and evaluation a part of a strategy's development and implementation, embedding it so that it influences the process." [3] (emphasis added)

As this definition makes clear, learning is an active and applied process: its goal is not learning for the sake of learning, but learning for the sake of improved effectiveness.

In the context of CI, where strategic decisions are often made by groups of people, it is important to put in place structures and processes that support group and organizational learning. The **learning processes** described in Table 1 can help CI partners share and explore new information, insights, ideas, curiosities, and concerns.[4] These processes can be embedded in CI initiatives in a variety of ways, as described in Table 2.

Being intentional about learning means creating the space and time for individuals and groups to reflect on their experiences and practice, and to share that learning with others so that new learnings can be created that further the goals of the CI initiative.

Table 1: Learning Processes

LEARNING PROCESS	DESCRIPTION
Reflection	• Creating space, slowing down, paying attention, creating new patterns of thinking, creating alternative interpretations, creating new theories of action
Dialogue	• Participants working together toward common understanding, finding common ground, re-examining all positions, admitting that others' thinking can improve on one's own, searching for strengths and value in others' positions, listening to understand
Asking Questions	• Seeking clarification, probing assumptions, reasons, and evidence, illuminating viewpoints and perspectives, probing implications and consequences, questioning the questions (Socratic questions)
Challenging Assumptions	• Asking questions (testing assumptions, values, and underlying beliefs), surfacing mental models, seeking evidence, understanding inferences
Seeking Feedback	• Asking for and providing feedback on experiences, assumptions, perceptions, and actions

What's the best way to balance the desire to learn with the need for accountability?

"You cannot be accountable if you do not learn. And you need to know how well you live up to performance expectations in order to learn. *The tug-of-war between learning and accountability is nonsensical. They need each other.* Understanding effectiveness requires both."[5]

Partners in a CI initiative, including funders and practitioners, do not have to choose whether to focus on accountability or learning—***they should attend to both.*** While there are different kinds of accountability (e.g., political, moral, relational, legal), the following definitions are most useful for considering **accountability** within a collective impact initiative:

- An obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions;[6] and,
- The responsibility of program staff to provide evidence to stakeholders and sponsors that a program is effective and conforms to its coverage, service, legal, and fiscal requirements.[7]

Within the CI context, accountability is particularly important for ensuring that resources are used properly and that implementers work toward the goals they've been funded to achieve.

At the same time, CI implementers might also consider the notion of *strategic accountability,* which focuses on the extent to which individuals and organizations act as effectively as possible. This type of accountability is about feeling committed to one's ideas and strategies as well as to the internal mission (rather than, or in addition to, funders or other stakeholders).[8]

Accountability within a CI effort might show up in the ways in which:

- Partners hold themselves accountable to each other. Do they follow through on commitments, bring their best selves to the work, and collaborate genuinely?
- Partners hold themselves and others accountable (mutual accountability) to the common agenda. Are they visibly committed to the agreed upon vision and goals? Are they seeking ways to find synergies and commonalities among partners?
- Partners are committed to collecting and using data to make informed decisions along the way.
- Funders engage in appropriate and meaningful ways, and commit to securing adequate funding to support the initiative's success.

Accountability is not a bad thing, though it has often been associated with the notion of distrust, whereas learning is believed to be built on trust and relationships. As political scientist Arthur Lupia suggests: "Accountability needs to shift from achieving predetermined results on a predetermined plan to demonstrating the capacity to achieve results in dynamic environments."[9]

The performance measurement and evaluation approaches recommended in this guide seek to support CI partners in making this shift to using data in the service of learning *and* accountability.

Table 2: Strategies to Embed Learning

Learning within Groups
(e.g., Steering Committees, working groups)

- Setting aside time (consistently) at each Steering Committee or working group meeting to discuss what partners have learned through the day-to-day work of the initiative and any relevant implications for practice.
- Encouraging participants at all meetings to ask questions, surface assumptions and mental models, and to seek understanding before dismissing or judging ideas or suggestions.
- Inviting outside speakers on various relevant topics to bring in new ideas or perspectives for groups to consider.
- Bringing in data from the Shared Measurement System or other research and evaluation activities to co-interpret and develop insights and recommended action steps.

Learning across all members of a collective impact initiative

- Conducting an Appreciative Inquiry exercise to discover examples of what is going particularly well in the CI initiative, why this is happening, and ideas for amplifying and building on these successes.
- Periodically surveying group members to sense where energies are, what concerns exist, and what topics are in need of attention. This would then be followed by bringing the analyzed data to participants to reflect upon and discuss.
- Hosting Learning Convenings to focus on key topics as a means for developing deeper insights and understandings of challenging content areas, across the community. These might include residents, systems leaders, subject matter experts, organization development professionals and/or government officials.
- Holding an annual retreat to reflect on what has been learned over the past year. The retreat should include various small and large group exercises and discussion opportunities.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation are Essential to Ongoing Learning

The quality of a CI initiative's continuous learning process depends in part on a consistent flow of quality data and information. Ongoing performance measurement and evaluation activities supply much of this data and information.

Performance measurement is "the ongoing monitoring and reporting of [initiative] accomplishments and progress toward pre-established [outcomes]."[10] The process of measuring performance typically involves gathering data on a CI initiative's activities (known as inputs) and the direct results of those activities (known as outputs). For example, a workforce development initiative might track inputs such as the types of workforce training programs offered by participating providers, as well as outputs, such as the number of unemployed people who participated in each program and the percentage of trainees who completed the program.

In the context of collective impact, performance measurement also includes the use of a **shared measurement system** (SMS), which gathers and maintains quantitative data on a set of shared indicators. CI partners use the SMS to track progress toward an initiative's ultimate goals. These systems often include data on inputs and outputs, as well as data related to the initiative's short- and long-term **outcomes**. For example, the SMS for the workforce development initiative mentioned above might monitor a short-term outcome, such as the number of trainees who

reported finding a job after completing the training program, and a longer-term outcome, such as the employment rate in a target geographic region.

Evaluation, for the purposes of this paper, is defined as the systematic collection of information about the activities, effects, influence, and impacts of programs or initiatives to inform learning, decision making, and action. Evaluation findings can help improve CI partners' understanding of the data gathered through their performance measurement and SMS activities. In addition, evaluation can give CI partners increased confidence in making decisions and taking action. The design of an individual evaluation—including the questions asked, the outcomes and indicators explored, and the data collection methods used—depends on the purpose and goals of the CI initiative.

Shared measurement and evaluation are complementary activities:

1. ***Data collected through a shared measurement system can contribute to a variety of evaluation efforts.*** For example, quantitative data from the shared measurement system can complement qualitative data collected from interviews, focus groups, and surveys.
2. ***Data from a shared measurement system may influence the design of a CI evaluation*** by leading partners to focus on certain questions or outcomes. For example, if partners observe minimal progress on an important indicator, they may choose to explore a question about the relevant strategy as part of their evaluation.
3. ***Because shared measurement is one of the five CI conditions, it may serve as the object or focus of an evaluation.*** For example, partners in a CI initiative may want to evaluate the ways in which the shared measurement system is designed and implemented, as well as what improvements might be needed to make the process of data input, access, and use more effective.

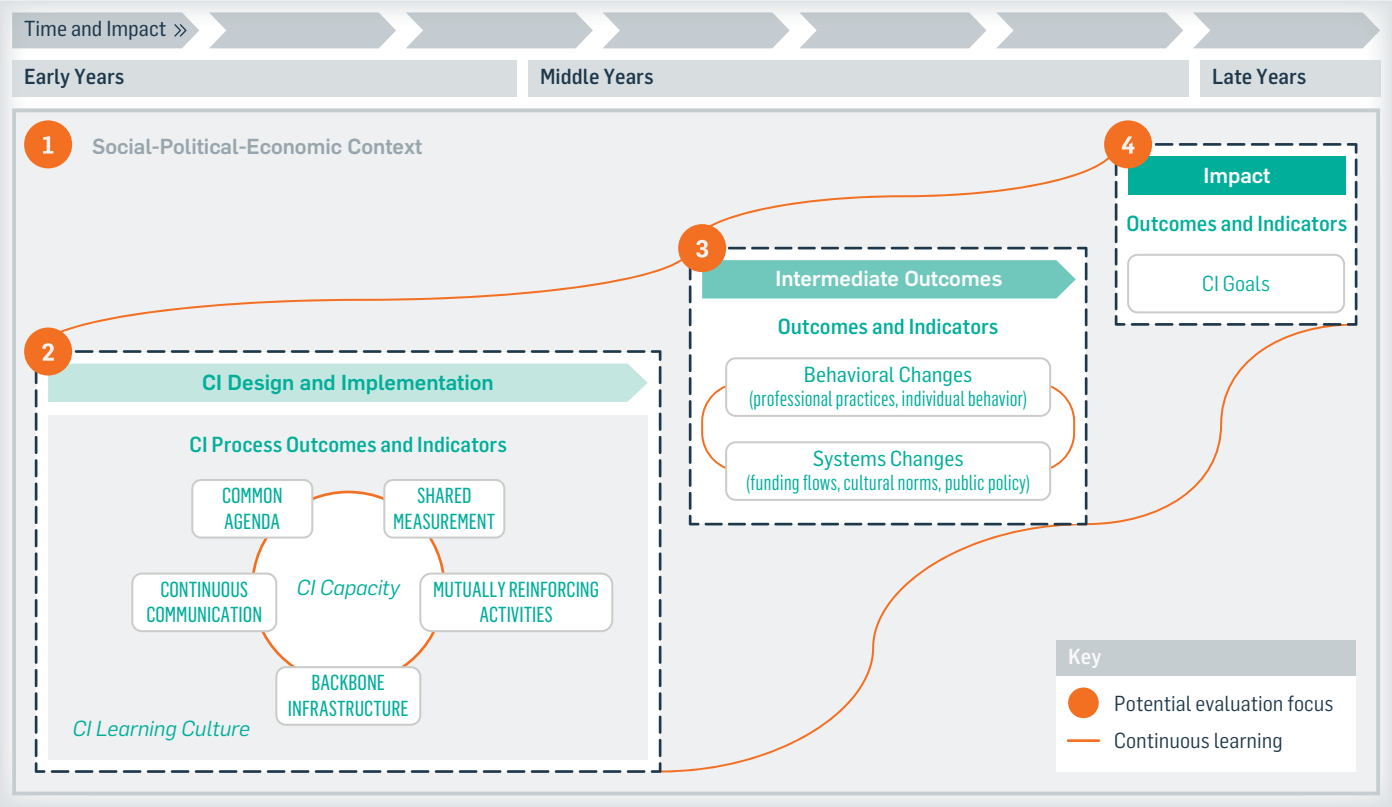
The data generated by performance measurement and evaluation activities should lead to insights and learning, and should boost CI partners' ability to make informed judgments as the initiative is implemented.

A common challenge facing CI partners interested in learning about their progress and impact is what exactly they ought to measure or evaluate, and when. The framework presented in the following section is intended to help practitioners, funders, and evaluators manage this challenge by exploring the ways in which CI partners can use performance measurement and evaluation to promote learning and inform strategic decision making throughout an initiative's lifetime.

The data generated by performance measurement and evaluation activities should lead to insights and learning, and should boost CI partners' ability to make informed judgments as the initiative is implemented.

Figure 1:

A Framework for Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts



Using the Framework for Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts to Organize, Focus, and Plan for Effective Evaluation

The Framework for Performance Measurement and Evaluation of Collective Impact Efforts (Figure 1) maps the key components of the CI change process over time (i.e., context, initiative design and implementation, intermediate outcomes, and ultimate impact), and illustrates the relationships within, between, and among these components. The framework serves as the basis for a more detailed discussion of CI performance measurement and evaluation.

The evaluation framework illustrates, at a conceptual level, a sequence of stages that CI initiatives typically pass through in their pursuit of social or environmental change. This is not to say that progress is predictable, though. At times, an initiative may generate significant momentum and quickly achieve several goals, while at other times, progress will be slow and incremental.

The purpose of this graphic is not to delineate markers of annual progress, but rather to help the reader conceptualize key inflection points in an initiative's maturity and identify potential areas of focus for performance measurement and evaluation over an initiative's lifetime.

1 **Context,** represented by the grey shaded area, is illustrated as the environment in which a CI change process takes place. Context encompasses everything that influences the ways in which and the extent to which an initiative is successful. Contextual factors help shape the initiative's early structure and continue to influence its progress and development throughout its lifetime.

Context also includes three critical conditions that serve as gateways to the CI journey. These "preconditions for success"[11] include a sense of urgency about the problem, strong leadership from one or a few champions, and the availability of sufficient financial resources to support the initiative's work. These conditions are prerequisites for a successful CI initiative, signaling that stakeholders are ready to engage in this type of complex change process.*

Beyond the preconditions, many other aspects of a CI initiative's context can significantly influence the speed and ease with which the initiative achieves its goals (e.g., economic conditions, demographics, a community's history and culture, political will, recent news events, popular culture, the political environment, media focus, and local laws and policies, among other factors). For this reason, CI partners should be especially attentive to following the ways in which context is shifting, changing, and adapting in ways that are contributing to or hindering the initiative's efforts.

Evaluation can support partners in identifying and understanding how changes in context might influence their initiative's progress and what the implications are for the initiative's design and implementation.

2 **Collective Impact Design and Implementation** depicts the *five core conditions of CI* (common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, backbone infrastructure, and continuous communication, as defined in the Executive Summary) as well as the initiative's *learning culture* and overall *capacity.*

In the context of collective impact, a **learning culture** is defined as one in which people know how to learn and "freely share what they know and are willing to change based on the acquisition of new knowledge."[12] **Capacity** refers to the financial resources, staff, knowledge, skills, expertise, and infrastructure necessary for the initiative to pursue its work as planned.

* The Collective Impact Forum (www.collectiveimpactforum.org) recently published a short readiness assessment focused on these three pre-conditions.

Reconsidering the Value of Process

A core tenet of collective impact is the belief that the lack of common purpose among many different nonprofits, businesses, community leaders, and government agencies is a major obstacle to solving social problems. When each organization defines the problem and sets its own agenda independently from the others, differences are amplified, knowledge is suppressed, and the alignment of resources is obstructed in ways that impede the pursuit of effective solutions.

In this context, it is important to recognize that the reconfiguration of organizations into a more aligned and coordinated system through a CI initiative is itself a powerful short-term outcome. This new configuration does not necessarily solve the initiative's targeted social problem, but it fundamentally changes conditions on the ground to permit new solutions to emerge and effective practices to spread rapidly in ways they could not before. In this way, even subtle improvements in alignment and coordination are critical to the ultimate impact a CI initiative seeks to achieve and to its sustainability over time.

The work of evaluating a CI initiative's context and carefully assessing the quality of its design and implementation is often misunderstood (and dismissed) as mere focus on process. We believe, though, that the successful reorganization and alignment of the system of actors that are addressing a problem is itself a monumental achievement and an important outcome of the CI change process.

The design and implementation of the CI initiative is typically the primary focus of CI partners' work during the initiative's early years. Table 3 lists some sample outcomes of partners' efforts to establish the five core conditions of collective impact. (These outcomes are discussed in greater detail in Part Two. The Supplement includes a list of sample indicators for each of the sample outcomes.)

Evaluation provides a helpful way to explore these early outcomes because it allows CI partners to better understand how and why, or the extent to which, elements of the CI process are designed and implemented. Evaluation can also explore the relationships among different core conditions, such as the extent to which data from the shared measurement system are being distributed across the initiative or used by the initiative's leadership to adjust overall strategy. Evaluation can also assess the extent to which the backbone infrastructure is effectively guiding partners through the CI process. Finally, CI partners can focus an evaluation on the extent to which partners are successfully implementing the programs and activities they have agreed to as part of the shared plan of action, or the extent to which these programs and activities are mutually reinforcing.

3 **Intermediate outcomes** include to changes in **patterns of behavior and the way targeted systems operate.** These shifts in the way people, organizations, and institutions function and interact are typically prerequisites to achieving a CI initiative's ultimate goal. For example, in order to achieve an ultimate goal related to improved education outcomes, a CI initiative must often first shift the flow of funding to public schools, improve the connections among school systems and other institutions in the education system, and/or change the behavior of parents, teachers, and other educators. Typically, CI initiatives gain traction in addressing patterns of behavior and systems operations in their **middle years,** after the key elements of the initiative are firmly in place but before partners' activities have begun to show progress in achieving population-level outcomes.

Table 3:

Sample Outcomes Related to Collective Impact Design and Implementation

	DESCRIPTION
Common Agenda	• The development of the common agenda has included a diverse set of voices and perspectives from multiple sectors (including input from community members in many CI initiatives) • Partners have achieved a common understanding of the problem • Partners have come to consensus on the initiative's ultimate goal(s) • Partners have committed to solving the problem using an adaptive approach with clearly articulated strategies and agreed upon actions.
Backbone Infrastructure	• The backbone infrastructure effectively guides the CI initiative's vision and strategy • The backbone infrastructure ensures alignment of existing activities and pursuit of new opportunities toward the initiative's goal • The backbone infrastructure supports the collection and use of data to promote accountability, learning, and improvement.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	• Partners have developed and are using a collective plan of action • Partners are coordinating their activities to align with the plan of action • Partners have filled gaps and reduced duplication of efforts
Shared Measurement	• The process of designing and managing the shared measurement system is participatory and transparent • Quality data on a set of meaningful indicators is available to partners in a timely manner • Sufficient funding and resources are available to support the technology platform, training, and technical support
Continuous Communication	• Structures and processes are in place to engage CI partners, keeping them informed and inspired • Structures and processes are in place to engage the CI initiative's external stakeholders, keeping them informed and inspired

High-level goals related to changes in patterns of behavior include:

- Changes in individual behavior: changes in behavior among members of the target population (e.g., diet, work habits, attendance)
- Changes in professional practice: changes in the way formal actors (e.g., medical care providers, educators, social workers) and organizations / institutions approach their work

High-level goals related to changes in systems include:

- Changes in funding: shifts in the flows of funds, improved alignment of existing resources, and increased funding for CI-related activities
- Changes in cultural norms: changes in social patterns and expectations of the way people behave
- Changes in public policy: changes in laws, regulations, and ordinances relevant to the CI initiative's goals

The Role of Community Engagement in Collective Impact Initiatives

One of the hallmarks of the collective impact approach is its broad-based engagement of different organizations and individuals who are in some way connected to a given problem. This typically involves a mix of actors from the public and private sectors, as well as representatives from advocacy organizations, social service agencies, universities, and other institutions. In addition to these "experts" and individuals in formal leadership positions, it is critical that CI initiatives thoughtfully engage the people whose lives are most directly and deeply affected by the targeted problem. This work is often referred to as "community engagement."

Efforts to engage community members (some of whom will be the initiative's ultimate beneficiaries) can contribute to a successful CI initiative by helping partners:

- Understand the problem from the perspectives of individuals who live with it each day
- Co-create solutions that are rooted in lived experience and have the potential for significant uptake
- Refine the CI initiative's evolving goals, strategies, and indicators
- Expand the initiative's reach, by increasing awareness, building the will for action, and improving the adoption of best practices
- Build community capacity to lead and sustain change

CI initiatives use many different strategies to engage community members and their intended beneficiaries. For example, in the education sector, Project U-Turn created a 30-member youth advisory board called the Youth Ambassadors to provide insight and direction to the initiative's Steering Committee. Members of this board help conduct research with their peers, provide training for community members, and advocate at the city level to advance the initiative's goals. Another education-focused CI initiative, the Road Map Project, engaged community members in several different ways. In one approach, the backbone organization developed a small grants program to provide up to $5,000 to grassroots and community stakeholders to support neighborhood projects that aligned with the initiative's goals. These investments helped build local capacity to participate in the initiative while growing the Road Map Project's network and building support for its goals.

Typically, a CI initiative's shared measurement system will track several outcomes and indicators related to these types of intermediate outcomes.

To complement this performance measurement data, CI partners can use evaluation to better understand how and why the CI initiative is achieving its interim outcomes. For example, partners may wish to learn about the extent to which a targeted system (e.g., education, health) makes different decisions about policies, programs, and resource allocations; or the ways in which formal actors (e.g., teachers, medical professionals) make changes in their work that align with the goals of the CI initiative. In addition, evaluation can explore the degree to which and the ways in which changes in systems influence changes in professional practices or individual behavior, and vice versa.

Part Two includes a sample set of intermediate outcomes and indicators. A subset of these is provided in Table 4.

4 **Impact** refers to the long-term, population-level changes a CI initiative seeks to achieve. While some CI initiatives will begin to make progress on their ultimate outcomes during their middle years, many require several more years of concerted effort before they begin seeing significant changes on population-level outcomes.

During the initiative's **late years,** its shared measurement system can provide invaluable data to inform CI partners about what progress is being made toward their ultimate goals. To better understand how or why progress is being made, though, CI partners will need the more nuanced data and insights offered by evaluation. Similarly, if partners seek to understand which aspects of the CI process are most effective, for whom, and why, performance measurement alone may not be sufficient.

Table 4:

Sample Outcomes and Indicators Related to Intermediate Outcomes

SAMPLE OUTCOMES	SAMPLE INDICATORS
Individual behavior – The CI initiative is influencing changes in awareness/knowledge related to the desired behavior change	• Individuals report increased awareness of the issues surrounding the desired behavior change • Individuals report improved knowledge of the desired behavior change
Funding flows – Public funding in the targeted issue area/ system targeted by the CI initiative is increasingly aligned with the goals of the CI initiative	• Overall public funding (federal, state, or local government) for the targeted issue area or system has increased • Existing public resources are directed toward evidence-based strategies in the targeted issue area/system • New public resources are committed to evidence-based strategies in the target issue area/system
Policy change – The CI initiative is strengthening the base of support for CI policy goals	• Increased public involvement in an issue • Increased breadth of partners in support of an issue • Increased media coverage • Public opinion changes to support of CI messages/goals

Evaluation can be used to explore the links **between and among a CI initiative's strategy and activities, changes in systems and behavior, and progress toward ultimate goals.** For example, an evaluation of an education initiative could assess how local or state policymakers are responding to the CI initiative or how well the CI initiative is adapting in response to recent changes in standardized testing policy. Evaluation can also help CI partners better understand the extent to which certain behavioral or systems changes (e.g., changes to a public school funding formula) are contributing to the initiative's success in achieving certain ultimate outcomes. And, evaluation can help assess the extent to which the outcomes of the initiative (including the implementation of the CI process) are likely to be sustained over time. Finally, CI partners can use evaluation to understand the ripple effects of their work on other stakeholders and systems.

If CI partners seek to understand which aspects of the CI process are most effective, for whom, and why, performance measurement alone may not be sufficient.

Planning for Performance Measurement and Evaluation

There are *many* opportunities to use performance measurement and evaluation to gather data and promote learning over a CI initiative's lifetime. **The goal of measurement and evaluation, though, is not to explore everything**. Rather, it is to provide CI partners with the specific information they need at a given point in time in order to understand their initiative's effectiveness and make well-informed decisions about its strategy and activities. Of course, CI partners consider dozens of important decisions over the lifetime of a CI initiative—for example, decisions regarding the initiative's structure, strategic direction, choices regarding resource allocation, and communications. As a result, a CI initiative's approach to using various performance measurement and evaluation activities will likely evolve over its lifetime.

During a CI initiative's first two or three years, it is often unreasonable to expect significant progress against the common indicators included in the initiative's shared measurement system. During this time, CI partners are primarily focused *internally,* on building relationships; designing, developing, and implementing the initiative's infrastructure (e.g., strategic action plans, working group structures, even the shared measurement system itself); and taking collective action toward their goals. During these early years, we suggest that CI partners agree on a set of **early performance indicators** to track their progress in establishing key elements of the initiative's infrastructure. (A sample set of these indicators is presented in Part Two of the guide, and a longer list is included in the Supplement.)

As a CI initiative matures and its core conditions become more established—and as partners begin to implement the programs and strategies defined in the action plan—the initiative should begin to see progress toward its intended outcomes. The common indicators included in the **shared measurement system** should track this progress over time, offering CI partners timely data about if, where, and for whom their initiative is making a difference.

At various points in the initiative's lifetime, most CI partners will also need insight into how, to what extent, and why the initiative is or isn't progressing. By providing data that helps answer these critical questions, **evaluation serves as an important complement to performance measurement.** Depending on an initiative's stage of development, CI partners may wish to use one or more different approaches to evaluation, including developmental evaluation, formative evaluation, or summative evaluation (see Table 5). Each of these approaches can help frame and focus an evaluation.

Importantly, the three approaches to evaluation are **not mutually exclusive.** Given the non-linear nature of the CI change process, it is likely, perhaps even inevitable, that certain aspects of an initiative will warrant a developmental evaluation at the same time that other aspects warrant a formative evaluation. For example, an initiative in its middle years may be ready for a formative evaluation of one or more of its intermediate outcome areas, while its relatively new shared measurement system is better suited to a developmental evaluation.

Table 5: Three Approaches to Evaluation

	Developmental Evaluation EARLY — MIDDLE YEARS	**Formative Evaluation** MIDDLE YEARS	**Summative Evaluation** LATE YEARS
Stage of CI Development	CI initiative is exploring and in development	CI initiative is evolving and being refined	CI initiative is stable and well-established
What's Happening?	• CI partners are assembling the key elements of their initiative, developing action plans, and exploring different strategies and activities • There is a degree of uncertainty about what will work and how • New questions, challenges, and opportunities are emerging	• The initiative's key elements are in place and partners are implementing agreed upon strategies and activities • Outcomes are becoming more predictable • The initiative's context is increasingly well-known and understood	• The initiative's activities are well established and are not changing • Implementers have significant experience and an increasing amount of certainty about "what works" • The initiative is ready for a determination of impact, merit, value, or significance
Key Strategic Question	What needs to happen?	How well is it working?	What difference did it make?

Part Two of this guide provides detailed guidance for collective impact practitioners and funders, as well as evaluators, on when and how to use these different approaches to performance measurement and evaluation.

Conclusion

At its core, CI evaluation is about learning: learning how to "do" CI—how to communicate and collaborate across sectors, forge new relationships, set shared goals, assess progress together, and use data to make decisions—and learning how to generate momentum, shift systems, change behavior, and, ultimately, solve a problem more effectively. For CI practitioners and funders seeking to address large-scale social or environmental problems, this means that learning can't be an isolated event. It must be a continuous process that provides relevant, credible, and useful information to inform strategic decision making. In effect, this means that performance measurement and evaluation must be an integral part of any CI initiative. While these activities require time and resources, they are essential components of effective collective impact implementation and are critical to reaching the outcomes that practitioners and funders are focused on achieving. As such, we implore CI practitioners and funders to carefully consider the value of strong performance measurement and evaluation activities when determining their staffing and budget levels.

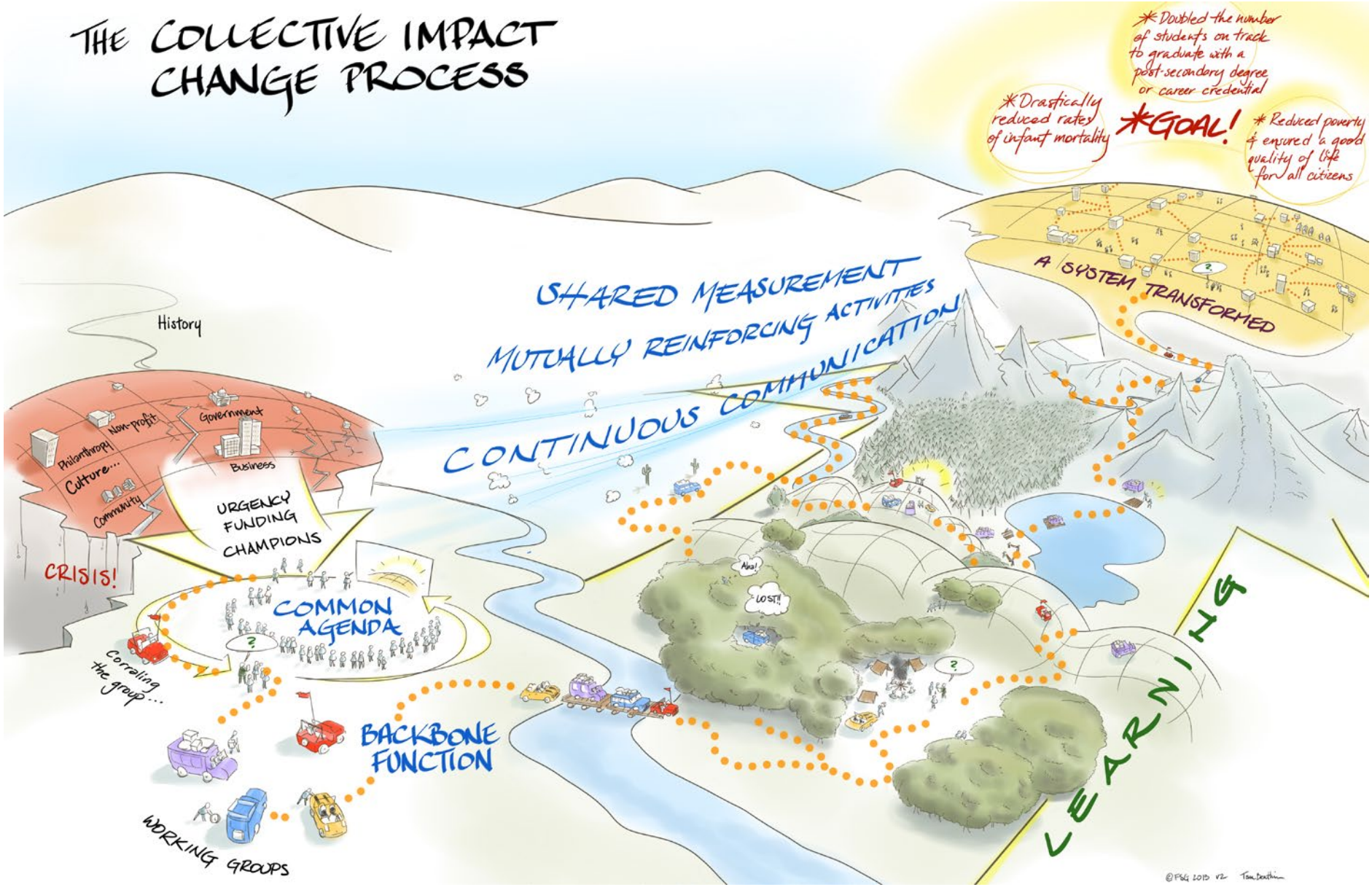
We hope Part One of this guide has provided a useful introduction to the ways in which well-designed performance measurement, evaluation, and learning activities can help drive collective impact success. In the early years, we encourage CI practitioners and funders to embrace the importance of measuring progress toward process-oriented outcomes and to celebrate even seemingly small victories, such as improved communication among key stakeholders or the willingness to share data across institutional lines. These understated achievements are the building blocks of sustainable change.

As an initiative moves into its middle years, we encourage CI partners to carefully measure progress toward intermediate outcomes, such as improved public policies, shifts in funding flows, and changes in patterns of behavior, among other things. These types of changes in targeted systems are critical to long-term collective impact success.

Finally, of course, a CI initiative's performance measurement and evaluation activities in its later years should focus on the initiative's progress toward its ultimate goal.

Part Two of the guide builds on the foundation laid in this document, offering collective impact practitioners, funders, and evaluators detailed guidance on how to plan for and implement a variety of performance measurement and evaluation activities at different stages of a CI initiative's development. Part Two includes sample performance indicators, evaluation questions, and outcomes for collective impact initiatives in different stages of development, as well as advice on how to gather, make sense of, and use data to inform strategic decision making, how to communicate evaluation findings, how to choose and work with evaluators (when desired), and how to budget for evaluation.

We welcome readers' comments, feedback, and suggestions regarding this guide and its application to real-life CI evaluation on the Collective Impact Forum *(collectiveimpactforum.org)*, an online community and collective impact resource center.



APPENDIX A: The Collective Impact Change Process

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