

COLLECTIVE IMPACT PANEL SERIES

PUBLIC HEALTH TALKS, PART 1

Guest: Dan Duncan, MSW, Senior Consultant, Clear Impact, LLC

Guest: Glennon Sweeney, MCPR, Senior Research Associate, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

Guest Moderator: Austin Oslock, MD, MPH



Region V Public Health Training Center
University of Michigan School of Public Health
1415 Washington Heights
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2029
rvphctc.org | rvphctc@umich.edu

All the partners around the table have to have relationships and trust, because you can't work together... Organizations don't work together, people do based on common purpose, relationships and trust.

There's a big difference in the way that I, as a White middle class woman define problems. Especially problems related to poverty, which I don't experience compared to someone who is living in poverty. I might not even be identifying the root cause of the problem according to the people who experience it. They're actually the experts. Their lived experience is expert knowledge. It's just as valuable as a PhD.

[music]

Welcome to Public Health Talks the podcast on emerging public health topics. Today we'll be doing a two-part episode on collective impact, a dynamic form of community organizing that can bring diverse players together to sit at the same table. My name is Austin Oslock, and I'll be your host today. Leading you through a series of interviews to explore the various facets of collective impact and how you can bring it back to your organization.

In our first part, we'll be talking about what collective impact is and why it matters. In our second part, we'll come back and talk practically about how to apply collective impact in your organization. Whether you're a small non-profit or a large public health department, collective impact can be a great way to organize around a common goal.

If you're listening to this on your desktop, but prefer to take this podcast on the go, you can download a copy for your mobile device by clicking on the download to computer button below. In the links section, you'll also find our resource guide which we'll reference throughout this episode. So let's jump right in and hear about collective impact from Dan Duncan, a leading expert.

Great to be here with you. Again, Dan Duncan. I'm a senior consultant with Clear Impact. Clear Impact is a consulting and technology firm that works with results-based accountability. And we have a software called the Clear Impact Scorecard, and it's designed to help communities, non-profits and governments be more effective in what they do. But we also include in it... So doing a lot of work with collective impact efforts to help them be more effective in what they're doing by bringing together some key conditions that we'll talk about today.

It sounds like you have a lot of experience helping organizations in what they're doing but what is your history and background with collective impact?

Okay. Great question. I spent 30 years as a United Way professional. So I... And all of our goals were really... And the work we did was always based on building partnerships and

doing the activities of collective impact. We didn't call it that back then, but our work around education, income and health and other areas was always around who else needs to be around the table, how do we measure our impact and how do we use data to improve what we're doing. So I've kind of been involved in doing this for a lot of years.

And for our listeners who may not be as familiar with collective impact, this podcast is to help people get introduced to collective impact and the ideas behind it. What is it? What are we talking about here?

Okay collective impact is a... Kind of, again, a new term that was coined by the folks from FSG a couple of years ago. But... And what they really did is they looked at effective collaborations, partnerships across the country, and what were some of the key conditions that were going on in relation to those that were more successful than others. And what they identified is that those who were successful, were laser focused on a common agenda. They weren't just trying to do everything, but they were focused on what they were doing. They were committed to using data and shared measurements, so they could learn from what they were doing and make mid-course corrections.

They understood that they had to have what they call multiple... Or excuse me... Mutually reinforcing activities that were really focused on what it takes to make a difference. There's no magic bullet. There's no one program that can make a difference. It's how do we bring together all of the activities that we need to do, and also that organizations have to work together. So continuous communication, not only with the community, but with the individual partners, so they could build trust and relationships.

And then finally, what they really identified is in successful efforts across the country, there was a... What they call a backbone organization. There was one organization that was identified and designed to actually make sure that all of those other conditions actually occurred. Because if nobody's paying attention to make sure that you're doing all of those things, it doesn't stay as focused.

It sounds like this collective impact is an evidence-based way to create collaboration that has five components?

Right.

A common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuing communication between these organizations as well as a backbone organization or a hub to create some accountability to make sure things are happening. Does that all sound correct?

That's sounds correct.

And will keep coming back to these core components and how they fit into what collective impact is looking like for people. You know, when talking through these five key components, what do you see as the pieces that organizations struggle with the most? Out of these five is there one or two that organizations really tend to stumble over?

That's a great question. I would highlight that probably the one that is the hardest is for folks to really get their arms around data and really work to use data strategically to make decisions. 'Cause we're not used to that. There are a lot of organizations that don't use data, they just kind of think they're experts, and they know what they're doing. So you have to become laser focused on using data to make mid-course corrections and understand that... Kind of in the analysis of what we're doing as a collective impact effort, there's no magic bullet, there's no logic model that'll say, if we just do these five things everybody in the community will pop out better.

It doesn't work that way because we're dealing with complex issues with... With working with people. So what worked for this family won't work for the next family, what worked for this youth or this child will not work for the next one. So we need data at the... Literally on the ground with the work we're doing, so we can make, as I call it a mid-course corrections to make sure that what we're doing is ultimately successful. So I would say the use of data would be the first one. And the second one is in the mutually reinforcing activities...

Still viewing that is, it's about programs and services, because I don't think that's true. It's really about a whole range of activities that we need to do, including some programs, some services, but it also includes public policy, media, bringing the community together in new ways. And it also includes the community, as a... As I call it, co-producers of their own in their community's well-being. So we need to engage the object of our intervention, if you will. Typically a collective impact effort is designed to help kids succeed, to help families to succeed, but we think the work is just done by the professionals or the agencies, but actually the work has to be done collectively.

And that's why I use the term of co-producers. So that we have to really understand that the people we serve need to have an opportunity to be co-producers of their own in their community's well-being. Not just help them be better, but they also need to contribute to their neighbors, their community, so that we really are using all the resources that we have available in our community.

I love that co-producer's idea, really getting the community engaged there. Also, today we're here at the impact assembly, and I really loved earlier in your talk when you put out the example of a recipe. That this isn't, "Okay here's your five things go out," and it's gonna work exactly the same for everybody. This is gonna look different for everybody, and that's an important thing for organizations to keep in mind as they implement it.

In terms of these two pieces, you talked about data and using that first strategic decision making as well as these mutually reinforcing activities, do you have any recommendations for organizations to maybe even jump over those hurdles?

Sure. Around the use of data... One of the tools that helped me, which is why I've kind of dedicated to my... The rest of my career to help communities across the United States and internationally... Use data and develop data-driven decision-making protocols, a culture, a commitment to using data. And the framework that's really worked for me that I've found has been very helpful was something called results-based accountability. It's a simple framework that can allow you to use data at the ground level, at the coalition level, to really make mid-course corrections and use data.

But you have to commit to data-driven decision making if you're gonna be successful. Use data... Find an easy way to do it. Which is why in RBA, we think just looking at trend lines make the most sense. Just looking at the trend and then what do we need to do to turn the curve or improve that trend. But there are two things that I would highlight for an organization that's gonna use RBA or for a coalition or a collective impact effort using RBA, is the leadership has to, first of all, commit that we're going to use data-driven decision making.

We are going to put data in the forefront of everything we do at every meeting, at every activity. Whether that's a collective impact meeting, whether that's a work group meeting, or whether that's an individual agency or program meeting... We're gonna look at the data and look at the trend lines and make decisions to improve that trend.

So commitment to data-driven decision-making. At the same time, that leadership either at the coalition level, the collective impact level, or at an agency or program level, has to also say, "And nobody is going to be punished for their data or their results, as long as they are using the data for continuous improvement." Because if you don't say that, then people will be reluctant to share their data, they won't give the data that we need to make decisions. So commitment to data, but commitment that nobody will be punished as long as you're using the data for continuous improvement.

It sounds like that ties in really well with this shared metrics and the collective impact model.

Exactly right.

You become... Multiple organizations coming together, you wanna make sure they are all committed to using the same metrics. And that if one organization is bringing in metrics

that maybe making things look bad, you have to be frank, that that's not going to hurt them.

That's right. And...

And that will only help the movement.

And so what we can create is learning organizations and learning groups and learning and learning coalitions and whatever. And so a quick example, when I was working in Tucson with the United Way in Tucson we were funding after-school programming. The agencies that we funded, we brought together and said, "We want you to collectively identify what performance measures... What data do you think would help you improve."

So they decided that they were going to make sure that they were teaching kids these six skills, and then they track that using data using performance measures. Is anyone better off. Each quarter they would track the number of kids that learned three or more skills and what skills they learned. They then came together collectively and shared that data with each other. And so the one agency could say, "Wow, you're having better success teaching that computer skill than we are. How are you doing it? So we can incorporate that into our program."

So we're trying to tear down the silos that often happen between agencies because it's about... Excuse me... Mutually reinforcing activities, and how do we get agencies to learn from each other and not be competitors?

That's a great example of bringing organizations to create these shared metrics and that shared data. And another really interesting piece I find, this is the backbone, the hub of the collective impact model. Who does that organization tend to be, and if an organization is interested in collective impact, where does that backbone organization come from?

It's a great question. It... Typically, in our experience, it comes from potentially the funders doing it. Many United Ways are serving as the backbone organization, other foundation, local community foundations, other organizations like that. Or there may be an organization that has a broader mission that encompasses many things that could serve that role. The key is that it's being a backbone is not about recognition, it's not about getting the credit, it's about sharing the credit that the collective impact effort does the work collectively, but making sure that there is somebody... A staff person or staff people that are paying attention to make sure that all of those activities, all of those conditions actually occur.

Because... So for example, making sure the agenda for the meetings are based on building trust and relationships, that's necessary. Because organizations don't collaborate, people

do based on relationships and trust. So how can we do that? So one of the things that many backbone organizations will do is that every quarter, every six months, whatever that time frame is, they'll actually send a survey out to their member agencies, the members of the coalition, saying, "Do you feel like your comments are valued? Do you feel like you're trusted? Do you feel like we're doing a good job?"

Whatever those questions are. There's a variety of... You can go online and find a lot of these collective impact questionnaires now. But the importance is somebody's doing that and listening to that. So if they find that the majority of the agencies don't feel like their word is being heard or is valued, they can change what they're doing. They can change the way they structure meetings to value everyone.

And you talk about valuing everyone, you also talked a little bit about who's kind of getting credit for this. So when all these organizations come together, who does get credit for the success of a program?

Well... Certainly the... At an individual program working with clients, they can get some success for the... And recognition if they're actually helping more clients be successful. But the coalition or the collective impact effort really needs to have kind of a name, a brand, if you will so that everybody feels that I'm part of this, and collectively, we're doing better. So they're being very clear that collectively we have a chance of being more effective than independently. And at the same time being very clear that if we're looking...

For example, if we're looking at a result of kids succeed in school, work and life. Okay, that's our result, and we may be looking at some indicator data around high school graduation or school success or things like that. When we're looking at the population level data no one organization, no one activity can cause that to happen on their own. It takes partnerships. So no one agency, no one program can say, "We actually turned that curve," if you will, at the community level. It takes a village to do that.

And you cannot prove that any one strategy is better than another one. All you can prove is that working with my clients, this is what happened. But you cannot prove that any one activity turns the curve, if you will, at the community level, because it takes everything we're doing to be successful. So we have to be careful to be really highlighting that the collective gets the recognition... No one agency... Because you can't prove... All you can prove is that everything we're doing is contributing to that school and life success for kids, and if we're contributing and we're aligning with that to help do that. So it's about contribution and alignment it is never about cause and effect.

Is collective impact the right approach for every problem? And if not then circumstances is collective impact most suited?

Yeah. Well, if we're talking about major community issues around kids succeeding, families succeeding, whatever that is, then it can never be done without a partnership approach. Whether you call it collective impact or not... It's not important, really. But it's gotta be built on partnerships, 'cause no one organization can do it alone. If we're talking about those broad, big issues of quality of life in a community, in a neighborhood, in a state, in a city, however we divide that population, it always is gonna take partnerships. And that's what, again, I think collective impact was developed for.

And the term was coined to help folks understand the conditions of how that can be more effective. So if we're talking about systemic critical issues in a community, it's always gonna take partnerships. On the other hand, if we're talking about a group of clients or families or whatever, then an agency could begin to do it, but they can never do it alone either. So it may not need a collective impact effort, but it's still... At the agency level, it's still gonna be partnerships.

So it sounds like the bigger the problem, the more impactful collective impact can be.

Yep.

So I know many of our listeners may be sitting out there listening to this, and... You mentioned that it doesn't matter whether it's collective impact or not, as long as partnership is occurring. And they're gonna think, "I'm doing partnership." I'm getting out there and collaborating to make things happen. What is really the strength of collective impact over just partnership in general, and why should our listeners care?

Yeah. Well, I think a good way to think about it is that, again, partnerships... So the ingredients of it are... That I think are really important are a common purpose. Being very clear what that purpose is, and that purpose should not be just about building a better service system or improving our services. It really ought to be what is the goal of those services, which is to help kids do better, families to do better, whatever that issue is. And that should be based on the hopes and dreams of the people in the community. So a common purpose is critical.

The second one is building on that, all the partners around the table have to have relationships and trust. Because you can't work together... Organizations don't work together, people do based on common purpose, relationships and trust. So that's the second ingredient.

The third one is really taking that broader perspective of community engagement, that the people we serve need to be co-producers of their own in their community's well-being. So

that we're finding ways to bring them around the table, creating their own tables, but that they are part of the solution, not just recipients of the impact or the service.

And then finally results and accountability so that we are using data to improve. Because we can't improve if we're not looking at data because we're just going on guesses without that. So those are for me, really the key ingredients around collective impact. But the last thing I do wanna highlight... And this was actually one of the major criticisms of collective impact when they first wrote the first paper, is they did not include racial equity and discrimination and inclusion.

And so it has to be based on a foundation of racial equity, of inclusion, of looking at the true story by disaggregating the data by race, by gender, by ethnicity... Whichever is the appropriate way to do that so the data represents the entire true story of the work we're doing. And understanding that to get the changes that we need, we're gonna have to deal with institutional racism, we're gonna have to deal with implicit and explicit bias. And make sure that our policies and procedures don't create barriers. Because when the dust settles, our work is really about removing barriers so people can succeed for themselves and they can contribute to helping everyone succeed.

Well, Dan Duncan, I think you've made an excellent case for collective impact, and... Thank you so much for your time today.

My pleasure, thank you very much, Austin.

Wow, Dan was such a wealth of knowledge and expertise, and he left us with a lot of ideas to consider, such as the importance of bringing community members in as co-producers on our projects and emphasizing data-driven decisions. If you're interested in using data to make more of those mid-course corrections with your organization, you can find info about his results-based accountability tool on our resource guide.

But of all the point Dan made, he most importantly emphasized the necessity to develop our collectives on a foundation of equity. Facing issues such as institutional racism and implicit bias head on. Many organizations are talking about equity, but what does it look like to bring equity into one's work on collective impact or other community organizing strategies? To answer that question we spoke with Glennon Sweeney.

I'm Glennon Sweeney. I am a Senior Research Associate here at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. And we are an Applied Social Science Research Institute. And so we do... Engaged in transformative scholarship, focusing mainly on issues related to race, ethnicity and identity.

Well, thank you so much for telling us a bit about yourself and about the Kirwan Institute. As we're discussing collective impact here, one thing that keeps coming up is this idea of equity. As an expert with the Kirwan Institute, I was hoping you might be able to tell us a little bit about this subject. What is equity?

Equity is the idea that people have equal access to opportunities. It's the idea that everybody's on an equal field or equal starting points in say the race of life. And I'm sure a lot of people have seen that image that has the three people standing at the fence. How it shows that... It shows the difference between equality and equity. Equity is when everybody is able to see over the fence. And so the shortest person gets more boxes because they need more of a lift to see over the fence.

And so you can also think of it in terms of like when we think about the ecology of plants. Malcom Gladwell talks about this in the book Outliers. He talks about the acorn growing into the tallest oak tree. And we know that the acorn was in good soil, it had sunlight, it got enough rain, it didn't get too much rain... Nobody walked on it and trampled it when it was a sapling. A lumber jack didn't cut it down. Nothing ate it when it was still growing... We don't think enough about the ecology of people in neighborhoods... Do all neighborhoods have the same soil?

Good soil. And what is the soil of a neighborhood in this analogy? What are the structures that give people the health that they need? Access to food, access to health care, safe housing, these things... And we don't think about that all the time. This whole culture of poverty mentality that's so prevalent in the United States, really villainizes poor people. That it's your fault that you're poor. You don't work hard enough. And that's just factually incorrect. Poor people on average work much more, a lot of times. They work more hours than a lot of wealthy people. They have to. They aren't making enough money.

And it's the structures in their communities that are really preventing them from accessing opportunity. They're not accessing quality education, and so they're not able to be qualified for jobs that pay living wages or... That's just one example. Those are some of the ways that I think about equity.

Equity wasn't an emphasis, in the original writings on the collective impact by the Stanford Social Innovation Review. Why do you think it's so important for our listeners to consider equity when they're developing their own collective impact initiatives?

'Cause equity is about who has access. Collective... If you're not talking about equity, then I'd say collective impact for who. Who's the collective you're impacting? I think equity is critically important to everything, actually... It would be my argument. I think it's really critical. And collective impact, is about leveraging resources to create the most amount of

good in addressing an issue. Say poverty or whatever... Food security or whatever issue you might be seeking to address or a series of issues.

But people experience things in-equitably. You might have a lot of wealth and I might not have a lot of wealth. Or I might live in a really nice house that's safe, and you might be housing cost burden and struggle... So people experience things unequally. And there are certain groups that disproportionately experience the brunt of issues related to poverty... People of color... Historically marginalized groups.

So equity is critically important, if we wanna address the issues that are being disproportionately experienced by certain groups of people. Those people need to be at the table. When the collective impact model was created, my guess is they weren't at the table, and that's why equity wasn't included.

Equity is so important to consider because obviously our goal of collective impact of any community organizing program is to benefit the people in that community. But if we're not thinking about the equity of those people we're targeting to start with, our end result is not going to be what we want it to be. So we've gotta think about that up front to consider...

Well, and I think it's also about defining the problems. There's a big difference in the way that I, as an academic, as a White middle class woman define problems. Especially problems related to poverty, which I don't experience right now, compared to someone who is living in poverty. I might not be defined... I might not even be identifying the root cause of the problem according to the people who experience it. They're actually the experts. Their lived experience is expert knowledge. It's just as valuable as a PhD, in my opinion.

And so I think it's about also framing the question and identifying the issue to address. That people need to be at the table at the beginning in order to frame those questions because they don't... We don't experience things equally.

This fits so well with this idea of the collective agenda setting that happens and in collective impact. You know today we were talking a lot about collective impact and what the pieces are, and for some of these people going back into their communities, equity can sound like an intimidating issue to address. But you've really highlighted the importance of in that agenda setting, the problem... Who is there to define what that agenda is and what the problem is, that is the beginning of where equity can come in in terms of moving a project forward.

Do you have any tips that some of our listeners might be able to walk away with, that they can use to consider equity as they go out and maybe perform some of these activities for collective impact?

First of all, I think that before you even sit down to think about agenda setting, you have to have rules of how to engage. Or principles that guide how you engage. And so Kirwan has principles of civic engagement that guide how we engage in situations like this. And so some of the principles that I think would be super... Very important in this setting... Especially when you're thinking about privileged people being at the table... Academic, CEOs, directors, people like that. I call it radical humility.

Okay... The idea that there are different types of knowledge that are valuable. Not every valuable type of knowledge comes with a PhD attached to it. Not every person with valuable knowledge has credentials that are like a PhD or a master's degree or a JD or something like that. But that those contributions are just as valuable. And so I think for the people with power and the people who are probably bringing these folks together in a lot of these situations, they need to practice radical humility. They need to be open to the agenda, not going the way they want it to go, or the way they had envisioned. You have to have a flexibility...

Adaptability... Adaptability to changes is how we phrase it at Kirwan in terms of the principles. So I think those are really important. And that... Especially for people in positions like mine coming in and into situations like this. And then another for people, particularly like me is awareness of power and injustice and history... Right. How has history and policy played out to maybe make the community that we're engaging in partnership with distrustful of authority?

What are the traumas this community has experienced? Did this community experience red lining? Have they experienced interactions with police recently that have been negative? Because those things matter. And if I'm coming from a position of authority where maybe I work with the city government, I might not be trusted as much if there are issues with services in the community, with police in the community. And so I have to understand my position. So self-awareness, radical humility and understanding... And understandings of positionality are critically important.

And another thing to think about too, is that in a lot of particularly very low income communities, there are lots of gifts and assets that people bring to the table. But they might not always be aware that they have them. So methods to bring out and help lift up people's assets and the gifts that they're bringing to the table that can help the project are also important. And so I would say that it will take time.

Now... And a lot of time, we're working under grant timelines. And so we don't feel like we have time to build relationships to help people grow into positions. And I think those are things that are critically important.

You've made some really excellent points about the fact that in this common agenda setting, the ideas we come in with need to be open to change. This radical humility... Being willing to change based on what the community really needs is so important. And then in addition to that, there's going to be... There's the need to include as many people from the community as you can in this process of agenda setting, in the planning of your metrics, in your communications.

Having more people at the table is better than less. But some of those people might not realize that the abilities and potential they're even bringing to the table. So really being aware of strategies to help pull that out. To help people become confident in their ability to be a part of this community activism in building something better together.

Well, thank you for taking some time with us today to discuss equity and its interplay with collective impact and why we should be considering it. Thank you again.

Oh... You're welcome. Thank you.

Well, that wraps up today's episode of Public Health Talks. Be sure to join us for part two where we'll be speaking with two different organizations who've gone through the hard work of bringing a collective to life. Be sure to check out the link section on this episode's home page, where you'll find our collective impact resource guide. It's got a ton of valuable resources on bringing collective impact to your organization, including the Kirwan Institute's rules for civic engagement that Glennon Sweeney mentioned.

You'll also find a link to the Region V Public health training center where you can explore many other wonderful learning opportunities. And don't forget to complete a quick evaluation where you can help provide us valuable feedback to improve future episodes.

Public Health Talks is produced by the Center for Public Health Practice at Ohio State University's College of Public Health. OSU Centre for Public Health Practice is a community-based training partner of the Region V Public Health Training Center, which is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Thanks for joining us. See you next time.

Where are you coming from today?

I'm coming from Columbus, an OSU extension as well.

Oh, fantastic. And how are you planning to apply something you learned today about collective impact and bring it to your organization?

So I've been a proponent of collective impact for a long time. I won't go... That's about all I'll say... I think it's an idea of communities and community agencies and community advocates and citizens have to work smarter and not harder. And this concept is what helps them do that. And so if anybody is gonna make a difference, it's gotta be through a collective approach and not individual.

Absolutely. It's a community that makes the change, not an individual.

Absolutely. And for too long, we've been in these roles of non-profits and getting grants, and that's how they functioned. Rather than a collective group getting more grants, and they all bring their strengths to the table and make a bigger difference.

Fantastic.

So that's what this is about?

Thank you so much for your time.

You're welcome. Thank you for asking.

And so where are you coming from today?

I'm actually from Marion, Ohio, and I'm involved in a bunch of different organizations. So I just came here to learn in general about collective impact and how I can... Basically, change a community, I guess.

Fantastic. And how do you think you're going to apply anything you learned from today back to the organizations you work with?

Well, I really think a lot of the stuff that was talked about today is something we need in all communities throughout the nation, not just within mine. But I think having... There were a lot of our local leaders that are here and I've worked with before, so I think it'll just reiterate the collaboration that we're already doing. And then on top of that, we did have one presentation with... Which dealt with a lot about... The discrimination that is systemic, personal... And she kinda went into a lot of different aspects as well as having statistics to back it up. And that was very, very eye-opening.

So I feel like today, if nothing else, it gave the leaders that I work with on a regular basis kind of a new viewpoint. And something that we knew was always there, but this kind of

shows the challenges that we still face because they're implemented so deeply within the construct of our communities.

Excellent. Thank you so much for your time.

Yeah. Thank you.

Where are you coming from today?

I'm Mike Michalski. I'm with the City of Maryland fire department, and the city fire inspector.

And how do you think you're gonna take something you learned here today about collective impact and apply it back in the organizations you work with?

I think the... That the framework that we learned here today to use that and to collaborate with other agencies... 'Cause nobody can do it on their own. And to get people with the same passions and the same likes and the same beliefs on a common goal, I think that's the most important thing.

Absolutely. Working to build that collaborative.

Right. And partnerships. And all the different organizations meetings I go to, it's all based on relationships. So building those relationships with people and to get that thing done. I think that's a very important piece also.

Fantastic, thank you for your time.

Hey, thank you.

+++