

COLLECTIVE IMPACT PANEL SERIES

PUBLIC HEALTH TALKS, PART 2

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The bottom line is, things are not getting better, what once were described as disparities are now chasms. I don't wanna overstate it, but it's an extremely dangerous situation for us right now. So we can believe those words, and we gotta do some things differently.

Collective impact is an art, and we really need to lead the framework with creativity and passion and inspiration.

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Welcome to public health talks, the podcast on emerging public health topics. In this episode, we'll be continuing our two-part exploration of collective impact, a structured form of community organizing, that aligns multiple organizations around a common goal. In our first episode, we explored some of the theory behind collective Impact and the importance of considering equity early in a project. Now, we'll dive deeper into the world of collective impact, exploring its practical application in both small and large organizations. My name is Austin Ozloc, and I'll be your guide today. If you're listening to this on your desktop, but prefer to take the podcast on the go, you can download a copy for your mobile device by clicking on the "download to computer" button on the screen below. Collective impact is only a framework, and the reality is that there can sometimes be growing pains when an organization makes the leap from writing a plan to actually forming a collective. How can we navigate these inevitable problems as they arise? Well, today we'll be hearing from two different organizations to hear about their experience applying collective impact first hand. Let's hear from a smaller organization first working to form their own collective.

My name is Whitney, I work at Marion County OSU Extension Office. I have been working with collective impact since about 2017.

Very exciting. And would you mind for our listeners, telling us a little bit about the project, a little bit of background, so we know what we're working with?

Yeah, our project really came out of a Marion County Auditor Report that told us that there are over 2,000 parcels in Marion County that are tax delinquent, amounting to about \$7 million. And additionally, we know that 14% of our households in Marion experience severe housing problems, so that's overcrowding, high housing cost, lack of kitchen or plumbing facilities. So in response, OSU Extension knew we needed to do something about it. So what we did was identify and brought together key stakeholders in Marion to initiate collective impact.

When and where did this collective impact idea, the seed, get started for you all?

I started in 2017, and it was the first month that I started that I attended a training on collective impact. Marion Public Health had brought in a speaker and he spoke about the

conditions of collective impact. And then in the spring of 2018, I attended the annual collective impact convening.

And it sounds like those offered you a lot of resources and information about collective impact to work forward with. Today, we're open to talk with you to hear about what this really looks like in the real world. Of course, a big part of any collective impact initiative is the collective. Would you mind telling us a little bit about who is a part of your collective, how that came together and who the big players are?

Yeah, so I'll talk about how it came together because I really owe a lot of thanks and gratitude to OSU Extension in Allen County and the Newton School in the city of Lima, who paved the way for this type of work. They worked on the issue of blight in the community, and then really started to generate flexible design and policy strategies to re-use vacant land. So they came to Marion in October of 2018, and they presented to our stakeholders. They have been with us ever since. It includes, like I said, the auditor's office, regional planning commission, the chamber, United Way, ordinary residents, it's really a diverse group, and I think that's what makes us so strong.

Yeah, it sounds like you've got some really strong city partners here within Marion, and who within that collective is serving as your backbone part of the collective impact infrastructure?

We didn't identify right away upfront, but OSU Extension has taken a natural role. People in the community see us as a neutral convener. We're not competing with local dollars like a lot of the non-profits in the community are, and we have access to financial resources and expertise from the university, and we have a lot of experience in group facilitation, data analysis and community advocacy.

That's fantastic and you know, that backbone organization is supposed to exist to help keep the project on track, remain a little bit separate and keep things moving along, and it sounds like OSU Extension has fall into that role really, really effectively. So that gives us a great sense of what your collective is, what you're tackling housing issues here in Marion County, and you're doing it as a team force, a team effort. Let's talk about some of the other components of collective impact and what those have looked like in your project. We'll just kinda work down through all four of them, and hopefully by talking about them, our listeners will get a better sense of what these terms about collective impact really mean in this setting so. Let's talk about common agenda. What has common agenda setting looked like in this Marion collective?

Well, for us setting a common agenda in that having a common understanding of the problem. Blight is such an ambiguous term that a lot of us were throwing around without

really knowing what it means. So right away in our early work group meetings, we pulled language from the Ohio revise code and we clearly defined what do we mean when we say blight and we listed those out in bullets, and that really helped us have some common language and set that common agenda. And we also knew that, besides just having a common definition, a common agenda, that we also had to begin sharing measurement, which leads into the next component.

Absolutely. And go right ahead, and I'm sure that your agenda items really were based on and flowed between that shared measurement aspect and what you were thinking of.

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think what we recognized is, at the time that the group came together, there were two agencies that had developed measures to identify vacant parcels and abandoned properties, but they were measuring differently in different ways from one another, with different definitions, and they weren't sharing their data sets. So naturally, this created a lot of confusion in the community on what figures we were using and how we were going to measure our results. So it really took some tough conversations and putting our egos aside to say, "This one agency has developed this tool. This is the one that we wanna go with for this group," and agreeing upon that resource.

And in this shared measurement aspect, were you able to get those organizations to work together and begin sharing that information?

Yeah. Actually, it's been really amazing. The one organization, even though their mapping tool wasn't selected, they've shared their Excel files with the auditor's office, who has uploaded all of this information onto OSU Extension's website for folks to access, and they're working on a landscape website where it will be posted as well.

Well, what a success, getting those metrics decided on, looking at the landscape of what's already been collected, and working together to collaborate and share those resources and that information. In terms of all these partners, we've talked a bit about the agenda and the metrics used to quantify it. How were you all using these mutually reinforcing activities to work together and build upon each other's efforts?

Well, I think [0:08:15.6] ___ having the shared measurement, and we purchased a license to Clear Impact, which has really helped us put in our common performance measures. So we do have that large population level indicator data that tells us what is the landscape of housing in Marion? But now together, we can put in all of our activities and what we're doing and start measuring our performance as a collaborative, and not just individual agencies. I think though, mutually reinforcing activities has been one of the most difficult parts of collective impact, because it's really been easy to work in silos. If someone isn't attending our work group meetings, they may not recognize our work and then create

another collaborative, so bringing those folks in. And a lot of credit to Marion Public Health, they had recognized that they had a housing coalition, but they weren't getting the attendance and instead of continuing down that path, they recommended their coalition members join our collaborative, and I just really appreciate their collective impact and their attitudes towards working together.

That ties back to what we've talked about here, about this collective vision, about putting the egos aside, and not being one organization that is the champion in this, but the whole collective that is the champion. So it's great that they were able to push that aside. Going ahead and talking a little bit about this, you mentioned that mutually reinforcing activities has been one of the struggles. Do you have any tips for listeners to help avoid that difficulty in the future if they implement this?

I think what I would recommend is identifying funders that are willing to have positions or fund positions that can be that backbone organization, that can oversee all of these reinforcing activities, can be at the table at multiple coalitions and meetings, be that organization that organizes the communication. A lot of my time is spent just relationship building, having daily phone calls, answering daily emails, and keeping track of all the various activities in the community. Without the support of Extension and the role that I'm leading and taking, this work would be really difficult.

And I think that this just really hits on the importance and the essential element of that backbone organization to be centrally organizing everybody's efforts, making sure these mutually reinforcing activities are happening, and preventing those silos from forming, like you mentioned. And it sounds like this backbone organization is Marion County OSU Extension has been a part of that continuous communication as well. Is that correct?

Yeah, absolutely. I think Extension and United Way have been great partners too. Collective Impact, the trend has been backbone organizations, but we're seeing things evolve to talking about backbone functions and each organization doing the little bit that they can to support the overall collective impact framework. So in Marion County, I've seen that United Way and Extension are sharing those functions.

So we've talked a lot about a lot of different pieces here and how they can connect together. Is there anything else as you've brought this collective forward into the community that you felt like has been difficult with the elements of collective impact?

Well, I think one thing to keep in mind is when we first presented a framework to the community, we had a five-week lunch and learn series. And we had it all planned out, we thought everyone was gonna appreciate and love it, but they really struggled to understand the concepts and they were expecting a linear process, a formula for them to follow. What

we recognized is they weren't quite ready to implement collective impact, and we need to provide them more resources. So taking the extra time to add resources to our website, offering more webinars. We did the impact assembly and we'll continue to do those things. We've also just had to have courageous conversations about our own institutions and what our history of collaboration has been, what it hasn't been, at times when we've worked with, for, and against each other. And then thinking about, one thing that always gets brought up in collective impact is whose logo is on the flag. That sounds so silly, but everyone asked that with collective impact, and so to really co-brand with each other, it's building those relationships. I think Dan said this, that organizations don't collaborate; people do. So spending that extra time to co-produce with folks and inviting more people of color to join in our work.

And it sounds like, this continued conversation about what collective impact is, is not only important for the community and getting them on board, but also for the organizations within your collective and making sure everybody stays on the same page.

Yeah, absolutely.

Now, for our listeners a little bit earlier, when you did mention the Clear Impact tool, that's one of the resources available through Dan Duncan's organization who we heard from before, and a whole list of resources is available at the end of this podcast.

And the other thing I would recommend to listeners is to reach out to your local Extension office. That we have an extension office in every county in the state of Ohio. And like I said before, extension is that mutual convener in the community that can do this type of work.

If you're listening to this outside of Ohio, I'm sure there's other extension offices within your state for your publicly funded as the university as well. Now, today, we've also been talking about equity. This is a theme that we've been coming back to because it's become a part of this conversation and hopefully an essential element of these collective impact initiatives. Would you mind telling us a little bit about what this has looked like in your collective and how you all are hoping to bring equity to the table?

Yeah, I would say equity and anti-racism has been paramount to our work in Marion. In Marion, a lot of neighborhoods have struggled from decades long of disinvestment, and most recently, the housing crisis really reflects that underlying conditions that prevent or stall our economic recovery. Like many divested neighborhoods today, it also reflects some harmful legacy of racist and unjust policies. So whatever the cause, that there's one cause or a combination of causes, we know we have to address equity in our work. And there's no question that the cost of these practices and policies have contributed to vacancy, abandonment, and private properties in our community. So the work that we've done with

equity in our collective impact framework is OSU Extension's really taking the lead on developing a grassroots alliance to empower ordinary residents to engage in leading decisions that improve their own quality of life and liberation. And our main aim is to really broaden the leadership base and provide opportunities for these emerging and existing leaders to become more actively involved in the public decision-making arena, and that includes working with housing and blight and reuse of vacant land.

On a very practical level, this means that we have an incubator where residents and institutions are actively involved with the stewardship of Marion's land, and together, we're building out programs that are tailored to the community, and together developing a long-term vision.

You are really bringing the community into this and this equity piece, and as you know, you're talking about overt racism, you're talking about institutional racism, you're talking about implicit bias, and I love how you all are putting that front and center, making that a part of the conversation, not pushing aside, but making it a really big piece of your movement, so that's fantastic.

Yeah, and recognizing that residents have assets to contribute to the work that we're doing. So often we reach out to these dis-invested communities and think that we need to help improve their conditions or change their circumstances. But sometimes we just need to stand back and create the space for them to do great work. In Marion County, a great group of residents have already taken on projects on their own, such as renaming Cass Avenue to Martin Luther King Drive, and that accomplishment has been inspiring to our other community voices in Marion. And the great thing is that it didn't need institutional support, that this is something they created and did on their own, and the little help that Extension provided was just to cover the cost of some of the fees involved with changing the street name.

So it sounds like, that this collective has really been focused on building up the community, and I love that. To kinda wrap things up here, Whitney, we've got a lot of listeners out there who are listening to this, overwhelmed, thinking about "How am I gonna make this collective? How am I gonna bring this idea forward?" What one piece of advice would you have kinda moving forward with somebody to encourage them and something that they might be able to take from today?

The advice that I always give to folks, and I said this at the Impact assembly, is that collective impact is an art, and we really need to lead the framework with creativity and passion and inspiration. And we need to allow the framework to be porous, to allow things to come in and out, and be comfortable with that even though it's something different that we've never done before. I also compare it to... I reference a lot of paintings, and this

technique called pointillism, which you've probably seen before; it's the paintings that have all the tiny little dots and up close, the canvas is filled with those tiny dots, but from a distance, the small dots transform. And this is really symbolic of the vision that we have for collective impact; it's all those tiny dots working together for a grander, connected all. And our communities need that type of collaboration to be vibrant and to really move the needle on these tough issues.

Well, today we've talked a lot about this collective forming and reducing redundancy by finding people in the community who are already doing this work, doing good, great things, to bring them together to build that common agenda. And then moving from there, looking at what data is already on there, looking at what people are doing, looking at what metrics and measurements are already being collected and making sure that you're collaborating together to share the information. And then finally, you really emphasized this backbone organization, how essential they are to ensuring that continuous communication, but also making sure that those silos don't develop and that you can have these mutually reinforcing organizations.

The way you summarize that is so clear and concise, and having an outsider describe the process is really bringing even clarity to me.

Well, Whitney Gherman with Marion County OSU Extension, thank you so much for your time today and for sharing a bit about your experience.

Thanks so much for having me.

Whitney gave us a great appreciation for the experience of implementing collective impact at the organizational level, but what about the funders of these collectives? As community partnerships are changing, how can we expect the landscapes of grants and funding opportunities to change as well? We spoke with the head of United Way of Greater Lorain County to hear some of the lessons they've learned during their transition to funding collectives over programs. I'm here with Bill Harper, if you wouldn't mind just tell us a bit about yourself, your role in your organization.

I've been the Executive Director of United Way of Greater Lorain County now for nine years. I took this job on the heels of a 33 year career in mental health, and it's been a great experience. We are a good size United Way, as far as United Ways go, about 10 staff, a little over a \$3 million budget, great board of directors, a great community to work in, and it's been a good ride.

I was hoping you might be able to tell us when you first heard about collective impact, and how long have you been doing this with this work specifically?

Yeah, very good. I came into this organization in July of 2010, and the board was pretty concerned about where we were going. We were struggling for a purpose, what was our relevance, how could we be more relevant in the community? Our collections had declined and of course, we had been a traditional fundraiser, allocator of funds was primarily our role in the community, so the board and I explored some other options, and with me being new and with me having the luxury of having all this experience working in communities, we began to explore what we might do. In June of 2012, I went to the Ohio United Way conference, and Charles Wright, a social worker from the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, did a presentation on effective collaborations. And so as it turned out, collective impact really had its start with John Kanya and his colleagues, and they wrote their first article about collective impact in winter of 2011, if I'm not mistaken, in the Stanford Innovation Review, and what that article was about was what was going on in Cincinnati between the Greater Cincinnati Foundation and United Way of Greater Cincinnati and others.

So I'm still exploring how to bring the impact about in the community that we wanted. In August of that year, our local community foundation was doing their strategic plan, and they actually brought John Kanya in, it was an evening kind of a deal to talk with John, I learned more from him. Those articles were a lot about the framework for collective impact, it gave you principles and maybe the architecture for it, but not really how to make this happen. And at that point, we also let the agencies know that we aren't gonna be doing program funding anymore, we really felt strongly that that wasn't going to get our community to where it needed to be, and that was all based on the needs that we saw in the community. We brought a bunch of people together in the community to identify what we should accomplish. So I asked the person that was in charge of economic development in our community, "Hey, would you lead the advisory council to help us decide what to do in the area of financial stability?" "Oh yeah, sure." I asked the Health Commissioner to lead the health piece, "Sure, glad to do it." And then in the area of education, I asked the basically, the county school superintendent, and he joined on, and then we involved, it wasn't a bunch of administrators, we involved lots of other folks who had various levels of experience, different roles in the community in those areas.

So that helped us decide what to do, then it was about how to do it, and we really didn't know it as collective impact at that point, we knew it as collaboration, and we went to school on what was collaboration. And so we came up with a very precise definition of what collaboration meant, it was not networking, it wasn't other variations of working together, it was a specific definition that required people to change the way they do things, to join together in a specific aim, and to make a commitment together to bring about this change in ways that were not necessarily first and foremost beneficial to their organization.

That's what we're talking about today, right? We're talking about collective impact, a specific framework for collaboration to help make this a little bit more and more straightforward for organization and helping parse out what you said, it's a framework, but it's not a road map in terms of helping organizations think about what this looks like and how it's going to come together. That's what we're here to do. We're here to help organizations start to think about, with my idea how do I turn this into a collective impact initiative?

And you know the pressures, if you kinda think of like a force field analysis here, so the pressures on one hand is Greater Lorain County is like a lot of communities, there are great disparities in educational outcomes, health outcomes, very close to one another, we have those disparities and that was where our call to action was, "Is this okay?" "If we continue what we're doing, we're gonna continue to have those disparities, or is this okay?" And so we had that pressure, on the other hand we've got in the United Way world, you've got corporate executives, their view is, "How can we with the least amount of time and resources, how can we convert raw materials into some kind of finished product or service?" We had to convince those folks that this isn't quite that tight. And actually we lost a few, we lost a few funders, we lost a few supporters who said, "You know, that just sounds like a lot of administrative overhead to me." And so it sounds like from this you kinda went through a revamping of United Way of Greater Loraine County.

Right.

And it sounds like you went in with some targeted goals of a few different kind of sub-collectives that formed each with a different kind of mission.

That was the key. Is that true?

You have great clarity about what our aim was.

Yeah.

And so we started with those goals. Now, I think it's important to recognize that these were not something we cooked up in our basement and then announced. It was based on a lot of research, social demographic information, but also a lot of community conversations with groups, all kinds of groups out there, so that when we came forward and said, "Hey, this is the work that we wanna do." They would say, "Yeah, I agree, that's the right stuff. That's what we ought to be." And the key for us was we weren't so bold as to say, "Okay, we're gonna do this for the whole community, and we're gonna get it done in 10 years." We said, "Let's focus on specific neighborhoods, where necessary. In some cases, we might be able to work through the whole county, but let's not over-promise. And so, first of all, we said, "Okay, we're gonna be specific about what we're gonna accomplish, where we're

gonna accomplish it, with whom and during what time period?" And from the start, we said, this is a generation or more. So if you're giving to United Way, and you expect me to come back in six months to a year and say, "Hey, problem solved." We're not the right place to give you money [0:27:35.0] ____.

And it sounds like a big part of this was the planning and making sure there was a plan in place.

Mm-hmm.

I obviously wanna talk about that more and what that's looked like, but for our listeners, I'm gonna take a step back and just remind them of the five components of the framework of collective impact.

Yep.

There's developing a common agenda?

Yep.

Setting shared metrics?

Mm-hmm.

Ensuring mutually reinforcing activities?

Yep.

Continuing communication between partners?

Right.

And making sure that there's the establishment of that backbone organization to keep everybody on track, which it sounds like United Way served in that role for these collectives.

Actually, again, kind of our changes in the way we approached this was, so I'm de-funding these 30 agencies, many of whom have been funded for decades. Initially my thought was, "Okay, well, let's have conversations with those folks." So I asked to meet with each of their executive directors, I met with them monthly on a brown as well as their board chair, if not their full board. And I went alone and I basically said, "This is where we're going, this is what we want to accomplish." And I was very open and honest with them whether or not this seemed to fit with what they did. In some cases it was, "Hey, wow, this is in your

wheelhouse. This is perfect for you guys, I really hope that you would consider being a backbone organization for a collaborative around this." Others, I'd have to be honest with them and say, "You know, this isn't what you do, unless you change your mission, I think our relationship is gonna have to end." So we went through that process, and the idea was to try and get those agencies that we had always worked with to become backbones.

So it sounds like you were trying to bring a lot of these collectives forward at the same time with a few different focuses, trying to bring in the agencies who were working with.

Yep.

Setting them up as backbones, running into some hurdles.

Yeah.

You mentioned that maybe the establishment of these backbone organizations was one hurdle, but of these five elements of collective impact, What have you seen organizations struggle with most, has there been a new commonality in that?

Yeah, well, just to kind of go down through them, so the common agenda, we established that, that was clear right from the get-go. What's the target? What are we trying to hit here? The metrics piece, when we were funding 30 agencies in 52 programs, I had metrics for one of those 52 programs because people didn't have the capacity to do it or they didn't see it as important, or they were allowed to do that, so we said, "Okay, we're gonna do the metrics here." We're gonna create a position here and that's totally responsible for educating, training and then collecting the data and sharing that, so we did that piece, with the ensuring mutually reinforcing activities, that's a tough one. People have to give up their turf in order to help their neighbor do better, so they can do better, that comes with time. It's not a big hurdle, but it requires giving up that turf and that takes a while. [0:30:37.2] _____ communication... We said, "You know, collaboratives ought to meet every other week." If it's a month? Especially at the start, a month goes by and you get back together and you say, "You know what? Everybody had these assignments, nobody's done any of them." And we'll make another commitment, and it doesn't get done.

That's dead long.

And eventually... You know how that works.

Yes.

But every two weeks, you gotta jump on it. You know, it's coming up. So probably the most difficult one was, if I go back and do it over again, I think I would have been more rigorous

with choosing the backbone organization, and probably would have taken on more of it ourselves with more certainty maybe. Yeah, backbone organization, we went through a few until we really landed on those that do a good job for us.

And with those backbone organizations, for our listeners who were starting to piece together their collective, starting to think about what that looks like. What is the struggle with the backbone organization? And what can they do to help make sure they're meeting the right people for the job?

Well, for many of them in the non-profit world, and we're totally to blame for it, the funders, whether it's foundations or United Way or others, or the public sector, we're totally blamed for it. What we've done is we've created a competitive ecosystem for non-profits, and so those organizations that have done well under that competitive ecosystem, who have been mercenary and merciless in feeding upon their lesser rivals. They're not gonna give up to collaborate, they've been successful, they've got the English majors who write the grants, they've got them at their disposal. I wish I had done more in terms of exploring with the leadership within these organizations. Are you a collaborative leader or a competitive leader? Because if you're a competitive leader, it's obviously working for you. You're not gonna come over to this unless it's constantly learning, open to new ideas, searching out those new ideas and excited about bringing them to the table.

This tension between the backbone organization and finding the right fit for that is, that you hear backbone organization, you're like okay this is the one organization within the collective. It kinda gets called out in the framework. It's the only one that's solely is mentioned, so that makes them seem like a leader.

Yeah. They wanna see themselves in the paper and all that type of thing, and that's important, certainly. One of the things that wasn't on my radar at all when we started this was the importance of branding our efforts. And luckily, one of our first collaboratives, they got that. They actually brought in a marketing branding expert, and we thought, "Oh yeah, okay. So now they have their own logo, so they can identify with that", and so we jumped on that bandwagon and said, "Okay, we get it. We have to brand this thing, we have to market it, we can't just be sitting back and say what we're doing good work, come and see what we're doing", and that was important.

Okay. Shifting gears a little bit, we've been talking about all of these different pieces of collective impact, but we've also been talking about equity. Earlier, we were talking with Glennon Sweeney, and she defined equity as equal access to opportunities. I was hoping you might be able to talk a little bit about the work the United Way has done here, and how they've incorporated equity.

Yeah. I think it's interesting. So I think you can apply equity to the purpose behind our work, the lack of equity, lack of social equity within our community, and really it goes to social justice, I think. Justice, I think, is even a better word than equity. It's probably a more radical word, but being a social worker at United Way, I feel comfortable with it.

Oh, Glennon Sweeney talked about justice as well.

Okay, okay.

And he... Go for it.

[laughter]

Okay, very good. So yeah, it's all about do people have what they need to be the best version of themselves? And I think it's an ongoing struggle. It needs to really permeate all of our work, both in terms of, What fuels our passion is the lack of social justice in our community, the lack of equity, and we throw that in people's faces all the time. We share statistics about the differences between one zip code to another in terms of premature death and disability due to the zip code here in Lorraine versus a zip code somewhere else in the community. One of the things that we've done that's been... We were a little bit nervous about doing it, but it's turned out great, is getting our corporate partners to explore the neighborhoods where we're working, that are in most cases, less than a mile away from where they are in these corporate headquarters. That has turned out, Austin, to be unbelievably emotional for those corporate folks. There seems to be a great deal of shame that they experience going into those neighborhoods that are so close by that they haven't been familiar with.

And I think there's an inner understanding that, wait a minute, I could be there. Here I have all of this benefit that I've gotten through my life to where I am, and yet these other folks who are just as capable, could be in the seat that I'm in, are out here struggling. And so, yeah. I think equity, justice, permeates everything we do, and particularly our focus throughout all of our work on low-income working families that struggle a lot.

And it sounds like part of your work as United Way has been bringing some visibility to these issues of equity, and the zip code differences and communicating those to your funders, communicating to the organizations you work with, and just bringing it all to the top of people's minds.

Yup, yup.

Now, United Way as United Way, and correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like you're in the unique position now where you are funding collectives. You are having collectives form,

come to United Way, you submit applications to get funded as a collective. Now, some of our listeners, they might already have their idea of what this collective is gonna be, they're just a step away from starting to put these pieces together.

Yeah.

And now they've got the tough task of taking that idea and turning it into an application. Do you have any tips in terms of what are you looking for on paper to say, "This is gonna be a successful collective, something we're behind?"

Well, this was the struggle. So we didn't want to over-prescribe what this was going to be. It really needed to be something that was owned by and designed by each of the collaboratives, so we did put together what we call a letter of inquiry that had as part of that, a business plan. So the process looks like this; first, there's an organization that's got a few folks they're working with on a specific issue that is tied to our target outcomes. That's what we're interested in, that's what we're focused on. If they're interested in working on the opioid crisis specifically, really big problem in our community, it's not something we can do right now. Some other folks are doing. We could certainly share with them how we think they ought to approach it through the collective impact model, but that's up to them, that's not something we're putting time and energy into. As we were developing this collaborative, an organization comes to us saying, "Hey, I've got two or three folks, we're having some conversations." So first step was, "Okay, well, let's qualify you as a backbone organization." We actually had some forms for folks to fill out. Tell us about the executive director or the CEO of the organization. Are they a collaborative leader? Is there a person that's gonna be leading this collaborative specifically from the organization?

What about their background? Are they a collaborative leader or a competitive leader? And then, we looked at the capacity organization. Are they capable of dealing with HR? Human resource issues. Where are they funding-wise, are they stable? If they're just hunting resources to stay in business, probably not the organization we wanna work with. We did that and then we said, "Okay, put together a planning grant application." And it was just a two, three pager. Give me this idea of what you're working towards and how you're gonna do that, and then we'll give you \$10,000 to develop that. And we thought when we first started, so we thought, Okay, it'll take them two or three months to then develop a business plan. And we put together what that business plan needed to include, so we prescribe that. But here's the key, we said, "First of all, there's not gonna be a deadline for getting that business plan in." That turned out to be amazingly important because it ended up taking them an average of about 14 months to put a business plan together. And the other piece we said to them is, "Once we accept your business plan, we're gonna give you three years worth funding. And our horizon is gonna be 10-20 years, so don't feel like you have to get everything done all at once."

And then here was the kicker, and I'm sure folks in philanthropy are gonna say, "No, this doesn't work." But it does. We said, "The exercise of putting the business plan together is really that's what it is. It's an exercise of beginning to develop your collaborative muscle, to engage your partners." And you couldn't do it without... That's why it took 14 months, 'cause the partners had to put it together. And then we said, "Okay, once we approve that business plan, you can change everything in that business plan the next day after we give you the check, because what we expect is for you to be continuously learning about what you're trying to accomplish and how to go about it. We expect you to continuously experiment." So, the business plan is a snapshot in time. And then, we provided some rigorous training to them around how to make change in a system, and how to experiment. How to run experiments. And that's how that move forward, and it's been magical the way that that's advanced. All during that time, we're a partner in the collaborative, were a signer to the MOU, we're more than just someone who provides resources. We're a partner.

It sounds like talking about this, there's a huge emphasis on collaboration and how that has to come down all the way to the business planning of this process, and seeing that collaboration visible in the product they're putting forward.

Right.

And then also, that there's gonna be some adaptability to it. That you know what you have now is going to change over time, but that you still have to put your best foot forward, in terms of showing that you have a solid plan in place.

Yeah. You've got the chops to do it.

You've got the partners in place. That you have everything you need. Well, I think that's terrifically helpful for our listeners who are thinking about moving this idea to the next step.

Yeah, 'cause most funders are gonna say, "Okay, we're gonna give you a year grant at most." Maybe if it was something that was a little bit farther, but you gotta figure out everything ahead of time. You've gotta come to us for any change in your proposal, or in your budget, or all that. You don't have to come to us at all. We just give them 1/12th of their annual allocation every month. We're at all the meetings, so we know what's going on and we contribute to that. It's difficult, and we've learned how to, in most cases, I sometimes don't hold to this as well as I should, we've learned when to step back and when to assert ourselves. But, we don't want them looking to us for what's okay, because ultimately, if our funding went away tomorrow, we would hope that the collaboratives would continue. That would be our hope.

Yeah.

It's not like that we're walking away because we see our funding as being that foundation that the collaboratives... As other funding comes and goes, and we leverage a lot of funds for the community, other than ours through collaboratives, we provide that funding so they've always got the foundation to build on.

And you've really framed a great picture of what a successful process of collective impact can look like for people. I think that you've really hit on an important piece of this process for so many areas. To wrap things up, for people who are listening to this podcast and this is the first time they've heard of collective impact, they might have been doing community programming for 20 years already, and they're hearing this and they're saying, "What I'm doing works just fine. Who are you to come and tell me?"

For a lot of folks it's been a buzz word that's been around for about five or six years, and they've gone, "Oh, that's another fad, that's gonna go on."

Exactly, so to those listeners as well, why is this important? Why is this something we should pay attention to?

Well, I think it's extremely important because the bottom line is things are not getting better, unfortunately. What once were described as disparities are now chasms between economic status, health status, educational status of our communities. I would have to say that it is extremely dangerous. I don't wanna overstate it, but it's an extremely dangerous situation for us right now as a democracy, as a nation. We believe in certain tenets, equal opportunity among them. And I think the piece that was mentioned earlier in terms of equity is underlying that equal opportunity. We believe those words in our founding documents, and we gotta do some things differently. And so collective impact, which will probably morph into something else down the road, they always do, but the idea of working together, bringing the public sector, the corporate sector and the non-profit sector, as well as all of the informal networks in the community all together, all putting the same yoke on themselves and pulling this forward is extremely important. And collective impact gives a framework for doing that. And I think what we've been successful in doing is to really put the nuts and bolts about, at least in one community, how this has worked.

It sounds like we need change, and collective impact is one way to maybe get us to where we need to be.

Absolutely.

Well, thank you so much for your time today.

My pleasure.

I really appreciate you speaking with us.

Thanks, Austin.

Whether you were someone who'd never heard of collective impact, a person already considering forming a collective in your community, or a member of a seasoned collective that's been running for years, we hope you still walked away from today's episode having learned something new about collective impact. Be sure to check out the link section on this episode's homepage, where you'll find our collective impact resource guide. It's got a ton of valuable resources on bringing collective impact to your organization. You'll also find a link to the Region V Public Health Training Center, where you can explore many other wonderful online 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 Center 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 & Human Services. Thanks for joining us. See you next time.

Where are you coming from today?

Yeah, I'm coming from Knox County, I'm with the OSU Extension Office of Knox County SNAP Ed program.

Fantastic, and how do you think you're gonna apply anything you learned here today back in the organizations you work with?

Yeah. I'm a part of a couple of different coalitions in Knox County, our food council, and our Creating Healthy Communities, and I think there's a lot of projects that are going on, and a lot of groups that are doing a lot of great things, so it's bringing it all together, trying to figure out, "Okay, who's really the backbone, and how can we bring all of these people together and make people aware of everything that's already going on so we don't replicate anything."

Fantastic, so it sounds like you're gonna go right back and get collective impact in action.

That's the plan. That's my goal.

Awesome, thank you for your time.

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you.

Where are you coming from today?

I'm coming from... I live here in Marion, Ohio, so not too far.

And what organization do you represent today?

I am a community member, I represent the Marion Public Health Department, the Black Heritage Council of Marion, and also the Peace and Freedom Committee. I'm wearing a lot of different hats today.

Lots of hats, lots of hats. And how do you think you're gonna take something you learned here today about collective impact and bring it back to the organizations you work with?

Well, I think the important thing for me as far as the collective impact was with our membership as to what can drive especially, grant writing and application, but most importantly, will allow us to have vision for what's good for our citizens here in Marion.

Yeah, developing that common agenda to rally around.

Right, right, right. Exactly, Exactly.

Fantastic, thank you so much for your time.

Thank you for talking to me.

So where are you coming from today?

I came down from Cuyahoga County.

How are you planning to apply something that you learned today about collective impact back to the organizations you work with?

I'm a collaboration consultant and I was just talking here, that one of the things that I will be using from today's session is how to better use data to inform the decision-making of collective efforts. I talk about that a lot, I know how important it is, but I don't have the technical comfort to do it, and I was introduced to some tools that'll allow me to help my clients use data to advance their collective work.

Fantastic, well, I'm glad to hear that even somebody who has plenty of experience in collective impact is still able to grow from today's session.

Oh, yeah, we're always learning. Right, Christine? What is the one thing we can guarantee about collective impact? We're always learning.

Everyday is different.

Everyday is different.

Constant improvement. Thank you so much for your time.

Thank you.

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