



Eric Brower

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Collective Impact Best Practices Analysis

Numerous collective impact organizations exist across the nation that seek to improve the condition of youth in regard to educational access and achievement. The Albany Promise is one of these organizations and can benefit from reflecting on the practices of similar organizations. This analysis examines the practices of Champaign-Urbana Cradle to Career (Champaign, Illinois), Mission: Graduate (Albuquerque, New Mexico), and Thrive Chicago (Chicago, Illinois). It is determined that various strategies regarding data collection, information sharing, goal setting, and community partner relations are key to the success of the collective impact groups that were analyzed. Implementing such practices may help The Albany Promise to better utilize its resources and facilitate coordination with partner organizations.

Introduction

The programs that were selected for this study were primarily chosen based on the demographics of the cities that the organizations operate in. Cities similar in size to Albany, such as Champaign were chosen due to their similar size as compared to Albany. Likewise, cities much larger than Albany, including Chicago and Albuquerque were also examined because these larger cities have more highly-developed cradle-to-career collective impact organizations due to a higher demand for their services. Table 1 shows the demographics of each city in this report. The methods of the study included email questionnaires and telephone conversations with representatives from each organization. The best practices of each organization, based on responses to questions on organizational practice collected via telephone and email, were then determined and compiled herein.

Table 1: Demographics of Cities in Analysis

| City | Total Population | Percent white | Percent Black | Percent Hispanic | Percent Living in Poverty |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Albany, NY | 98,469 | 57.0% | 30.8% | 8.6% | 11.5% |
| Albuquerque, NM ^a | 561,379 | 40.3% | 2.3% | 48.1% | 18.5% |
| Champaign, IL | 86,096 | 67.8% | 15.6% | 6.3% | 27.3% |
| Chicago, IL | 2,720,546 | 45.0% | 28.9% | 32.9% | 22.7% |

All demographic information from U.S. Census Bureau (2014) for all cities except Albuquerque, NM.

^a: Portions of Albuquerque, NM data from U.S. Census Bureau (2014) and portions from Albuquerque Economic Development (2015).

Champaign-Urbana Cradle-to-Career (CUC2C)

Overview

Champaign-Urbana Cradle to Career is located in Champaign, Illinois and has been in operation for three years. Between the two school districts that it serves, there are 14,500 total students. Of those students, approximately 51% of students are White, 35.5% are Black, and 11% are Hispanic. The served high schools show promising graduation rates. Overall, 87% of students graduate from high school. Of Black and Hispanic students, 81% and 84% graduate from high school, respectively (Kelly 2016). These graduation rates are slightly lower than the 86% average of Illinois students graduating from high school on-time (Illinois State Board of Education 2015). In terms of demographics, Champaign and Albany do exhibit slight differences, however, they have relatively similar populations.

CU2CC is not affiliated with the Strive Together Network and has an extensive number of partners. 118 total organizations are associated with this collective impact effort. CUC2C boasts a 72% participation rate per month from these organizations. CUC2C operates on an all-volunteer basis and seeks to engage both nonprofit and for-profit organizations in its efforts. Partnered organizations include businesses, hospitals, health centers, schools and after school programs. In terms of meeting their goals, CUC2C rates itself at 7.5 out of 10 submitting that they have been successful in reaching many of their short-term goals. However, they have a longer road ahead in meeting their major aim: improving graduation rates. CUC2C believes they will be near its goal graduation rates in roughly 10 years (Kelly 2016).

Best Practices

Goal Setting

Perhaps the most important CUC2C practice is allowing partners to help dictate the goals and future of the partnership. The group believes that because the network is the sum of its parts, the parts must be allowed a voice in directing the future of the entire organization. CUC2C has found that this approach works well and increases the sense of investment that the associated nonprofits and businesses have in the collective impact group. The heads of the group recognize that the collective impact is made up of members of the community. It serves the community, and is itself, a member of that community. Therefore, it is important to let the associated organizations have a sense of determining the partnership's future (Kelly 2016).

Measuring

CUC2C utilizes statistics and numeric tracking for many tasks associated with their work. First, using statistics and figures on student readiness and the effect that programs around the nation have on the matter, CUC2C has had great success in encouraging more businesses and nonprofits to join their effort. These figures allow potential partners to see what impact their membership could have and helps to influence their decision to join the group. Statistics and numeric tracking are also important as they help the organization to see its progress toward its goals and simplifies reporting on their impact using concrete figures (Kelly 2016).

Adding Partners

CUC2C adds partners and encourages their assistance in a number of ways. First, CUC2C is open to any organization joining their network that has an interest in combatting the issues of educational access,

achievement disparities, and student readiness. CUC2C is willing to recruit a great variety of organizations because of the investment that they believe the entire community has in the education of students (Kelly 2016).

Second, CUC2C also tries to leverage the many relationships that have been formed in order to obtain new partnerships. In one case, the organization had been trying to get a mental health services provider to join the collective, but with little success. However, when a local hospital joined the group, the mental health provider wanted to become a partner as well. This is just one case that was cited in influencing other organizations to join the collective (Kelly 2016).

Additionally, CUC2C finds that it is important to hold meetings with groups of prospective partners to pitch the organization to them. Representatives from the collective show the impacts of certain programs and how the programs will impact these potential partners in the future. These meetings also allow ample discussion time between the prospective partners and the collective in order to generate engaging conversation that fosters action (Kelly 2016).

New Programs

CUC2C believes that their strategy of focusing on adding programs slowly over time has been effective in improving their offerings and expanding their services. CUC2C tries to add about one new program per year. This allows them to devote due attention to that program and ensure that it becomes established before shifting their attention to the next program or service that they would like to add (Kelly 2016). Mission: Graduate

Overview

Mission: Graduate is based in Albuquerque, New Mexico and a Strive Together Network collective impact. Albuquerque has a higher Nonwhite population than White population with the plurality of residents being Hispanic. As is the case with many larger municipalities, including Albany, a clear achievement gap exists among White, Black, and Hispanic students when high school graduation rate is considered. The graduation rate in the Albuquerque area as of 2015 for White students was 73.6%. For Black and Hispanic students, this rate is 62.9% and 67.2%, respectively. The State average high school graduation rate is 68.6%, putting White students above the average and Black and Hispanic students below the State average. About 72% of Albuquerque Public High School Students make the transition to higher education, with rates by racial group similar to that of the high school graduation rate of each group, thus further highlighting the racial achievement gap (Mission: Graduate 2016). Mission: Graduate was studied due to Albuquerque's high Nonwhite population and clear racial achievement gap.

Best Practices

Goals

Mission: Graduate's long-term goal is to see 60,000 additional degrees and certificates in Central New Mexico by 2020. To track their organizational progress, Mission: Graduate does a fair amount of data analysis. The organization sets goals and implements new programs to meet its larger initiatives based on what appears to be working according to the data that they collect (Wimborne 2016). The organization sets both long and short-term goals and tracks progress toward them.

Measuring

Mission: Graduate is highly focused on data in their organizational practices. The organization tracks its progress and programmatic effectiveness and efficiency by collecting and assessing data. Mission: Graduate gathers data on changes that are made in their programs to determine if the change is having an impact on that program's success. Furthermore, Mission: Graduate encourages its partnered organizations to collect data on their own programs and operations and requests that they report that data to Mission: Graduate. This allows the collective impact to track what partners are doing, and what level of impact a particular program or partner is having on meeting the group's goals. The organization explains that a good way to think of what data to collect is by considering two questions:

- 1) How much did we do?
- 2) How well did we do it?

Mission: Graduate believes that an organization should not think in terms of "Did we make a difference?" because this is a hard question to measure with data. The two previously stated questions can be assessed very clearly with data analysis and are always considered in Mission: Graduate's planning (Wimborne 2016).

Partner Relations

Mission: Graduate recognizes that organizational decisions must be both "top-down" and "bottom-up". This is to say that Mission: Graduate unilaterally makes some organizational decisions that affect partners. However, not all decisions can come this way. Some changes in the organization must come from the partners, something that CUC2C also believes is important in a collective impact. If only top-down decisions are made, partners may feel disillusioned and lose their sense of being an equal member of a larger group. For this reason, bottom-up changes and decisions must exist so that partner organizations can have a sense of determination in the collective impact's operations (Wimborne 2016).

To facilitate direction and action, Mission: Graduate divides its partners into "strategy groups" that coordinate their similar or relatable services toward a broader outcome. This allows partners to see how their efforts interconnect with those of other partners. The strategy groups are allowed to set their own united goals and then create goals for their organization that work toward meeting those of the strategy group (Wimborne 2016).

Mission: Graduate also believes that when meetings are held there must be a core purpose to it. Meetings are a time investment for organizations. Therefore, if nothing is getting done at meetings, partners will be driven away from the collective impact group, seeking to make better use of organizational time. Meetings should have a clear purpose and takeaways so that partners feel that they are getting a return on their time investment. Mission: Graduate believes that each meeting should include a concrete task that needs to be accomplished, discussed, or worked toward before adjourning (Wimborne 2016).

Thrive Chicago

Overview

Thrive Chicago is based in Chicago, Illinois and, like The Albany Promise, seeks to combat issues regarding educational access and achievement. Thrive Chicago is another Strive Together Network organization. The Chicago Public School District is 9.4% White, 38.9% Black, and 45.6% Hispanic. Of the total student population, 59% enroll in college, with 66.2% of students enrolling in a four-year institution and 33.8% of students enrolling in a two-year institution. By racial group, 57% of Black students, 55.3% of Hispanic students, and 74.5% of White students enroll in either a two-year or four-year higher education institution. The five-year graduation rate for Chicago Public Schools in 2015 was 69.9%, which is much lower than the Illinois five-year average of 88% (Perez Jr. 2015; Chicago Public Schools 2016; Illinois State Department of Education 2016). Chicago is similar to Albany in that it has an achievement gap between White and Nonwhite students, as indicated by the previous figures. Also similar to Albany, minority of students, much like the Albany City School District are White. For these reasons and because Chicago is vastly larger than Albany, Chicago's collective impact group focused on education, Thrive Chicago, was considered.

Best Practices

Goal Setting

Similar to other collective impacts in this study, such as CUC2C and Mission: Graduate, Thrive Chicago seeks to set goals of varying timeframes. Echoing the goals of other groups in this study, Thrive Chicago's long-term goal is to increase college transition rates. Specifically, Thrive Chicago seeks to increase the percentage of high school freshmen who graduate from a two or four-year higher education institution within 10 years of starting high school to 30%, roughly double the current percentage.

Additionally, Thrive Chicago sets its goals with the local community and its partners. The collective impact group asserts that its goals are the community's goals. For that reason, it is important to consider the input of the entire community including partners, businesses, local leaders, and governing bodies, even if the organization is not affiliated with Thrive Chicago (Thrive Chicago 2016).

Coordinating Partners

Thrive Chicago states that coordinating the concept of a collective impact is difficult and the methods employed for one may not work for another. However, Thrive Chicago does hold that partner organizations can play a major role in helping a collective impact group to understand its role in the community and the goals for the organization. The organization also reports that getting a variety of organizations to work on the same agenda can be difficult. For this reason, Thrive Chicago believes that open channels of communication between partners and the collective impact group must exist. The group also finds it to be important to obtain data, when available, from their partners. This data can be used from program and impact tracking and play a vital role in organizational planning (Thrive Chicago 2016).

Recommendations

Based on the best practices of the organizations that were researched, a few recommended practices have been determined. These suggestions are based on recurring practices that other collective impacts have employed successfully. The Albany Promise may see improvements in resource allocation, partner coordination, and planning if it considers the following best practices from the collective impact groups included in this study.

Community Partner Buy-In

The collective impact groups that were investigated in this project had some common themes in regard to increasing buy-in from community partners. First, many of the organizations that were examined stated that they were able to increase buy-in from partners by allowing them a voice in the goal setting and direction of the collective impact. Another strategy that increased buy-in from partners was clear communication. By having clear communication channels for addressing concerns and relaying information on the partnership, partners feel engaged in the organization. Finally, meetings to prepare for entry into the partnership, discussion of roles and coordination in the partnership, goal setting, and information sharing seem to be a common practice among the assessed organizations. If The Albany Promise considers implementing organizational practices, it may have an easier time coordinating with partners and have better results in the realm of partner participation and buy-in due to an increased sense of stake in the partnership.

Data Collection

The organizations that were studied all practiced meticulous data collection. Many organizations track success toward larger goals by assessing data related to that goal. Additionally, many track programmatic data to determine if changes in the organization were improving the offered programs or harming them. Data collection can also improve community partner coordination. It allows all partners to assess progress and effectiveness both for their organization and the collective impact. This practice not only helps the collective impact to measure its progress and results, but may also encourage buy-in from partners because they are able to track their role in the collective impact and the collective impact's path toward its goals. By closely tracking and analyzing data, The Albany Promise would be able to see which programs are working, perceptions of programs, and progression toward goals. This would in turn lead to better allocation of resources and pinpointing areas for improvement.

Goal Setting

Goal setting is a cornerstone to many organizations and the collective impacts in this study are no exception. Many collective impacts set goals of varying scope and time, such as one, five, and ten year goals. The organizations also set goals in a variety of areas. Examples of one-year goals may be to add two new partners, start a new program, or cement an existing program. A five-year goal may be something such as a benchmark toward a larger ten-year goal, a certain number of partners, average rate of partner engagement, or a specific graduation rate. While one and five-year goals are similar to the action steps to get to a larger goal, a ten year goal is often one that relates highly to the collective impact's mission. A ten-year goal may be to increase graduation or college enrollment rate by or to a certain percentage or achieve a particular literacy rate among third graders. Goal setting helps an organization to remain on-track in terms of its mission and aid in maintaining organizational focus.

Government Coordination

The options presented throughout this report provide many ideas for future organizational practices. The Albany Promise may choose to engage with local government institutions in order to enact some of the programs and recommendations that were discussed. For instance, actively engaging and partnering with The Albany City School District's Board of Education and School District administrators may facilitate coordination for instituting new programs. Some of the cradle-to-career organizations in this study go as far as to bring local school districts in as partners. This may help The Albany Promise to better serve local students and the Albany City School District by enhancing cooperation between the two organizations.

The Albany Promise may also consider seeking the assistance of local governing bodies such as the Albany City Council or Albany Mayor's Office. Having regular communications with these divisions of government may be valuable to The Albany Promise in terms of expanding its programs and reach in the community. This is also a practice of several cradle-to-career collective impacts that were studied.

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Community Policy Institute

The Community Policy Institute builds capacity surrounding policy within the Capital Region. We provide researched-based policy information to our community partners who use the information to modify best practices and advocate for policies that will further the development and effectiveness of direct community engagement.

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Eric Brower

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