

# Civic Collaboration Consultants, LLC

216-215-0329

[chris@civiccollab.com](mailto:chris@civiccollab.com)

@civiccollab1

## Facilitating Collective Impact Meetings

How to avoid Ground Hog Day

Collective impact is a framework for diverse partners to co-create, implement and sustain collaborations that result in enduring, positive community change. When successful, collective impact efforts transform outcomes in the community and they transform the civic systems that generate those outcomes

Successful collaborations depend on skilled facilitation because the partners at the table often range from individual residents to staff members of non-profits to chief executives and elected officials. These players have distinct priorities and motivations. The diversity of participants also expose the power dynamics within our communities, dynamics that often prevent co-creation of solutions. And the issues being addressed are always complex – that is beyond the control of any single entity – and interconnected with many other complex issues.

Effective facilitation helps the partners navigate the different priorities, community power dynamics and the complexity of the issues.

Facilitation is done within the context of the structures created to support the effort. Those structures often include:

- A board of directors or a steering committee that provides strategic leadership and oversight of the effort.
- Action teams where partners shape and implement specific initiatives.
- Community committees that provide a vehicle for a broader set of stakeholders to inform and influence the effort.
- A support team, often referred to as the backbone, that provides communications, measurement, assessment and, most importantly, facilitation services to the partners. The backbone is overseen by the board or steering committee.

The backbone team is responsible for facilitating meetings of the steering committee and the other teams and committees that make up the collective effort.

Meetings within the collective impact framework have three primary objectives:

- Build trust among the diverse partners
- Build shared understanding of the status quo and the potential to transform it
- Make agreements.

Common agreements include:

- Defining the status and key factors that contribute to it
- What changes the partners want to achieve

- The actions members will take individually and collectively to disrupt the status quo and achieve the desired changes
- How to measure the status quo and evaluate progress toward the desired changes.

Each meeting should open with a clear statement of the purpose and desired outcomes of the meeting. Each meeting should close with a clear statement of the agreements that have been reached, including who will do what by when. Meeting agendas should be designed to accommodate these clear statements. Often, the “content” of the meeting takes up all the allotted time and there is insufficient time to clarify and memorialize the agreements. This failure contributes to “ground hog day meetings” – which are meetings that repeat themselves week after week or month after month as partners fail to reach, memorialize or fulfill agreements.

## Tools for Facilitation

A variety of exercises and facilitation techniques can be used to help the partners build trust, develop shared understanding and make agreements. The following provide brief descriptions and links to more detailed explanations of the exercises and techniques. These tools were developed or are provided by [Academy for Change](#), [Co-Creative](#), [FSG](#), [Tamarack Institute](#) and [Liberating Structures](#). More tools are available on their web sites.

[Empathy Maps](#) help partners consider the perspectives of those most affected by the issue being explored.

[Force Field Maps](#) help partners identify the forces for and against change.

[Constellation Maps](#) help partners identify challenges, opportunities and resources.

[Collective Impact Self-Assessment and Planning Tool](#) helps partners assess their progress.

[Actor Maps](#) are a visual depiction of the key organizations and individuals influence an issue.

[System Maps](#) help partners visualize the activities, functions and players within a system. This link provides two examples of system maps. [Kumu](#) is an online platform for building system maps, but it is likely only useful if you have significant capacity to make full use of this tool.

[Designing Shared Intent](#) is essential as the intent clarifies the purpose of collaboration. Co-Creative’s guide to developing a powerful shared intent can be used to guide early meetings of the partners and to later reinforce and reassess the partners’ shared intent.

[Triz Exercise](#) helps partners better understand the status quo and what it will take to transform it by asking partners to design a collaboration that will most certainly fail.

[Nine Whys](#) helps partners dig deeper into the forces that are holding the status quo in place.

[Wheel of Engagement](#) helps partners to clarify their level of commitment and how much responsibility they are willing to assume to support the collaborative effort.

[Wicked Questions](#) help partners surface and explore the paradoxes and [tensions](#) that are inherent in complex civic systems.

What tools do you use to facilitate collaboration meetings? Please share them with me on Twitter @civiccollab1 using #collaborationtools

## Facilitation in the Age of Covid

The global pandemic of 2020 and beyond fundamentally changed how we meet with each other. Facilitators must develop online skills and use digital tools to be successful. Video meetings don't have to be limited to presentations and clunky Q&A.

Evan Ishida of [Thrive at Work](#) offers some [good advice and resources](#) for using digital tools to facilitate collaboration.

What's your advice for online facilitation? Please share with me on Twitter @civiccollab1 using #onlinecollab