

COLLECTIVE IMPACT: STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE WHEATLEY CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD, EASTSIDE PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD AND SA2020 INITIATIVES

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Collective impact is defined as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem”.¹ The process of forming these initiatives involves initiating action, organizing for impact, and sustaining action.

There are currently three collective impact initiatives in San Antonio so it is more prevalent in the social and political context of the City. These three initiatives are the federally-funded Wheatley Choice (Choice) and Eastside Promise Neighborhood Initiatives (Promise) and SA2020. Through building on the characteristics of collective impact to improve communication and collaboration between these three existing initiatives, San Antonio can reap the benefits of the Choice and Promise neighborhoods becoming examples of focused and intentional collaboration in the city.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Historically, agencies and organizations have worked in isolation to pursue change in their communities. However, during the past few decades there have been organizations that fostered cross-sector collaboration and communication to pursue large scale social change. These organizations provided examples of the success that can come from collaboration to the federal government. Through these examples, the federal government has now encouraged isolated agencies to find areas of overlap and opportunities for collaboration through the Choice and Promise Neighborhood Initiatives.²

Place-based initiatives are similar to collective impact because they involve multiple sectors and holistically approach challenges by analyzing resources and policies in the context of a social issue.^{2,3} These initiatives are also a multi-sector, collaborative approach to address a larger social problem. The importance of collaboration between sectors in place-based initiatives points us to the key elements of the collective impact model for social change. The success of place-based and collective impact initiatives is often determined by five commonly cited conditions.^{1,4,5}

1. **Common agenda:** This is a shared vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach for solving it through actions on which all partners agree.
2. **Shared measurement:** This is a consistent form of collecting data and measuring results or effectiveness that contributes to the increased collaboration of the organizations.
3. **Mutually reinforcing activities:** Instead of each organization working independently from the others, their activities are coordinated to intentionally pursue the common vision together.
4. **Continuous communication:** Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create motivation to pursue mutual objectives toward the common goal.
5. **Backbone organization:** This organization serves as the support for the collective impact initiative and coordinates activities between organizations and agencies.

Collective impact is intensely data driven and dependent on communication and structure. The communication between stakeholders and service providers builds trust that is essential for the success of initiatives to reinforce

cooperation and community investment. Trust is necessary to bring in a wide range of stakeholders including the community.⁶

Additionally, successful collective impact does not build from the ground up, but instead takes advantage of existing collaborative efforts.⁵ Another crucial aspect of collective impact is a sense of urgency for change.⁵ This urgency must be created among the public too in order to gain wider support. This is demonstrated in conducting research and publishing a report that captures media attention and highlights the severity of the problem. Urgency incentivizes people to come together and work toward common goals.⁵ This urgency can be sustained by communicating early wins in collaboration to demonstrate the value of working together. These successes are essential to holding the collaborative together.⁵

Funding of place-based initiatives is not only a task of the federal government like Choice and Promise, but can also be supported through grants and government funding, like what SA2020 is gathering. In both instances, funders of collective initiatives need to base their decisions on data of socioeconomic conditions, market strength, institutional capacity, regional context of the neighborhood, and the residents themselves.² They are tailored to a particular social geography; therefore this geographical context influences the types of programs that are needed.

Recent collective impact and place based initiatives around the country include the Strive Partnership in Cincinnati and Opportunity Chicago. These initiatives provide examples of struggles and successes in collective impact that inform future collaboration.

HOW ARE THE WHEATLEY CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD, EASTSIDE PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND SA2020 INITIATIVES COLLECTIVE IMPACT?

Currently within San Antonio there are three major collective impact initiatives: Wheatley Choice Neighborhood, Eastside Promise Neighborhood and SA2020. Through understanding that these three programs are collective impact initiatives, we can begin to see the potential for the three of them to work in conjunction to form a larger collective impact within the city. Expanded collaboration could also increase the Eastside as an example of what intentional cross-sector collaboration looks like as an example for the rest of the City.

Each of the initiatives in San Antonio is collective impact because they seek to bring together organizations and individuals from varied sectors to pursue a common goal in a specific social problem. Choice's vision is to make the Eastside a neighborhood of choice and to be a model for other revitalization efforts in San Antonio. The Eastside Promise Neighborhood vision is to create a cradle-to-career pipeline of education. SA2020 envisions San Antonio as a world-class city by the year 2020. Additionally SA2020 has visions for each of the eleven cause areas. To address the question of shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, and continuous communication, each of the initiatives have defined data indicators, are coordinating actions with organizations that were already involved in some way in their areas of interest, and communicate through work groups, conference calls, meetings, and shared databases. Lastly, SAHA, United Way, and SA2020 serve as the backbone organizations for these initiatives. These pre-existing organizations coordinate interactions between other agencies and organizations and bring together major players to catalyze action. Given the existence of these three collective impact initiatives, San Antonio is in the unique position to expand on the successes in collaboration by increasing that collaboration between the initiatives.

Choice, Promise, and SA2020 overlap in geographic area within the eastside, but they also overlap in their areas of influence or desired change. In fact, the Choice and Promise Neighborhood initiatives address eight of the eleven SA2020 cause areas: Community Safety, Economic Competitiveness, Education, Family and Well-Being, Health and Fitness, Environmental Sustainability, Neighborhoods, and Transportation. This and the geographical overlap provide the context for future collaboration between them.

STRIVE PARTNERSHIP^{4,7}

Strive Partnership began as a place-based collaborative effort between cross-sector organizations in Cincinnati, Ohio and the Northern Kentucky region. Prior to the Strive Partnership, educational and social services were available, but they were rarely coordinated or organized around a single vision or goal. Strive took into account that the community and social geography of a school affects the education and experiences of the students. Therefore, there would need to be a coordinated effort from various service providers to confront the issue. The vision for Strive is to create a “cradle-to-career” pathway for education and they broke this broader vision into five goals and also created a system of data gathering, analysis, reporting results, and holding service providers accountable for performance. This cross-sector partnership led to successes in Cincinnati’s school system.

There are some key elements of the Strive Partnership that lead to its success and expansion into a national network of education-oriented collective impact initiatives. Agencies created a data dashboard to monitor service providers’ progress and they also gathered together regularly to discuss their work. Strive annually releases its “Striving Together” report card which shows community progress on all indicators. The data is also made available to teachers and community providers so they can use it to better address students’ learning and developmental needs (cited in Tucker “Putting Data into Practice”). Making data accessible is crucial for directing resources and efforts and is critical for the partnership’s success.

Strive put school reform at the center of community and economic development. It also served as the premise for the federal Promise Neighborhoods initiative that is now in San Antonio and other cities across the country.

OPPORTUNITY CHICAGO

Opportunity Chicago was also a place-based collective impact initiative that came out of the realization that providing housing for residents of a particular geographic area would not be helpful if residents could not meet the work requirement to qualify for residency.⁵ From this realization, this initiative was founded through the collaborative efforts of non-profits and governmental departments.⁸ The initiative established five priorities to promote workforce development, the provision of support services, employment opportunities, and document and evaluate effectiveness for future lessons. It built upon existing resources to expand and improve services through assessing effectiveness.⁸

From 2006 to 2010, 6,743 public housing residents participated in Opportunity Chicago programs.⁸ The initiative also placed 6,000 residents in new jobs.⁵ It increased collaboration among workforce systems actors, integrated public housing residents into existing citywide efforts, and provided an opportunity to influence the change of pre-existing systems. This last opportunity allowed the reconfiguration of three existing workforce boards into one entity that allowed for more collaboration toward a common goal.⁸

Two crucial lessons were learned throughout the process of the Opportunity Chicago Initiative. Firstly, it is important to abandon individual silos and agendas to work together toward a single goal and collective approach. It was also significant to have a method of data collection, storage, and analysis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHOICE, PROMISE, AND SA2020

Since San Antonio is the host of three collective impact initiatives, there is an opportunity to learn lessons from these other successful collective impact initiatives to apply the best practices to the future collaboration between Choice, Promise, and SA2020.

Elements from the Strive Partnership like the data dashboard gave service providers access to individual-level data. In San Antonio's context, the kind of data that Choice and Promise are gathering could be aggregated to a community level to provide San Antonians with an example of the impact collective impact can have.

In both Strive and Opportunity Chicago, it was important that silos of operation be broken down for organizations to work cooperatively. This is also crucial within San Antonio. Non-profits, companies, faith-based organizations, and even governmental departments would need to be de-siloed and cooperative for the sake of pursuing a shared goal. This kind of cooperation between governmental entities could facilitate the policy implications of the goals of Choice, Promise, and SA2020.

Strive Partnership also published annual data report card to the public to build an understanding in the community of what Strive is aiming toward. This could build initiative and future collaboration within San Antonio in organizations that are not currently aligned to the visions of Choice, Promise, or SA2020. Additionally, it could serve to build understanding among the larger San Antonio community of how collaborative effort can lead to larger social change.

San Antonio has the unique opportunity to pursue increased collaboration to build trust among the existing collective impact initiatives through publishing a common score card to show the overlap between Choice, Promise, and SA2020 and to expand the influence of Choice and Promise to be an example of concerted collaborative effort in the City. This would ideally boost collaboration in the future in other parts of the city to further pursue SA2020's vision by transforming San Antonio into a world class city by the year 2020.

References

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² Cytron, Naomi. 2010. "Improving the Outcomes of Place-Based Initiatives" *Community Investments* 22(1): 2-7.

³ 2012. "Impact in Place: A Progress Report on the Department of Education's Place-Based Strategy."

⁴ Bathgate, Kelly, Richard Lee Colvin, and Elena Silva. 2011. "Striving for Student Success: A Model of Shared Accountability." *Education Sector Reports* (Nov): 1-10.

⁵ Hanleybrown, Fay, John Kania and Mark Kramer. 2012. "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*: 1-8. (<http://partnership2012.com/download/Collective%20Impact%20II.pdf>).

⁶ Bockmeyer, Janice. 2000. "A Culture of Distrust: The Impact of Local Political culture on Participation in the Detroit EZ." *Urban Studies* 37(13): 2417-2440.

⁷ Edmonson, Jeff and Nancy Zimpher. 2012. "The New Civic Infrastructure: The 'How To' of Collective Impact and Getting a Better Social Return on Investment." *Community Investments* 24(2): 10-13.

⁸ Parkes, Rhae, Emily Holt, et al. 2012. "Opportunity Chicago: 2006-2010 – Improving Access to Employment for Public Housing Residents in Chicago." Center for Urban Economic Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, Abt Associates Inc., EJP Consulting Group, LLC. (July). (http://cjc.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/OC-Evaluation_July2012.pdf).