Collective Impact Policy Summit 2015

Aligning Policies for Children and Youth

Executive Summary

The Collective Impact Policy Summit brought together state and local leaders who are engaged in innovative thinking and practices to align their efforts vertically (from local to federal) and horizontally (across education, human services, health, justice, labor and more). The two-day summit provided the leaders the opportunity to 1) exchange ideas and promising practices that allow us to build on each other's progress; 2) harness the collective power of the participants; and 3) provide a venue to talk about vertical alignment and share promising practices with the federal government.

Each of the topics covered fell into one of four broad areas: **People** and the collaboration, partnerships, structure, backbone support and engagement that make collective impact happen; **Data** and **Evidence** - the proof that is needed to know we are actually achieving the collective impact that we set out to at the system, program, population and individual levels; and **Money** because without a fresh look at how we fund things we will just continue to support business as usual, running the risk of redundancies and even worse, gaps. The following is a summary of the topics and themes across these four buckets that were shared.

People

Collaboration across agencies and the structures that support them

- **Collaboration must be modeled at the top** and the conditions must be created for collective impact to occur locally. Leadership must be engaged – which means communicating clearly how the objectives will help leadership achieve their own goals.
- **No need to recreate the wheel**. It is important to recognize that new entities do not need to form, but rather they can come under the umbrella of an existing coordinating body, in order to promote alignment and coordination among a range of partners.
- **Create natural connection points.** As identified at the Summit, there are challenges to collaboration: agencies do not naturally have ways to talk to each other and it takes a lot of follow-through, patience and intentionality.
- **Staffing is critical.** There needs to be space, time and people dedicated to creating and building these relationships. Everyone's plate is already full and it is a challenge to find time and energy to do this linking work on top of an existing job.
- **Collaboration is an art and a science.** When it comes to infrastructure, participants identified the need for more research on what works specifically to promote collective impact within the government sector. Assistance in defining roles within a coordinating body and communicating who is responsible for what among the partners was a challenge.

Youth, family and community engagement

- **Engagement is the 'holy grail' of the work.** Summit participants engage their members in a range of ways, including community conversations, surveys, focus groups and advocacy opportunities.
- **Advocacy** has been a primary way of including the voices of children, youth and their families since our political systems began, but often bureaucrats cannot engage directly in this. Working with partners who can is a great strategy.
- **~~You~~ have to plan for engagement**. Think of ways to break barriers to participation, including providing child care and transportation. The timing and location of the meeting must be friendly to the audience you are attempting to attract
- **Communication is key.** Make sure to communicate in a way that the target population can understand and relate to and address any language barriers both in print, as well as through translation services at the events. Communicate in a variety of ways that will reach various youth and family audiences.
- **Build authentic, lasting relationships**. Community, youth and parent engagement still boils down to relationships. Leverage key connector points to make sure you are constantly getting fresh voices, while continuing to nurture the stakeholders who have already come to the table.

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Money

Fiscal Mapping

- **Power in Numbers.** Unless a state or community has done a thorough children's budget analysis there is really no telling how much investment is being made in children and youth because investments are housed in various departments and come from different levels of government.
- **Staff it and institutionalize it.** The act of conducting a comprehensive children's budget analysis itself is illuminating. To do so once is nice but it is worth institutionalizing the collection of the fiscal information in this way to really make informed decisions going forward.
- **Base it on outcomes.** Most places have easy ways to pinpoint department-by-department investments in children. Understanding what is being invested across departments on the desired outcomes is less common but quite useful if a government is trying to hold themselves accountable for population level outcomes.
- **Have to overcome territoriality**. Agencies can think that putting the dollars into context in one big document is a power grab by a governor or mayor. It can be a hard sell and there is a bit of a fear of the unknown – of the many places that have conducted this type of fiscal map, none of them have had a scenario where this fear came to be.
- **Using the data.** To conduct a fiscal map can itself feel like a big challenge but it is not as difficult as getting people to use the data and analysis to inform budget decision-making going forward.

Blending and Braiding Funding

- **Fragmentation breeds fragmentation**. The rigidity of silos is problematic and contagious. From congressional committee silos, federal agency silos to state silos in both the executive and legislative branches – policies come down to localities that have such restrictions that often render the resources almost unhelpful.
- **Too focused on compliance**. One result of these silos is an overreliance on compliance as a proxy for outcomes. Though not a root cause solution, allowing communities at least the flexibility to blend and braid funding streams if they can better achieve outcomes by doing so should be more broadly adopted at all levels of government.
- **Start small and show potential.** It can feel like a big risk to appropriators to let go of the compliance mentality, finding ways to allow smaller numbers of ready communities to demonstrate the value of blending and braiding funding is a good first step.

Social Impact Bonds

- **There is a continuum of options**. Not all places are ready to start with a Social Impact Bond (SIB). Begin by paying for program performance and move toward paying for outcomes, making government compacts without outside investors and then you can eventually set up these more complex arrangements between private investors and government.
- **Not all interventions fit this model.** Policymakers should be cautious and recognize that some interventions lend themselves to this model better than others. High cost, high touch services we currently invest in can be great fits.
- **Collective gains.** Many of the desired outcomes for a children's cabinet are shared outcomes and not the responsibility of any one department. As the SIB work evolves around the country, are there ways to think about how to monetize outcomes when they are collectively won and collectively beneficial?

Dedicated New Funding

- **Federal and state cuts have huge impact locally**. Many city and county leaders are stepping in to call for increased supports locally.
- **Local is more palatable to voters**. Voters in more than two dozen communities have put dedicated funding streams in place and seem to have a much higher tolerance for local tax increases than for state or federal ones to pay for their own children.
- **Being willing to stop funding some things**. To establish a certain level of confidence among skeptics and their perception of government funding, policymakers will need to make real progress in cutting out the ineffective investments.

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Data
Population Level Indicators and Dashboards

- **Many people have very little understanding of data**. Programs, partnerships and other coordinating bodies need staff that understand the importance of data and how to integrate it into the entity's work – from identifying indicators, creating measures, making mid-course corrections, etc.
- **Maintaining a dashboard and data system is time consuming but allows for rich conversations**. Many agencies and partnerships do not have the capacity or resources to collect data, establish data systems and create dashboards in ways that allow leaders to make informed decisions. The few that are able to lay a foundation have an even harder time updating and maintaining those data systems and dashboards.
- **There has been significant emphasis on data lately but it doesn't always tell the whole story**. The leaders shared examples of changes in their community that were out of their control and affected their data in ways that painted an inaccurate picture of what they were accomplishing. It is helpful to use a myriad of approaches when doing research including qualitative, quantitative, stories, focus groups, etc.

Integrated Data Systems

- **Data sharing agreements**. Coalitions often seek to use data from existing government sources to track progress and learn. Sharing this data publicly, however, may not be authorized. Policymakers can support this process by entering into data sharing agreements to share internal databases across agencies (such as public health or education) with agreed upon entities acting in partnership.
- **It is not a technical process as much as it is a people and relationships process**. Although there are technological aspects involved in integrating data systems, a bulk of the work requires culture and attitude shifts, and identifying and engaging the right partners. Systems not only have to be built but those using it have to believe in it and actually use it.
- **Each place with an integrated data system is fairly unique**. Jurisdictions begin with different reasons as to why they want to integrate their data system and each place has to make decisions that are specific to and reflective of their jurisdictions.

Evidence
Evidence Based Policies and Practices

- **Allowing evidence to be used for continuous improvement instead of punitive actions**. A culture shift is needed to allow leaders the space to take risk and find out what works - balanced with ways that maintain accountability.
- **Engaging partners and stakeholders**. One has to take into account what the community wants and having high levels of community engagement and focusing on what is known about evidence based practice can sometimes be in conflict.
- **Using evidence in policy**. There has been a clear shift in funding at the state and local level to finance evidence-based programs. While the increased use of evidence in policy is great you cannot drop a program into a community just because it was successful in a randomized control trial – community context and buy-in are critical.

Results Based Budgeting

- **Lack of funding, resources and tools**. There is an expectation for programs to be evidence-based and data driven but funding is not provided to build capacity in those areas. Programs are often not funded to build systems, train staff and do evaluations.
- **Calculating Return on Investment (ROI)**. The government and foundations will fund a program or service poorly and expect to see results which is unrealistic. It is also difficult to incorporate the social value of services into ROIs.
- **Identifying the right measures and using the data is difficult**. The challenge often comes with implementation, practitioners need help with how to use data, track it and build outcome monitoring systems.

***Summit attendees also provided specific examples, tools and resources at the city, county, state and federal level. You can access that information in the full Policy Summit Memorandum.**