Between the Bridges: Formative Evaluation Report

June, 2019

Contents

ABOUT THIS EVALUATION

Between the Bridges requested this formative evaluation to identify learnings and successes since the initiative began, and to inform how to strengthen the work going forward. A small working group of Between the Bridges Backbone staff and Inspiring Communities evaluation team members provided guidance, and drew on the *Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework* to shape this evaluation process.

Data collection methods included:

- Reviewing Between the Bridges documents and databases
- Observing Between the Bridges table/team meetings
- Conducting confidential key informant interviews

Between October 2018 and January 2019, evaluation staff from Between the Bridges and Inspiring Communities conducted a total of 28 interviews with:

- Provincial level allies associated with Inspiring Communities (3)
- Between the Bridges backbone staff (2)
- Members of five Between the Bridges tables/teams (23)

Interview participants represented the following tables/teams (note that some members are affiliated with more than one table/team):

Strategic Roundtable	8
Residents' Roundtable	12
Student Success Alignment Team	9
Community Insight Team	6
Community Health Planning Team	5

BACKGROUND: THE BETWEEN THE BRIDGES STORY

Between the Bridges is a collective impact initiative focusing on Dartmouth North, primarily the area between the two bridges spanning Halifax Harbour. Between the Bridges evolved as a partnership of residents, community organizations, businesses, government and United Way – a partnership established to draw on community strengths to address important community needs.

The area served by Between the Bridges has many strengths and assets. In addition to its setting, location and access to facilities and public spaces, the area has a diverse population, a real sense of community pride, a strong culture of volunteerism, and a history of various grassroots organizations working to improve specific aspects of community life.[1] The Between the Bridges area also faces many complex challenges. Compared to Halifax Regional Municipality as a whole, residents in this area have higher percentages of low income households and Income Assistance recipients, higher demand for mental health services, lower rates of home ownership and more homes in need of repair, more adults without high school graduation, and more vulnerable students entering school. There is an identified lack of coordination and communication among various community groups. The area also has a history of organizations and projects coming into the community with their own ideas about how to 'fix' it, and then abandoning efforts or leaving without making a difference that was meaningful to those who live and work there. This experience has left many in the community distrustful of projects coming into the area to improve conditions.

In 2015 the provincial government supported implementation of a new approach to addressing the complex social problems facing many communities in Nova Scotia. This approach – collective impact – brings together people with a diversity of knowledge, skills, resources, and lived experience for the purpose of tackling complex and longstanding issues. Because of Dartmouth North's many individual, family and community risk factors, the provincial government selected It as an initial site for collective impact work.

During the summer and fall of 2015, a community engagement team (residents, community organization leaders, government agencies) 'hit the streets' to hear what residents of Dartmouth North considered to be important neighbourhood issues. Two community meetings in September 2015 provided further input. These consultations generated qualitative information to supplement existing data, and pointed to fourteen interrelated topics the community identified as concerns.

> *"In just six weeks this team spoke with more than 200 residents: they held focus groups, hosted a street party, spoke with people at a community carnival, sat down and had one-to-one interviews, hosted pot-lucks, created graffiti walls, and captured ideas for change on post-it notes!"*
>
> *From the 'Working Together' Report*

During the spring/summer of 2016 the Between the Bridges backbone staff joined the initiative, and by the fall of that year staff had established a Dartmouth North office called "Basecamp" to reflect the mobile nature of the work in the community.

Also in the fall of 2016, Between the Bridges initiated another community engagement process with the goal of hearing from at least 600 community voices. It was important to include diverse voices, and the more marginalized voices that are not always heard. The *600 Voices in '16* survey was available in several different languages. It grouped the 14 issues identified through the previous consultation process into three categories: Student Success, Community Caring, and Healthy Bodies and Minds. A community engagement team conducted the survey; the team included over 25 community members, residents and organizational leaders who could access a diversity of people through their networks. The survey asked participants to choose the

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[1] Avalon Sexual Assault Centre (2015) *Stronger Together: Dartmouth North Strategy and Pilot Project*; p. 3

three priorities they considered most important (from the list of 14, plus an option to add an 'Other'), and to explain the reasons for their choices.

By the end of 2016, the *600 Voices in '16* survey had exceeded its goal, obtaining views from over 700 community voices. The table below shows the three categories and the 14 items as they were presented to the community; it also shows the percentage of respondents who identified each item as one of their three most important priorities. Between the Bridges shared these results with the community in December 2016 and early 2017.

Categories and Potential Priority Areas from *600 Voices in '16* Survey: *Percentage of Respondents who Identified Each Item as one of Their Top Three Priorities*	
Student Success	
A Great Start – Our kids are ready for school. Schools are ready for our kids.	*15%*
Safe and Caring Classrooms – Respectful and positive learning environments	*20%*
High Standards, High Expectations – Students are supported to do their best	*15%*
Parents are Partners in Learning – Two-way communication and shared responsibility	*9%*
Graduating Ready – Students graduate and are prepared for what's next	*16%*
Further Education and Training – Accessible pathways to enrollment and completion of post-secondary education and/or training	*16%*
Community Fabric	
Youth Engagement – Youth have opportunities to participate and lead in the community	*20%*
Community Pride – Well maintained public spaces. Community curb-appeal and beautification	*15%*
Social Support – Neighbours are there for each other and involved in the community	*18%*
Breaking the Cycle – Accessible pathways to transition from crisis to wellness	*19%*
Healthy Bodies and Minds	
Safety – Being safe. Feeling safe	*30%*
Nutrition – Accessible, healthy, affordable food	*28%*
Housing – Safe, healthy, and affordable homes	*41%*
Access to Professional Care – Family doctors, walk-in clinic, mental health and addictions support	*30%*

Between the Bridges also used these results – along with community level data, and information from earlier community consultations and initiatives in the community – to support the development of a shared agenda. Combining information from these sources, Between the Bridges identified an overall shared agenda as *Breaking the Cycle*, and four priority areas within that overarching theme: housing, student success, accessible healthcare, and community fabric

Early in 2017 Between the Bridges presented the results of the *600 Voices in '16* survey to the community, along with information about working on a shared agenda:

Collectively Working
to
Break the Cycle in Dartmouth North

Updated April 2017

2015-2016

Community Level Data + Working Together Report (2015) + "What's already happening" in community + 600 Voices in '16 Community Survey = Shared Agenda

Now

Our Shared Agenda

Housing
With a focus on affordability and quality.

Student Success
With a focus on high standards, caring classrooms, and graduation rates.

Accessible Healthcare
With a focus on increasing health services in Dartmouth North.

Community Fabric
With a focus on safe neighbourhoods, social inclusion, and community pride.

Next

Organizing for Impact

Residents / Government / Community Organizations / Business → Our Shared Agenda

- Identify and engage those already active in each priority area.
- Convene groups of people with knowledge, life experience, and information to facilitate collective understanding of the strengths and opportunities around the priorities.
- Grow a shared understanding of the components for success in Collective Impact.
- Recruit and convene Collective Tables.

Early Successes

SPAN
Strengths·People·Action·Neighbourhoods

- Launched March 27, 2017
- Resident led and collectively implemented.
- Allignment to Community Fabric.
- 6-12 month time frame.
- Share what is being learned.
- Build skills and relationships along the way.

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Over the next year, Between the Bridges focused on developing a preliminary governance structure and on recruiting group members. Between the Bridges is currently supporting the efforts of six groups working on the priority areas.

The *Residents' Roundtable* is one of the two Between the Bridges roundtables. Its role is to keep the work of Between the Bridges grounded in the community by providing vital insight, information and ideas that reflect the impact (intended and unintended) of various systems on the lives of residents. Roundtable members reflect a diversity of ages, social and economic backgrounds, neighbourhoods, life experiences, culture and ethnicity. Currently there are approximately 20 members of the Residents' Roundtable. In addition to their involvement on this table, some members also participate as resident representatives on the Strategic Roundtable, or on one or more of the working groups. The initial meeting of the Residents' Roundtable was held in November 2017; since then it has continued to meet approximately monthly.

The *Strategic Roundtable* is a roundtable established to bring information, insight and senior level influence to priorities in response to solutions identified by the working groups and the Residents' Roundtable. The Strategic Roundtable is intended to promote, advocate and guide systems and policy change to bring about new solutions to address complex population issues in the Between the Bridges area and beyond. The approximately 20 members of this table include senior leaders and decision makers from public, private and not-for-profit sectors, as well as representatives from the Residents' Roundtable and the working groups. The Strategic Roundtable met for the first time in February 2018, and continues to meet approximately 3-4 times/year.

The *Student Success Alignment Team* (A-Team) was the first formal subject matter table to be formed; it addresses the issues encompassed within the Student Success priority area. Between the Bridges established this group in an effort to find new ways to work together to support students by identifying actions that will support all students to be successful and thrive. The current Student Success A-Team has 20 to 25 members, including residents, parents, educators, government representatives, a school liaison officer, and not for profit sector representatives working in areas related to literacy, education, and youth. It also includes several community members who had worked on education issues through the Dartmouth North Association, prior to the establishment of Between the Bridges. The Student Success A-Team has been meeting approximately monthly since its first meeting in January 2018.

The *Community Insight Team* focuses on the Community Fabric priority, which includes neighbourhood safety, social inclusion and community pride. (During its first two years this team was known as SPAN – Strengths, People, Action, Neighbourhood). Through the development of a grant program, using funds earmarked for community investment, this group has supported collectively-implemented projects intended to provide opportunities for residents and organizations to experience success in working together to improve and strengthen the community. The Community Insight Team met approximately monthly for the specific purpose of reviewing and strengthening applications for project funding; it has 10 to 15 members, primarily residents and representatives of non-profit organizations, government and business. The Community Insight Team began meeting in May 2017. During its first year they endorsed 12 grant applications and distributed just under $20,000 in grants for projects such as benches for a local school, a community Thanksgiving dinner, cooking classes for youth, and community library enhancement. In its second year, the Community Insight Team broadened the focus of the grants program to include larger grants for projects spanning more than one community within the area. As its second year draws to a close, the Community Insight Team, in consultation with the Between the Bridges Network, is currently considering how it might redirect its efforts toward enhancing community leadership capacity.

The Dartmouth North *Community Health Planning Team* originated in the community for the specific purpose of opening a Community Health Centre in Dartmouth North. The group consists of approximately 20 people who meet monthly, all year round, starting in the fall of 2016. This group was not initiated by Between the Bridges. Instead of establishing a separate table to address the health priority, Between the Bridges chose to support this existing community-based initiative, and has done so since the summer of 2016. Support provided by Between the Bridges takes the form of supporting the development of meeting agendas and materials, facilitating the creation of agreements for working together and consensus decision making processes, exploring community health centre models, encouraging learning opportunities about social determinants of health, mapping existing health services and identifying gaps, and establishing a working relationship with the Nova Scotia Health Authority Primary Health Care.

The *Housing Social Innovation Lab* is the most recent of the Between the Bridges initiatives. This initiative currently takes the form of an intensive, multi day "lab" approach rather than a group meeting on a regular basis. To date there have been three sessions with 7 residents and 13 cross-sectoral leaders involved throughout; a day-long "advance" session in November 2018, three-days in February 2019, and a further two-days in early April 2019.

These groups form the Between the Bridges Network, and are linked through participation of members on multiple groups, and through the sharing of information and insights. Backbone staff provide regular, short 'snapshots' of activity throughout the Network to give each group a general sense of what other groups are doing with respect to the shared agenda. As well, Residents' Roundtable and Strategic Roundtable members provide input on selected activities of the working groups. For example, these tables provided comments on focus areas recently identified by the Student Success A-Team as potential action areas.

Some key differences among these groups have implications relevant to this evaluation:

- The Health Planning and Community Insight teams have been established for longer periods of time – since mid 2016 and early 2017, respectively. The other groups began meeting near the beginning of 2018, or in the case of Housing, in late 2018. A longer timeframe can provide more opportunity for groups to develop the trusting relationships that are necessary for collective impact to be effective.

- The Health Planning Team and the Community Insight Team also have specific, well-defined goals. The Health Planning Team is focused on having a health centre located in Dartmouth North, and the Community Insight Team seeks to build community relationships through collective work on projects to improve community spaces and spirit.

- The Student Success A-Team is currently working to establish a specific focus from among the range of issues encompassed within the student success priority. Additionally, since this group includes members who have held very different views with respect to how to improve student success, the group is taking time to co-create an environment in which safety and trust can be developed to support difficult conversations about systems and what the team can work on together.

- The Housing initiative is not only very recent, but also has adopted a different approach from the other groups. Instead of meeting for two hours every month or quarter, the housing initiative has met for longer, more concentrated periods in an intensive 5-day "sprint" approach to identifying specific areas to further develop prototypes that may impact affordable and quality housing.

- The Residents' Roundtable and the Strategic Roundtable differ from the other groups in that they don't focus on a specific issue, but rather provide insight and support on proposed activities relating to all issues. The Residents' Roundtable is also unique in that it is intended to bring agency and amplification to the voice of people impacted by the systems Between the Bridges is attempting to change.

BETWEEN THE BRIDGES: CORE CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Between the Bridges is a collective impact initiative, established as a means of finding new ways to work together to address complex issues in Dartmouth North.

> *Collective impact occurs when a group of actors from different sectors commit to a common agenda for solving a complex social or environmental problem. More than simply a new way of collaborating, collective impact is a structured approach to problem solving that includes five core conditions.*[2]

The five core conditions for a collective impact initiative include a common agenda, backbone infrastructure, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a shared measurement system. The remainder of this section explores each of these five core conditions; it describes how each condition could be reflected in an early stage collective impact initiative, and examines the extent to which each condition is currently present in Between the Bridges.

COMMON AGENDA

Commitment to a common or shared agenda plays a foundational role in collective impact. Once this core condition is well established, participants in the initiative have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. A collective impact initiative develops a common agenda with the help of members of the target population; it uses local data to inform the selection of priorities, strategies and actions; and it incorporates equity considerations into all aspects of the work. Partners and the broader community understand and can articulate the problem. The initiative's leadership structure includes voices from all relevant sectors and constituencies. Partners are committed to working together on the issue, and have a sense of collective responsibility for the issue and for generating results around the issue. [3]

At the end of 2016 Between the Bridges shared the results of its *600 Voices in '16* survey, and identified four priority areas as part of the shared agenda for Between the Bridges. The *600 Voices in '16* survey, and the previous series of community consultations used a variety of methods to obtain input from a wide range of community members having diverse perspectives and lived experience. Through local newspaper items and presentations, Between the Bridges shared information about the priority areas people identified (housing, student success, accessible healthcare, and community fabric), collectively referred to as 'Breaking the Cycle', as the initiative's high level or strategic common agenda. As noted previously, Between the Bridges has established, or supports, groups working on each of these four priority areas, and is supporting the identification of focus areas and goals in all four priorities.

Although Between the Bridges had initially identified a common agenda by the end of 2016, there are indications some table members continue to have lingering questions as to how the four priority areas were selected.

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[2] Collective Impact Forum, FGS Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact, Part 1: Learning and Evaluation in the Collective Impact Context, p. 4

[3] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p 7

Between the Bridges shared information about the relative importance community members attached to the issues listed in the *600 Voices in '16* survey, which supports the four identified priorities. However, the issues are seen as not being discrete; they have interrelated aspects and over time have been combined in several different ways. When asked, most parties – including most table members – indicate they have a shared understanding of the issues Between the Bridges is addressing. However, some don't feel their tables have yet achieved a shared understanding, and others indicate that some members need additional support and/or additional information in order to adequately understand the issues.

> *"We're all in the same boat; we all understand where we want to go; we want to see improvement."*
>
> *"We're pretty clear on the themes, but not as sure about the deep work around the issues."*
>
> *"[I] don't believe they have a shared understanding. I do believe they share the understanding that we want to do something, but not sure what that something is."*

Leaders and organizations are highly committed to working together on shared issues, and most table members participate in and feel engaged in the work of their tables. Table members often credit backbone staff facilitation and the group agreements for working together for encouraging participation and helping members feel safe, comfortable, respected, and heard.

> *"Very well – across both tables there's almost total participation; no one shows up and just sits there"*
>
> *"And throughout we use the consensus model; it's intentional, thoughtful; make sure everyone has a chance to share their views. If someone is not talking there's a pause and the person is given a chance to contribute."*
>
> *"Everyone has the same opportunity to speak but some are more comfortable stating their opinions in front of a larger group than are others. Some are quite vocal, others aren't."*

There are also indications that participation and engagement could be strengthened further. Several members noted that they or others don't feel they can speak freely during meetings; sometimes they needed support or additional time to encourage their participation, and sometimes they felt their views would not be accepted or respected. Still others noted that some voices were not present around the table.

Table members have a general sense of collective responsibility for the issues constituting the common agenda. This often refers to a sense of responsibility for working on specific issues or for bringing the community voice to the table, rather than for generating results, since most tables are not yet at the point of taking specific actions on their priority areas.

> *"100% -- that's what we're there for. The people wouldn't be there if they were not committed to doing something on the issues."*

Perceptions about the Community Insight Team and the Health Planning Team differed from perceptions about other groups, particularly in terms of having a shared understanding of the issues. Members of these two groups indicated that they understood the issues before their tables, were clear on their role with respect to those issues, and felt free to express their views, knowing they would be heard and respected. Members of the Student Success A-Team and the Residents' Roundtable were more likely to indicate a need for more information or data to support understanding of the issue, and more likely to express concern that voices were not adequately heard or respected at their tables.

In summary, Between the Bridges has identified a high level common agenda with four priority areas, and is supporting groups working on each of those priority areas. The groups have varying levels of understanding of the issues, and are at different points in terms of developing a joint approach to addressing those issues through agreed upon actions. Between the Bridges' continuing efforts in these areas will help solidify the common agenda for the initiative.

BACKBONE INFRASTRUCTURE

A well-established backbone infrastructure requires dedicated staff with specific skills to coordinate participating organization and agencies, and to design and support good process and a learning culture. Backbone staff provides project management support, including monitoring progress toward goals and connecting partners to discuss opportunities, challenges, gaps and overlaps. They convene partners and stakeholders to ensure alignment of activities, and have the respect of partners and stakeholders. In collaboration with the steering committee, backbone staff provide support, strategic guidance and leadership for the initiative. The initiative allocates adequate resources for the backbone infrastructure.[4]

Between the Bridges has two full time staff – a project leader and a community coordinator – who have been in their positions since the spring/summer of 2016. These backbone staff members provide a wide range of different types of support for the initiative, including:

- designing the overall strategy for the initiative
- designing and maintaining a process for recruiting table members
- developing and facilitating meeting agendas
- identifying with the network, information needs and arranging for required research and data
- preparing accessible materials for consideration during meetings
- co-creating group agreements for working together and for decision making
- creating approaches to support safe, respectful environments for working together
- facilitating most working group meetings
- reporting on group activities
- holding community information sessions and responding to community inquiries
- arranging for catering and supports to equitable engagement including childcare and transportation
- meeting with co-chairs and table members
- a myriad of other big and small tasks needed to support the work of six groups

From the perspective of table members, backbone staff does a great job of providing the type and level of support needed. Many positive comments described ways in which backbone staff facilitate meetings, communicate meaningfully, and encourage members to participate and express views during meetings. The great majority of table members also feel that backbone staff hear and understand members' views, and respond to feedback provided by table members.

Table members were less confident about the nature of the relationship between backbone staff and the community. While some table members feel backbone staff are very connected to and engaged in the community, others were uncertain about how well backbone staff provide the type

> *"Excellent! . . . They step in when they need to and sit back like a fly on the wall at other times. They're clear on their role; they're there to facilitate, not OWN. They both do an excellent job, are easy to work with; they follow up, are trustworthy; they get back to you when they say they will."*
>
> *"Whatever they do is above and beyond what we need. They do exceptionally well at creating and sustaining teams – a phenomenal job."*
>
> *"Very well, too. If anyone makes a suggestion, they definitely put it into effect or they find out more about it, or they bring someone to the table who can provide more information."*
>
> *" . . . they are the eyes and ears on the ground, they're gauging the pulse of the community; they're in and a part of the community, and they share relevant information with and about the community"*
>
> *"Not sure about the type and level of support the community needs. I don't know exactly what they are doing in the community . . . don't know what their role would be in the community."*

and level of support the community needs; this was usually due to members being unaware either of what the community needs, or of what the backbone does in the community.

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[4] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p 6

When table members discussed how backbone supports could be strengthened, most either couldn't think of anything, didn't feel the backbone needed strengthening, or simply felt current staff should be cloned. When table members did identify areas where backbone support could be strengthened, their suggestions tended to centre around a need for more meaningful communication with residents and the community. For example, suggestions offered by table members included strengthening the community voice, pushing for 'real' conversations and more time to review information, sharing more data and information, allowing others to participate in leadership roles, and having clearer communication around goals and objectives.

> *"I don't feel people are being heard. Sometimes decisions take more than 20 minutes; but that's the time on the agenda and it can't go onto the next meeting."*
>
> *"They hear the stuff around the table fine. But people don't feel comfortable speaking freely."*
>
> *"They could believe more in what the residents are saying."*

In summary, Between the Bridges backbone staff currently provide many forms of support for the initiative, for the six groups comprising the Between the Bridges Network, and for individuals serving as members of those groups. They also have the respect of partners and stakeholders working in various parts of the Network.

MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

When this core collective impact condition is in place (usually in the middle phase of the work, after a solid foundation has been laid), initiative partners have developed a collective plan of action which clearly specifies the activities that will address disparities, and indicates what each partner has committed to implementing. Partners have clear goals for their own contributions to their working groups; and they understand the roles of other working groups and how they support the common agenda. The collective impact initiative coordinates the differentiated activities of working groups so as to align with the plan of action, in a way that fills gaps and reduces duplication of effort.[5]

During the initial period after establishment, Between the Bridges concentrated its efforts on laying the foundation for collective impact work; it focused primarily on building trust and relationships, and on developing agreements for working together and decision-making. Many table members feel this effort has enabled them and others to change the way they interact in group settings so that they can better express their views, understand and appreciate each other's views, and have constructive discussions about difficult and conflicting issues.

In preparation for developing a collective plan of action, Between the Bridges has organized work on its four priority areas in a way that reduces gaps and duplication of effort. For example . . .

- Instead of establishing a working group for the healthcare priority area, Between the Bridges has been providing backbone support for an existing community initiative focused on increasing health services in Dartmouth North.

- Instead of establishing a working group for the housing priority area, Between the Bridges compiled research describing the issues and identifying activities already underway to address these issues in Dartmouth North; it has also provided a vehicle for various parties working on housing issues to come together to understand the problem better, and to start considering potential actions to address the issues.

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[5] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p.7

Between the Bridges is taking steps to integrate the activities of the different groups in its Network. For example, backbone staff prepare a 'snapshot' of the activities of each group, and shares them at all group meetings to increase awareness of activity among partners in all parts of the Network. This is also intended to help the Residents' Roundtable and the Strategic Roundtable know when and how their input and support will be needed by the working groups.

Table members indicate that measures such as – and probably in addition to – the Network 'snapshot' are needed.

Most table members feel they have a minimal understanding of the interests and concerns of other working groups. They also note that they consider it important that they know and understand what their partners in the initiative are doing.

> *"Not very well. I'm confused about what this group's role is . . . I'm confused about what we're sharing, and what's the final goal"*
>
> *"I know there are other groups; I know they are community based; I know they all link at some point, they all have portions of it and those portions intersect. But I don't know specifically what those groups do. I'm not even sure about some of the specifics of my own group."*
>
> *"As far as I know, I understand what I need to know about other parts of the Network."*

CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

In order to satisfy this core condition, a collective impact initiative needs open and continuous communication – across the many players and among external stakeholders – to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation. When continuous communication is in place, working group meetings take place regularly and are attended by actively engaged members; there is regular communication and coordination of efforts among initiative partners, and external stakeholders engage with the initiative through regular meetings and integration of their feedback into the initiative's overall strategy.[6]

The groups in the Between the Bridges Network are meeting regularly, usually on a monthly basis; the Strategic Roundtable generally meets quarterly. (The housing initiative is new, and has taken a lab approach rather than a meeting approach.) The groups vary in size, and attendance at meetings varies somewhat from group to group and during different times of the year (e.g. during winter or stormy weather, or during holiday periods). Average attendance during 2018 was around 65% to 70% of members.

With few exceptions, table members participate in, and feel engaged in, the work of their tables. As noted in a previous section, table members view the modelling and facilitation provided by backbone staff, and the development of agreements for working together as helping participants, particularly residents, feel comfortable expressing their views on the issues being discussed.

There is some communication among members apart from group meetings. For example, some members might meet to discuss information provided during previous meetings, or may occasionally meet to update members who were unable to attend a previous meeting. Members also noted that they feel free to contact backbone staff between meetings to discuss or clarify issues, or to express an opinion. Apart from these informal activities, backbone staff provides most of the communication and coordination relating to Between the Bridges groups.

During the initial stages of implementation, Between the Bridges sought input from the community through a series of community consultations. Currently, Between the Bridges' communication with external stakeholders

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[6] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p.6

focuses on information about ways community members can become involved in Between the Bridges activities. For example, Between the Bridges placed articles or notices in the local community newspaper on a regular basis to let residents know about the community grants program, or about upcoming information sessions or conversation cafés.

Currently much of Between the Bridges communication activity occurs within groups. Working group meetings are taking place regularly, and most members attend and are actively engaged.   Group members report positive changes in the quality and nature of their communication. They have observed changes in their ability to express their views and to understand and respect the views of others. Information provided on feedback forms completed after meetings indicates that members feel they are able to have difficult discussions and work through their differences productively. As described previously, there is limited communication among the different parts of the Between the Bridges Network.

SHARED MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

When this core condition is in place, collective impact initiative has established a system to collect data and measure results consistently across all participants – as a means of ensuring that efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable. The measurement system also provides feedback to the initiative so that goals and strategies can evolve with new learning. Partners understand the value of a shared measurement system, are involved in determining the indicators and data collection methods that comprise the system, and know how they will participate in the system.[7]

A shared measurement system is usually the last of the five core conditions of collective impact to be put in place. Initiatives often find it challenging to implement this condition due to differences in levels of readiness and to differences in existing systems that may not integrate well.

It Is premature for Between the Bridges to establish a shared measurement system. Discussions at some of the tables – for example, the Student Success A-Team – indicate that table members value the concept of measurement, and are interested in identifying appropriate indicators to monitor progress toward achieving identified outcomes. This table is currently in the process of narrowing its priorities for action; it will select indicators and develop a shared measurement system after decisions have been made about a specific course of action.

Between the Bridges does have some data collection processes in place as a means of promoting accountability and tracking activity or process. For example, the Community Insight Team has maintained records of projects funded through its grants program, and has feedback information on many of the funded projects, particularly during the first year. Between the Bridges also collects feedback on group functioning at every meeting of the Residents' Roundtable, the Student Success A-Team, and the Strategic Roundtable, as a means of monitoring members' perceptions of group process. This information is stored online in a common drive for easy access.

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[7] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p.7

LEARNINGS: IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT CORE CONDITIONS

The five core conditions of collective impact—common agenda, backbone infrastructure, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and shared measurement system – are intended to provide structure to enable communities to create long term, large scale solutions to social problems. A recent study examining the impact of collective impact initiatives found initiatives varied widely in the extent to which they had implemented the five core conditions, and the elements comprising each of those core conditions. Initiatives generally were more likely to have implemented all or most elements of the backbone infrastructure and common agenda conditions, and often had implemented few or none of the elements of the shared measurement and continuous communication conditions. [8]

Between the Bridges similarly has made mixed progress in its implementation of the five core conditions of collective impact.

Common Agenda: Between the Bridges has made good progress toward development of a common agenda. It has identified four priority areas – student success, housing, accessible healthcare, and community fabric – as comprising its high level 'Breaking the Cycle' common agenda, and it supports groups working on each of these priorities. Group members are committed to working together, are engaged in their group work, and feel collectively responsible for that work.

Backbone Infrastructure: Between the Bridges has two full time backbone staff who provide the type and level of support the initiative's groups need. Backbone staff hear and understand members' views, and respond to their feedback.

Continuous Communication: The initiative's groups are meeting regularly, and have a core of regularly attending participants. Members participate in and feel engaged in the work of their groups, and backbone staff are open to hearing from community members.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Between the Bridges has not identified mutually reinforcing activities at this time. Working groups are currently narrowing their focus in preparation for deciding on specific actions within the four priority areas.

Shared Measurement System: Between the Bridges has not yet established a shared measurement system as it is currently narrowing its priorities for action. Group members value the concept of shared measurement, and have expressed interest in its development and implementation.

Between the Bridges' implementation of the five core collective impact conditions has centred primarily on elements of **common agenda** and **backbone infrastructure**, and these are still in development. These two core conditions are foundational to the establishment of the remaining conditions, and support the long-term success of collective impact initiatives.

> *The findings also clearly indicate that there are specific steps initiatives can take upfront to increase their likelihood of success over the long-term, including . . . Not rushing to get the five conditions in place, but rather investing thoughtfully in the two that are most foundational upfront: **backbone and common agenda**.*
>
> *If the work will take years, there is no reason to assume all conditions need to be fully up and running within the first couple years. In fact, the evidence suggests that a deep investment in the strength of the backbone supports and the common agenda in the first couple years will pay off over time.[9]*

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[8] ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute (2018). When Collective Impact has an Impact: A Cross-Site Study of 25 Collective Impact Initiatives. ORSImpact.com/directory/ci-study-report.htm

[9] ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute (2018). When Collective Impact has an Impact: A Cross-Site Study of 25 Collective Impact Initiatives, pp 84-85; ORSImpact.com/directory/ci-study-report.htm

Between the Bridges' upfront focus on common agenda and backbone infrastructure is an appropriate investment of effort to support successful implementation of the initiative. It is important to note, however, that implementation of these and the other core conditions is not yet complete, and could be strengthened through learnings gleaned from Between the Bridges' early period experience.

Key learnings include the following:

- Although a shared agenda has been identified, some table members are still uncertain about how the four priority areas comprising the agenda were selected. It is not clear whether this is primarily a communications issue, or whether there are concerns about the process used to select or describe the four priority areas. Whatever the cause of the uncertainty, it indicates a limitation regarding the extent to which the initiative's agenda is actually a shared agenda, and without a common understanding and endorsement of a shared agenda, it will be difficult to develop a meaningful shared plan of action.

- There is minimal understanding among table members regarding the roles, goals, and activities of the different parts of the Between the Bridges Network. This could make it difficult to design and implement mutually reinforcing activities, and to have a more complete common agenda.

Our Culture and How We Work: Foundation for Success

In collective impact, partners from different sectors work together on a common agenda for the purpose of solving complex social problems. Those partners often have differing understandings of the cause, shape, and impact of those problems, as well as differing ideas as to how they could and should be solved; and at some point all partners will need to let go of some of the perceptions and assumptions they brought to the work. Collective impact work can be particularly difficult when partners do not have a history of working together on issues. In this situation – which is the usual situation – foundational work is required in order to provide fertile ground in which collective impact can take root. Elements of this foundation include ensuring that the initiative has adequate capacity to undertake the work; building a culture that fosters relationships, trust and respect; addressing equity, diversity and inclusion in initiative design and implementation; and embedding learning and evaluation structures in the work of the initiative.

Initiative Capacity

Initiative capacity refers to the resources available to support partners in their collective impact work. It includes support in the form of adequate operational funding for the backbone infrastructure. It also includes resources in the form of respected influencers and champions who can bring stakeholders to the table, and of supporters who can champion the strategy in the broader community.[10]

Funding for operational support for Between the Bridges was initially provided by the Province of Nova Scotia under a three-year agreement terminating at the end of March 2019. As of the beginning of April 2019, the same level of provincial funding will be provided for an additional two-year period as Between the Bridges becomes part of Inspiring Communities. Between the Bridges uses this funding for two full time staff, office and meeting space rent and utilities, to cover the costs of supporting meeting attendance (food, child care, transportation), for part time research and evaluation assistance, and for activities such as the housing lab and a conflict resolution workshop.

Evaluation participants view the current level of funding as adequate to meet the initiative's needs; they also noted that having stable funding that can be utilized flexibly to meet initiative needs is essential and invaluable. Backbone staff have indicated that in the future, additional resources may be needed to enhance external communication or to enable groups to take on specific activities as they move into an action phase.

> *"If the province can pay for the core, the backbone, that is where we should be able to go out and resource sectors or foundations. The commitment from the Province to provide the core funding has made this all possible."*
>
> *"As we go forward, and the groups identify their specific areas of focus and action there will need to be some funding diversification because Between the Bridges doesn't have the resources to pay "to do things". When groups come up with specific ideas of things they want to do, they may require investment of financial resources."*

Evaluation participants agree that Between the Bridges has successfully attracted champions and influencers who command the respect of stakeholders, and who can bring stakeholders to the table. The Strategic Roundtable has skilled and professional people of influence with the competencies and personalities to support the initiative; they have relevant expertise and experience, and they are able to influence shifts in both public and private funding. These champions and influencers are ready and willing to help where needed,

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[10] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p. 7

although there have as yet been few opportunities to draw on those resources. Examples of ways in which Strategic Roundtable members have been able to contribute include helping with the recruitment of people with influence or needed perspectives, and supporting a Student Success A-Team member in accessing data which was not at the time publicly available.

While Between the Bridges has successfully attracted champions and influencers to the initiative, it has had more difficulty maintaining engagement of those champions and influencers. In particular, a lack of meaningful activity to date, and some uncertainty regarding roles and responsibilities may hamper the engagement of Strategic Roundtable members. This in turn raises concerns that members might begin to question the value of continuing their involvement in the initiative.

> *"Yes! – that's the whole purpose of the Strategic Roundtable. There are some heavy hitters there, people who can also bring others to the table. But this gets back to the fragility issue. The role needs to have real meaning in order for the table to have influence; otherwise they will start to waver."*
>
> *"The only thing I can say is that with the Strategic Roundtable, I know there were a number of participants over the past year who were questioning the value of their time in being involved. Slow to action, and there being a lack of clarity about role, responsibilities, decision making, and where we were going."*

The resident voice is important in collective impact, and if given the opportunity, residents could be champions for the initiative within the broader community. Some table members have expressed concerns about the meaningful engagement of residents, particularly with respect to decision-making responsibility, and how residents' voices will be heard and incorporated into decisions as the initiative moves into an action phase. The concern is that some party other than residents (e.g. the Strategic Roundtable) will have the final say in decisions which have impacts for those who live and work in the community.

TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In order to be successful, collective impact requires a culture that embodies trust and relationship building. Work on collective impact initiatives should be guided by principles and practices which partners have endorsed and which are reinforced. Partners should be able to trust one another, be comfortable expressing their views, and feel that their voices are respected and heard. They should be able to seek feedback and advice from one another, and should feel included in the initiative's major decision-making processes.[11]

Between the Bridges has focused considerable effort in these areas, and has made recognizable progress in establishing a culture that will provide a solid foundation for future activity.

Early in the establishment of each group, Between the Bridges backbone staff spent significant periods of time helping members explore and develop agreements for working together. Each of the regularly meeting groups now has such agreements in place; while they vary somewhat from one group to another, most agreements address matters such as commitment, transparency, confidentiality, listening, respect, and dealing with conflict. Backbone staff regularly included reminders about these agreements during initial meetings, and less often or as needed as groups became more established.

Backbone staff have instituted intentional practices to encourage and support the building of new relationships among members within each group. For example, they design seating plans that vary for each meeting, and are intended to ensure members don't cluster with people they already know, but rather have an opportunity

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[11] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p. 8

to become better acquainted with others in the group. At the beginning of each meeting backbone staff use check-in exercises as an informal means of helping members learn more about each other as individuals. Also, during small group discussions, backbone staff intentionally vary the grouping combinations of members so that members are exposed to a range of different views and perspectives.

The Community Insight Team's grant program has been instrumental in developing relationships in the community where previously there were none. Through joint work on community projects, community members and organizations have established ongoing relationships that benefit the community, and that enable youth to participate in community activities.

Information provided by table members on feedback forms completed after meetings indicates that members have a high degree of trust for each other and are able to work through difficult discussions productively. With respect to difficult conversations, comments provided during interviews indicate that many groups have not yet had what they would consider to be really difficult conversations. Some attributed this to the fact that groups are not yet addressing difficult issues, while others felt steps had been taken to avoid or discourage conflict among group members.

> *"Haven't had a bunch of those yet. To date the conversations have been very frank, open; there have been some differences of opinion, but those differences were respected and it was worked out. I don't anticipate a problem in this area."*
>
> *"I don't know that I've observed tensions or challenges at our level. And the meeting content is usually not about that; it's usually updating or providing information."*
>
> *"There hasn't been a whole lot of conflict because there hasn't been a while lot of conversation around the issues. And some people are holding back, not saying what they feel."*

The co-created agreements for working together, and the facilitation provided by backbone staff, are important factors in helping table members productively engage in their group's work. Some members noted that they use those resources to help deal with difficult conversations, and some members were able to identify specific changes they had observed in themselves or in others in their ability to express and respect differing views, or at times to be able to squelch their own inclination to lash out or reject opposing views and perspectives. This represents a significant achievement, considering the lack of trust and prior experience working together which had characterized many segments of this community.

> *"Members recognize that there are difficult conversations, and recognize when those conversations are taking place. They have guiding principles – it's OK to have different views, difficult conversations, OK to have different views and to express those views."*
>
> *"But this group has deeply established norms for the group – so we are prepared to work through things; we are listening differently."*

Early in the establishment of each group, backbone staff also spent time guiding members through sharing information and hosting discussions of different ways of making decisions. Members considered the pros and cons of different models, with particular reference to how it might work for their specific group. In most cases members have opted for consensus decision-making that suit the specific needs of their group; the Community Insight Team used a supermajority approach for endorsing grant proposals.

Backbone staff attempt to ensure that table members are included in all decisions pertaining to the issues on which their table is focused. Each time a decision is required, backbone staff review the procedures associated with the table's selected decision-making method, and record the decision results. Feedback provided by table members indicates that most members feel they are included in major decision-making processes.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Many collective impact initiatives are established to address social issues that affect groups and individuals differently. Identifying and understanding the impact of those disparities is important in collective impact; and it is also important to institute measures to ensure meaningful inclusion and representation of affected communities and individuals.[12]

Between the Bridges has adopted several measures intended to increase equity, diversity and inclusion within the initiative. As an initial step, backbone staff developed a diversity matrix to identify groups and individuals within the community who might be differently affected by the issues on which Between the Bridges is focussing. It was developed working with Census data to help further understand the % representation of various groups living within the catchment area so there could be engagement with intention to reflect, as much as possible, the diversity of lived experience found in the community. The diversity matrix established objectives for the inclusion of group members who are youth, parents, seniors, males, females, trans, LGBTQ, Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, Muslims, who have a disability, and/or who live in different geographic sections of the community. The diversity matrix was used to guide the initial recruitment of group members, and is kept at the forefront of ongoing efforts to help in selection of replacements for group members.

This process has increased diversity in group membership, and has helped identify areas where additional effort is required. For example, backbone staff note that the initiative had been missing an Indigenous perspective; recently a table member was able to identify and provide introductions to several other people who might be able to make further introductions for recruitment of new members. The diversity matrix serves to maintain awareness of the range of voices that could be affected differently by the initiative, and that should be represented in the initiative's work.

Between the Bridges provides several forms of support intended to increase inclusion. Backbone staff have food available at all meetings, and provide assistance to address participation barriers that may be posed by transportation or child care costs. Backbone staff aim to use plain language in their communications as much as possible and are always open for recommendations for greater clarity with group members; and during meetings they use reframing to promote better understanding of matters being discussed.

Many table members feel Between the Bridges hears and respects different backgrounds and perspectives. They indicated that facilitation by backbone staff, and the agreements for working together, help members feel comfortable expressing their views, and help ensure different backgrounds are heard and respected.

Other table members took a different position, indicating that Between the Bridges does not hear and/or does not respect some voices. Their explanations indicated that some individual table members are less vocal in group settings, some members feel intimidated by others around the table, and sometimes there is simply not enough time to allow for the expression of all perspectives.

> *"This is critically important. Between the Bridges has facilitated that within the group – either (backbone staff) or someone from the table. There have been lots of conversations about diversity – what perspectives are critical to bring into the discussion."*
>
> *"As we start to dig our teeth into different topics, we will need to ensure that we have the right voices around the table – people with the experience relevant to the topic; and if we don't have them we'll have to go out and get them."*
>
> *"Like any group of people you'll always have some who are more vocal than others; they don't mind speaking in public, they will always be the first to speak up, etc. But (backbone staff) do a great job of making sure that everyone is heard, that everyone feels their point of view is heard. Usually the only restriction is time."*

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[12] ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute (2018). When Collective Impact has an Impact: A Cross-Site Study of 25 Collective Impact Initiatives. ORSImpact.com/directory/ci-study-report.htm; p. 79

The inclusion of the resident voice is an important issue for many table members. They emphasized that the voice of residents with lived experience should be strengthened within Between the Bridges. Suggestions offered to achieve this included actively seeking out those with lived experience, giving the resident voice priority, and/or providing additional supports to ensure that residents are comfortable sharing their views.

> *"The resident voice should be a priority; have to establish trust, and have to help residents understand the system."*
>
> *"I don't see how we can tackle the issues of Dartmouth North unless the residents are the focal point. Otherwise I'm just giving input."*

LEARNING AND EVALUATION

Continuous learning is critical to collective impact success. In order to effectively address complex problems, a collective impact initiative must be aware of changes in any aspects of the initiative and its environment, and must be able to learn from and adapt in response to those changes. In order for this to occur, learning and evaluation processes should be an integral part of the initiative; a process should be established for the sharing of insights and lessons learned; and community input and feedback should be used to inform the initiative's ongoing work.[13]

Between the Bridges has an allocation for a part time research and evaluation function, and the initiative has implemented several measures to support a learning and evaluation culture.

The initiative has used research and evaluation resources to obtain and update research on the community and on the initiative's priority areas, and to collect and compile evaluative information. For example, this has included updating statistical data for its community profile, compiling and updating educational data for Dartmouth North schools and students, compiling and summarizing research on housing in Dartmouth North, developing key themes in student success from an analysis of community consultation and roundtable discussions, and developing and summarizing feedback forms.

During group meetings, backbone staff use facilitation techniques to encourage members to share their views. For example, backbone staff use opening and closing rounds as opportunities for individual members to settle into the meeting, share with each other, and pose outstanding questions or concerns; they use open ended questions to support the exchange of ideas and views; and at times they employ a 'backing off' approach to encourage members to engage one another in discussion.

After each meeting, members of the Student Success A-Team, the Residents' Roundtable, and the Strategic Roundtable complete feedback forms which are aligned with the evaluation framework. These are available in both paper and electronic format, and backbone staff provide a summary of results to members at their next meeting. When table members identify concerns, backbone staff attempt to make changes to address those concerns. For example, feedback indicated members often feel meetings are rushed, and agendas are too full to allow for the length and depth of discussion needed; in response, backbone staff adjusted meeting start times and changed the agenda format. Table members also noted that they feel comfortable contacting backbone staff between meetings to discuss concerns, or to provide input on issues.

Between the Bridges has shared insights on its successes, failures and lessons learned with Inspiring Communities, and with staff of the Inspiring Community teams in Northside and Digby.

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[13] Inspiring Communities Evaluation Framework (June 19, 2018); Sample Early Performance Indicators, p. 8

The Community Insight Team established a process for sharing its learnings from the initial year of its grants program. It then developed a second version of the program based on those learnings. The Community Insight Team has also hosted a community event to celebrate the successes achieved through the grants program.

> *"They do an exit survey every week – questions to support your participation and engagement. I appreciate the opportunity to engage that way."*
>
> *"I haven't given much feedback, but when I've had ideas or suggestions, they've both been incredibly receptive; if it's as reasonable idea they'll work to implement it, make sure it runs smoothly"*

With respect to input and feedback from the broader community, Between the Bridges did actively seek input from the community during the initiative's early period about the Shared Agenda and subsequently for recruitment purposes. Since then it has hosted community conversations during which input could be provided; these events tend to focus on the provision of information to the community about the initiative. The initiative also regularly places articles and advertisements (regarding recruitment, events, program information) in the local community newspaper.

Between the Bridges' learning and evaluation efforts are currently focused on process and on providing background to support development of action plans. As the initiative establishes action plans and moves into a more active phase, it will refocus its learning and evaluation work toward specific activities identified in action plans for the priority areas.

LEARNINGS: FOUNDATION FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT SUCCESS

Between the Bridges emerged from an environment with a history of various organizations and community sectors working mostly independently on issues of concern to Dartmouth North residents. From its inception Between the Bridges has placed an emphasis on establishing the foundation needed in order for collective impact to be successful; many of those foundational elements are now in place.

Initiative Capacity: The initiative has stable funding at a level adequate to meet its current needs. It has a Strategic Roundtable comprised of people who have the ability and inclination to be champions and influencers for the initiative. It has recruited residents who could be champions for the initiative within the broader community, as well as other experienced and supportive members for initiative groups.

Trust and Relationship Building: Between the Bridges has co-created agreements for working together, and processes for decision-making with each of the initiative groups. Members of the initiative groups have a high degree of trust for one another, and feel confident in their ability to manage conflict when discussing issues on which there are differing points of view. Most members also feel included in major decisions relating to their group.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: The initiative has demonstrated a commitment to identifying and working to address ways in which initiative activity might impact people differently. It uses a diversity matrix to recruit group members and to maintain awareness of the extent to which initiative groups reflect the diversity of the community. Initiative partners emphasize the importance of giving priority to the resident voice.

Learning and Evaluation: Between the Bridges has implemented practices to enable it to learn from its environment so that it can adapt to changes. A series of community consultations helped frame the initiative during its early stages; feedback is regularly obtained from table members; and backbone staff are open to receiving informal input and feedback from table members.

Initiative partners recognize the value in focusing on these foundational elements. They identify the building of relationships, and providing opportunities for different voices to be heard, among the most important contributions made by Between the Bridges to date. Table members recognize that the ability to understand the perspectives of others, and to be able to share views and manage conflict, as important precursors to being able to work together productively. They have identified changes in themselves and in others in this regard, and they attribute those changes to their agreements for working together and to skillful facilitation by backbone staff.

The progress Between the Bridges has made in establishing foundational elements for collective impact will be important in helping it continue its work through future phases. Its ongoing efforts to maintain and extend this foundational work could be strengthened on the basis of what it has learned through this early experience.

Key learnings include the following:

- Initiative partners recognize that building trusting relationships takes time, but when this process is perceived as taking too much time, interest and engagement may be lost. Partners recognize the importance of relationship-building, and acknowledge that when dealing with different personalities and backgrounds, there will be differences in how much support is needed. However, there is a growing sense that Between the Bridges has now made enough progress in this area to enable the initiative to place more emphasis on specific actions related to the priority areas.

- Initiative partners consistently emphasize the importance of the resident voice. However, some also question the extent to which Between the Bridges reflects, hears, and respects the resident voice; and some express uncertainty about residents' role in decisions relating to the initiative's overall strategy. Addressing these issues overtly will strengthen Between the Bridges' ability to maintain a strong foundation for successful collective impact.

LEARNING AND MOVING FORWARD

Between the Bridges has made important progress on two of the five core conditions for collective impact: backbone infrastructure and common agenda. These two core conditions are usually the first to be implemented by collective impact initiatives; they set the stage for implementation of the remaining core conditions, and have been found to contribute to future system and population changes.

Between the Bridges' implementation of these two core conditions has produced key successes for the initiative:

✔ Backbone staff are well respected in the community, have assumed responsibility for a wide range of backbone infrastructure responsibilities in support of six groups, and are meeting the needs of those groups.

✔ Between the Bridges has developed a high level common agenda with four priority areas: student success, community fabric, accessible health care, and housing. These priority areas were identified through community consultation.

✔ Between the Bridges has established five groups and supports one additional group to address priority areas of the common agenda. Group members are from different sectors, and have different perspectives, experiences, and capacities. They meet regularly, are engaged in the work of their groups, and have a sense of collective responsibility for addressing the issues coming before their groups.

During its early period, Between the Bridges focused much of its attention on establishing a foundational culture that would increase the likelihood that collective impact could be an effective approach for the area. Its focus on foundational elements, especially its work on building trust and relationships, was particularly important for Dartmouth North, which has a diverse population and where individuals and organizations did not have a history of successfully collaborating on community issues.

Between the Bridges' focus on developing trust and relationships has also resulted in several key successes for the initiative:

✔ Between the Bridges participants acknowledge an improvement in trust and relationship building among initiative partners. They cite the joint development of agreements for working together, and the intentional provision of opportunities for the exchange of ideas, for the expression and understanding of differing perspectives, and for getting to know one another better, as important contributors to this change.

✔ The Community Insight Team's grants program has supported over 20 community-initiated projects, such as community dinners, benches for a local school, cooking classes for youth. These projects provided opportunities for residents to plan and work together, while contributing to community spirit and addressing issues within Between the Bridges' four priority areas.

✔ The Community Insight Team's grants program process also provided an opportunity for an active community organization to develop an ongoing relationship and presence in a somewhat socially isolated neighbourhood; this strengthened the organization's links with that neighbourhood, and provided more activity opportunities for neighbourhood youth.

Between the Bridges' experience in designing an overall strategy for the initiative, and in making choices in how that strategy would be implemented has produced learnings that may be helpful for other collective impact initiatives, or in future phases of this initiative. Between the Bridges' learnings from its experience include the following:

- o Having backbone staff who have not only the right combination of skills, but also the respect of the community and stakeholders, is important for the credibility and effectiveness of the initiative. Staff should have complementary skills, should engage well with one another, and should be able to model trusting relationships needed for productive group discussions.

- o Starting with one or two focus areas is preferable. The demand on resources (backbone staff, research, etc.) increases with each focus area, as does the need to ensure coordination and collaboration among the various groups working on different focus areas. Being able to concentrate on one or two focus areas, particularly during the initiative's early period, provides a more manageable workload and could result in more effective work.

- o Going too slow is better than going too fast. Between the Bridges has found that its careful pace, with an initial focus on building trust and relationships, has led to a high level of engagement and enthusiasm.

- o Strategic support for the initiative should be recruited and engaged when the initiative is ready to generate specific content, rather than at the beginning of the initiative. Having strategic resources in place before there is a meaningful role for those resources can result in a wavering level of interest and a loss of key support.

- o The resident voice should be incorporated into the initiative in a manner that is meaningful and effective for both the initiative and the community. It is also important to have clarity with respect to the role residents will play in initiative activities and decisions.

Considerations for Moving Forward

Between the Bridges requested this evaluation as a means of learning from the experience of its early stages to inform and strengthen implementation of collective impact as the initiative moves more firmly into an action phase. Six areas warranting further consideration have emerged from this examination of Between the Bridges' early experience. The following reflections are offered as a means of helping to identify questions to be considered by Between the Bridges partners when making decisions about future implementation of the initiative.

Checking the Pace

Between the Bridges partners acknowledge that collective impact takes time and is not a 'quick fix' solution; and they are aware that building trust takes more time for some people than for others. However, voices in several segments of the initiative are expressing concern about the initiative's timeframe for action, and are stressing the importance of moving the initiative forward in a more timely and more overtly demonstrable manner.

Some indicated a sense of treading water or going in circles rather than making meaningful progress on issues. For example, they suggested that the list of student success priority areas recently considered by several of the initiative groups includes items very similar to those listed in the *600 Voices in '16* Survey.

Their concern is that a lack of timely, specific action on priority areas may have a detrimental impact on the initiative as a whole. If table members become discouraged, lose interest, and/or decide to focus their valuable time elsewhere, the initiative could lose momentum and resources to work on the issues, and could lose champions and influencers. Similarly, if Between the Bridges is not seen as making a meaningful difference in the community, there is a risk the initiative will lose credibility, leading to an erosion of trust with the broader community.

Pace concerns are primarily associated with the Student Success team, which is currently narrowing its focus on issues and establishing priorities as preliminary steps to deciding on action, and with the Residents' Roundtable and Strategic Roundtable where activity is directly dependent on the activities of the working groups.

Questions to consider regarding initiative pace:

- What steps could be taken to increase the pace of meaningful group activity on priorities?
- What implications might an increase in group activity/pace have for trust or relationship-building among group and Network members?
- Are there steps that could or should be taken to address the needs of table members who may not be ready to participate in increased activity/pace?

Solidifying the Common Agenda

In collective impact a common agenda represents a shared vision for change; it includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach for solving it through agreed upon actions. Strong implementation of a common agenda creates a solid base for implementation of other collective impact core conditions, and plays an important role in increasing the likelihood a collective impact initiative will lead to system and population changes. Taking time during the early stages to ensure there is shared understanding of a clearly defined common agenda is a worthwhile investment in the future of the initiative.

Between the Bridges has a high level common agenda with four identified priority areas; and it has established or is supporting work on each of these priority areas. Although most Between the Bridges participants identify the four priorities as comprising the common agenda, some are uncertain about how the four priority areas were initially identified. It is not clear whether this uncertainty stems from the ways in which items were combined for selection purposes, or whether the initiative provided insufficient information regarding the results of community consultations and the selection process. In either case the uncertainty restricts shared understanding of the common agenda for some table members, and possibly also for the broader community.

Since establishing a collective plan of action is the next step in implementing a common agenda, it will be important to ensure there is clarity and shared agreement regarding components of the common agenda.

Questions to consider regarding solidifying the common agenda:

- What is the cause and specific nature of the uncertainty about the priority areas comprising the common agenda?
- How can this be addressed so as to improve shared understanding of the common agenda?

Strengthening Communication

Communication and learning are integral to collective impact. A collective impact initiative hears and respects the voices of those who are impacted by the issues being addressed; and it designs and adjusts its approach to incorporate those perspectives and changes in those perspectives. Collective impact expects an initiative to engage external stakeholders, and to integrate their feedback into the overall initiative strategy.

With respect to communication, Between the Bridges is where it is expected to be at this point.   After an extensive consultative process during its early period, the initiative currently focuses its communication on the provision of information about Between the Bridges events or programs, and the initiative has been somewhat reluctant to provide information about its successes to the community. Backbone staff have identified a need to strengthen external communications as work on the initiative moves forward.

Questions to consider regarding strengthening communication:

- At this stage in the initiative's implementation, what is the most helpful and appropriate means of telling the community what information it has collected and how that information was used?

- What should/should not be done to communicate initiative successes and achievements to the community?

Considering Implications of Structure and Format

There are many different ways of implementing a collective impact approach to address specific needs and specific circumstances. Sometimes a collective impact initiative will drive change directly and sometimes it will support or serve as a catalyst for others' efforts. For example, Between the Bridges plays a supportive role in relation to the efforts of the Dartmouth North Community Health Planning Team, and it has played a more active role in establishing and guiding a separate Between the Bridges working group to address the student success priority area. Similarly, while most Between the Bridges groups accomplish their work through regular monthly or quarterly meetings, work on the housing area has adopted a more concentrated lab format.

Between the Bridges is currently supporting the work of five regularly-meeting groups and one lab initiative. The two backbone staff are actively involved in almost all aspects of the work of these six groups – a very complicated workload that includes everything from designing agendas and facilitating meetings, to buying pizza and giving drives, to checking attendance, recruiting new members, and between-meeting contacts to discuss issues.

The use of a monthly/quarterly meeting format also has implications for the pace at which a group can accomplish its work. Between the Bridges groups meet in the evenings, usually for two hours each month or quarter. Opening and closing exercises, minutes and feedback, and the sharing of Network information further reduces the time available for discussion during each meeting. Table members frequently express concern about a lack of time to allow for a full discussion of issues. While backbone staff have made some adjustments to address this concern, there is a clear limit on what can be accomplished in a two-hour monthly format. On the other hand, the use of regular meetings over a period of time does provide a good opportunity for members to build trust and learn to work together.

As Between the Bridges moves more fully into an action phase, it may become increasingly difficult to provide needed support in a timely manner with current resources. There will be a need for more communication, interaction and coordination among the various groups, and it is unlikely there will be a reduction in the current pressure for more timely action.

Exploring the implications of the initiative's current structure and format for work level and timeliness could assist in determining whether modifications might strengthen Between the Bridges' ability to address the initiative's growing needs.

Questions to consider regarding structure/format:

- Can, or should, any of the groups be amalgamated to provide a more manageable workload?

- What tasks currently undertaken by backbone staff could be assumed by other members of the groups?

- What tasks could be assumed by other members of the groups after additional support/training?

- How does the lab compare to the meeting approach in terms of moving the work forward?

- Would the lab approach, or another non-meeting approach, be an appropriate option for the other working or insight groups?

- Could/should a lab approach be used in conjunction with or instead of a monthly meeting approach for the student success group? What are the pros and cons?

- Does a lab approach allow sufficient opportunity for trust and relationship-building? What are the indications that a group is ready for productive participation in a lab?

Prioritizing the Resident Voice

The importance of listening to the voices of those who are most affected by initiatives is central to collective impact. The need to hear, incorporate, and respond to those who live and work in the community is stressed throughout various conditions and practices related to implementation of collective impact initiatives. When a collective impact initiative does not meaningfully engage those most affected by the issues in initiative decision making, it runs the risk of becoming, or being perceived as, a top-down endeavour.

Between the Bridges has stated that it considers the resident voice the cornerstone of collective impact. It has established a Residents' Roundtable and has recruited members with the objective of addressing the diversity of the community. It has also recruited residents to serve as members of each of the other groups established or supported by Between the Bridges.

Table members recognize and value residents' contribution to the initiative; they stress the importance of hearing and respecting residents' perspectives, and they have suggested the resident voice be given priority in initiative decisions. They have expressed concern that the community voice may not be adequately reflected in Between the Bridges' work; in some cases they linked this to the limited diversity among current table members, and in other cases they based it on a perception that the resident voice is not being adequately heard, respected, valued. More recently some table members have also questioned how the resident voice

will be incorporated into decision making as the initiative moves into an action phase, and whether the decision-making process will mean that parties other than residents will have the final say in deciding matters that directly impact those who live and work in the community.

Questions to consider regarding prioritizing the resident voice:

- Who has the final say in decisions affecting residents?

- How, and how often do other tables seek and use advice and input from residents?

- What measures are/should be taken to ensure that residents are meaningfully engaged in initiative decision making?

- Have residents been provided with clear information on how the resident voice has been/will be incorporated into initiative decisions and strategy?

- Have residents been included in decisions regarding how the resident voice is incorporated into initiative decisions and strategy?

Clarifying Roles

In collective impact the backbone infrastructure has key responsibilities relating to the initiative, including guiding the initiative's vision, strategy, process and culture, and supporting the aligned activities of the various partners working on the initiative. While the backbone can take on different forms, it is usually comprised of dedicated staff and a steering committee. Together, these two parties are responsible for the various types of functions and activities needed to establish and sustain a collective impact initiative.

Between the Bridges has dedicated backbone staff who currently support the work of six groups. Their responsibilities relating to support for aligned activities will increase as different parts of the initiative move into action phases. The Strategic Roundtable is considered by some to serve in a steering committee role for the initiative; for example, interview participants during this evaluation referred to the Strategic Roundtable as the steering committee. However, it is not specifically identified as such within the initiative as a steering committee; instead, it was established to promote, advocate and lead systems and policy change, and to bring insight, information and senior level influence to priorities identified by working groups and the Residents' Roundtable.

The Residents' Roundtable has raised the matter of roles and responsibilities, particularly with respect to decision-making responsibility, and how residents' voices will be heard and incorporated into decisions as the initiative moves into an action phase. Their concern is that some party other than residents (e.g. the Strategic Roundtable) will have the final say in decisions regarding action plans which have an impact on those who live and work in the community.

There is a lack of clarity with respect to roles and the interrelationship of roles, particularly those played by the Strategic Roundtable, the Residents' Roundtable, and backbone staff. This lack of clarity raises questions about how the various parts of the initiative work together, how the role of the Residents' Roundtable relates to that of the Strategic Roundtable, and in particular how decisions are made. Some initiative participants have also expressed concern that the backbone staff have taken on, or have been saddled with, an inordinate share of responsibility for shaping the initiative strategy and for framing decisions and matters brought before the various initiative groups.

The relationships among the groups comprising the Between the Bridges Network, and the level of trust among the various groups will become more important as the initiative moves into an action phase. It will be helpful to consider how the roles of the various parties could be clarified, or possibly modified, in order to support an alignment of their efforts in working toward the specific priorities of the shared agenda.

Questions to consider regarding the clarification of roles:

- What are the roles of the Strategic Roundtable, Residents' Roundtable, and backbone staff relating to initiative strategy and decision-making?

- What are the roles of these parties in relation to each other?

- What could be done to ensure that all parties have a clearer understanding of their interrelated roles?

- Has there been a discussion about, or an agreement on, how parts of the Network will work together?

- What is the procedure for deciding what matters are brought to each group?

- Are there ways group members could/should assume responsibility for some of the roles currently undertaken by backbone staff?

- What supports would enable Residents' Roundtable members to assume more responsibility for the work of their group and/or the Network?