DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL:
Greater Cincinnati Models Collective Impact Towards "Bold Goals"

ENGAGE AND ALIGN WITH THE COMMUNITY	CREATE AND DEEPEN RELATIONSHIPS	DEVELOP STRATEGIES AND FOCUS ACTIONS	MOBILIZE RESOURCES	ALIGN & EXECUTE ON PLANS & STRATEGIES	MEASURE, EVALUATE & COMMUNICATE RESULTS

THE RESULTS

The United Way of Greater Cincinnati (UWGC) meticulously tracks the efforts of its collective impact strategy through a "State of the Community" report released every two years. Basing success on a set of key indicators that are being tracked over time allows for a holistic view and the ability to make informed strategic adjustments. Based on the most recent report, released in December 2012, it is clear UWGC's efforts are making a difference in several key areas:

- Kindergarten readiness in Cincinnati Public Schools has increased 30% since 2006.

- The region's Percent of Population Below 200% Poverty is lower than the national average;

- The Housing Opportunity Index shows the region continues to offer affordable housing;

- Their percent of population ages 25 and over with an Associate's Degree or higher is greater than the national average;

- Their number of "total jobs" have returned to more than one million and remained there for most of 2012; and

- Juvenile Crime has started to decrease in many of our counties.

These achievements must be credited to the contributions made by a multitude of partners. However, without the leadership of UWGC it is likely that some of these successes may not have been achieved.

"We will invite corporate leaders and government officials to the table and help them understand the role they might play. If corporate leaders are aware of the goals and acknowledge their vitality, it will clearly create more of a 'community movement'. If government officials endorse the goals, this will help make the case for aligning public funding streams."

UWGC does highlight areas that are not demonstrating sufficient improvement such as early childhood readiness and the infant mortality rate. These are areas the collective will be intentionally focusing on in the coming years.

UWGC has seen positive results from its approach to developing strategies and focused action. Prior to 2005, UWGC funded 150 agencies to provide outcomes that were not directed to specific goals. Today, UWGC has streamlined its cache of funded partners resulting in collective efforts that are achieving demonstrable results toward measurable goals. These results have led to strong community support and an expanding influence throughout the region .

THE CHALLENGE

From 2003 to 2005, the UW of Greater Cincinnati worked with the community to develop its Agenda for Community Impact platform. Utilizing this new platform, UWGC went about redesigning its investment RFP process and began the socialization of its perspective on maximizing impact through a more focused and aligned approach. However, in 2009 on the heels of the economic recession UWGC was faced with a perfect storm. With a declining donor base and limited progress on key community-wide indicators, UWGC realized the need to address both of these factors in a comprehensive way.

THE WORK

Although the response to the storm led to a more focused and informed strategic approach to community impact through a "collective impact" strategy, the journey really began years earlier. In 2003, the UWGC began a long multi-step process towards utilizing the power of the United Way brand, and its ability to bring the right people together, to generate better community results. Utilizing data and feedback from a series of community conversations, UWGC developed a framework for its approach to impact and, modeling the pillars later developed by UWW (Education, Income, Health), moved to the Agenda for Community Impact platform.

Based on this new framework outlined in a 140 page document, UWGC developed and implemented a new RFP for agencies seeking funding. With the newly determined focus areas came the realization that United Way needed to expand funding opportunities beyond the agencies that had traditionally been the recipients of UWGC community investment resources. They also put a premium on applications in support of collaborations geared towards predetermined "key outcomes".

UWGC knew that socialization of this new perspective around impact and funding was crucial and enlisted some of their more ardent volunteers in that role. In retrospect, this process was not as inclusive as needed, which led to a loud enough outcry that UWGC felt it necessary to put a hold on the process to mitigate the damage. This led them to spend the next year revising their approach to launching their Agenda and the resource allocation process. This new process included developing a number of task forces and committees including local service agencies to help drive "buy-in" from those agencies.* In addition, Rob Reifsnyder (CEO) and the Board Chair hosted luncheons with key agencies and community leaders.

By working in this more inclusive manner with partner agencies in developing a shared focus with common metrics, UWGC was able to partner with aligned agencies while discontinuing funding to some agencies that had received financial support but whose missions or programs were not maximizing impact on the predetermined outcomes. This transition was made easier, as the transparency of the

process allowed for the eroding of agency "entitlement" to UWGC funding.

This process put in place a foundation for UWGC's ability to address the challenges that began to surface over the last several years. UWGC realized that the Agenda for Community Impact strategy was powerful, but alone was not going to move key community indicators. UWGC leaders determined the need to improve on their Agenda for Community Impact strategies and could do so through the Collective Impact Model. This led to the eventual creation of Bold Goals for Our Region and was reached through the following steps :

1. They convened planning sessions of key stakeholders and conducted community focus groups to enhance their understanding of the needs of the community and the role UWGC could assume.

2. They then used their additional knowledge to put "Stakes in the Ground" by identifying where they could make the most relevant contribution, then moving to forming new strategic partnerships and improving on existing ones: a All with the realization that "collective impact" would need to be build off of the momentum of several short-term successes.

3. Understanding that a "collective impact" strategy would require an entity to play the role of "backbone", UWGC determined where it made most sense for UWGC to step into that role. This required conversations (including volunteers, staff and other supporters) over a considerable period of time, both to insure that redundancies would not occur, that their leadership would be welcomed, and that they had the significant capacity, knowledge and commitment to serve in that role.

4. The type of community efforts that would be required to really moved the needle on quality of life issues expanded beyond those areas defined by their Agenda for Community Impact leading UWGC to begin seeking additional opportunities for coordination and alignment. These became increasingly crucial as other "collective impact" efforts, such as the Strive Partnership, Agenda 360, and Vision 2015began in earnest. Understanding that metrics for success were the key drivers to any partnership efforts, UWGC began to formally compare and be-

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gan to sync their efforts with the goals of other Collective Impact efforts. They understood the power of encouraging an embracing of mutual goal "ownership" and the detrimental nature of "similar mission, different goals".

These efforts eventually led to the development of "Bold Goals", a series of community-wide goals that were easy to understand and allowed for continually building collaborative efforts and "buy-in". These goals were established over a 6-month period in which UWGC convened four dozen community partners to determine whether they could collectively establish a small set of Bold Goals in Education, Income and Health. Today, the Bold Goals have been endorsed by more than 250 public, private and nonprofit businesses and organizations.

Through their endorsement, each organization is pledging to actively work toward the attainment of at least one of the bold goals; participate in an annual review and report on the progress made toward attainment of the goals; participate in meetings where best practice is discussed and agree to promote the refinement of program strategies based on learning.

Endorsement opportunities create a space for a greater sense of "ownership" for all sectors. Utilizing high-level volunteers to help solicit endorsements has proven to be a best-practice.

The Journey from traditional model to this point has taken 12 years. Diligence in sharing the story with the network for others to learn from, and learning from other United Ways, have been important in the continuous improvement journey .

SCALING THE WORK

Perhaps the key factor that contributes to the scaling of this type of work is intentionality around shared learning. UWGC has focused its efforts on creating opportunities for their staff to learn about new innovations and best practices with of staff from partner agencies and other United Ways that are so crucial to lasting and impactful change in their communities.

In addition, the focus on growing affinity groups and connecting them with work issues specific to their interests allows for the strategies to expand and improve as more individuals become part of the movement.

LESSONS LEARNED

The process is as important as the final product (in terms of mitigating risk and achieving greatest buy-in).

Collective Impact does not require an abandonment of the Agenda for Community Impact. It's the way the Agenda's goals are achieved.

Collective Impact goals need to be easily digestible to garner greater public support.

LEARN MORE

For more information about this project, visit them online, or visit the "Bold Goals" FAQ.

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