Evaluating Collective Impact:
Six Simple Rules

By Mark Cabaj

May 23, 2014

Mark Cabaj

Here to There
CONSULTING INC

9540-145 Street
Edmonton, Alberta, CA
T5N 2W8
P: 780-451-8984
F: 78-447-4246
E: Mark@here2there.ca

Context

Collective Impact

The Spark: Collective Impact Article in Stanford Social Innovation Review

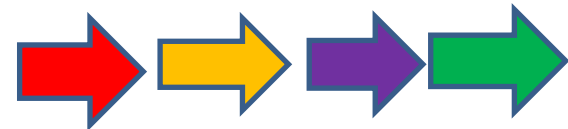# From Isolated Impact to Collective Impact

Isolated Impact

- Funders select **individual grantees**

- Organizations **work separately**

- Evaluation attempts to **isolate** a particular organization's impact

- Large scale change is assumed to depend on **scaling organizations**

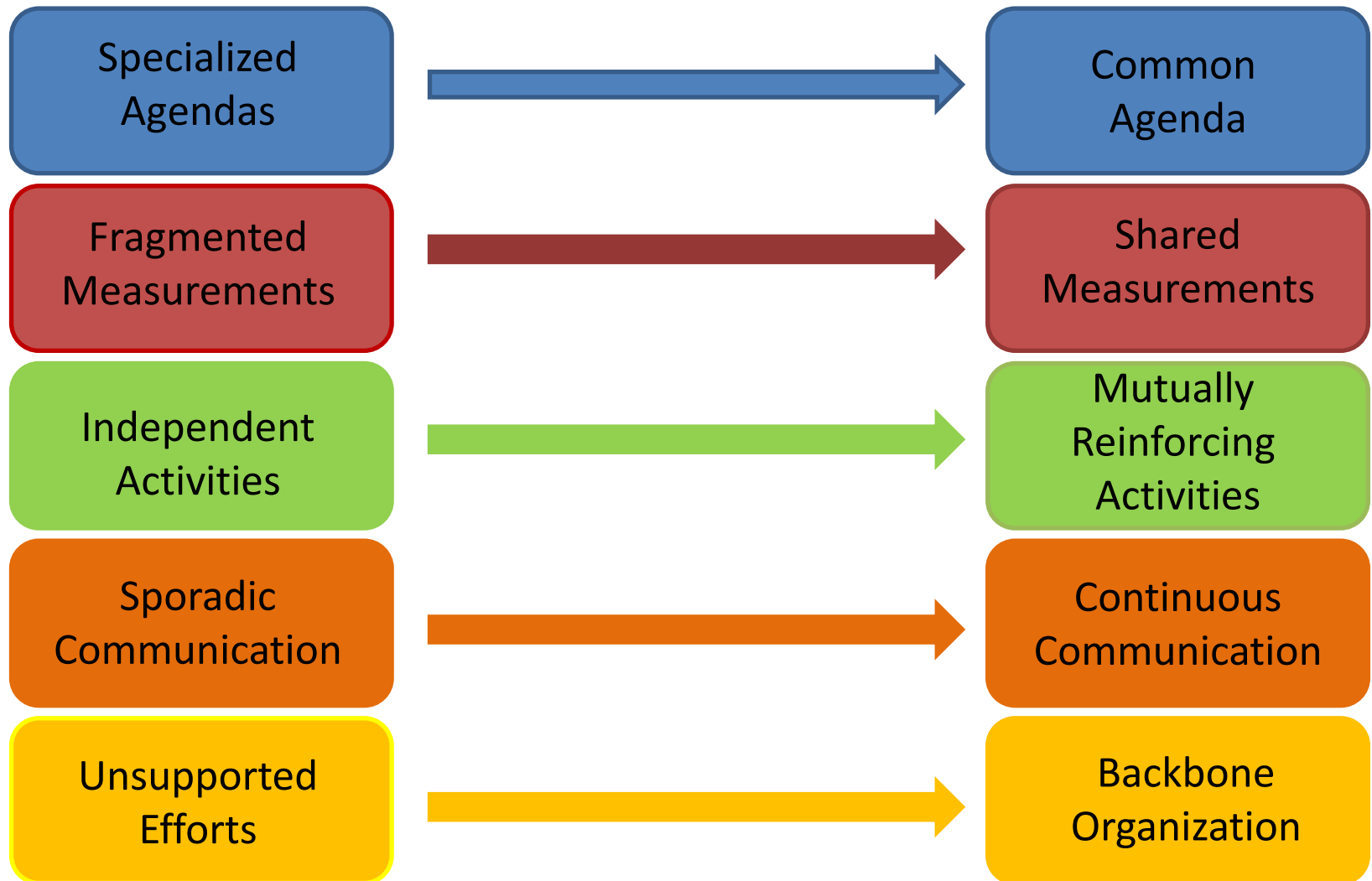- Corporate and government sectors are often **disconnected** from foundations and non-profits.
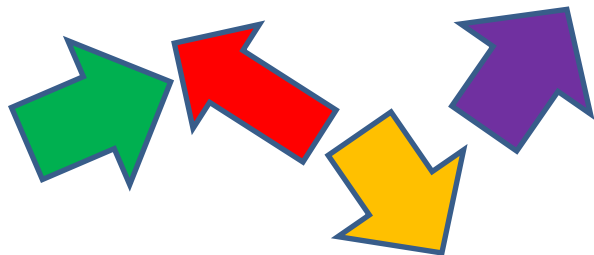
Collective Impact

- Funders understand that social problems – and their solutions – arise from **multiple interacting factors**

- **Cross-sector alignment** with government, nonprofit, philanthropic and corporate sectors as partners

- Organizations **actively coordinating their actions** and sharing lessons learned

- All working toward the **same goal** and measuring the same things

Five Conditions for Collective Impact

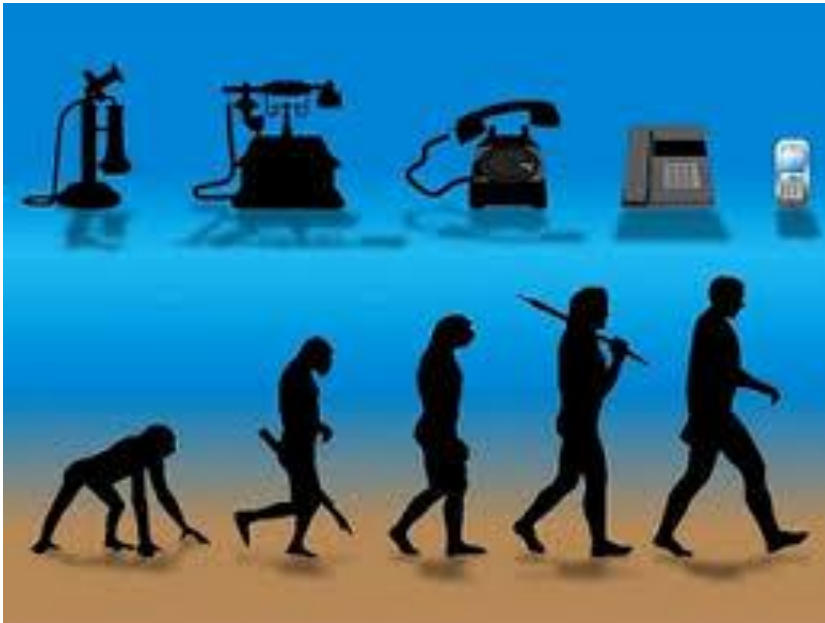|	
Specialized Agendas	Common Agenda
Fragmented Measurements	Shared Measurements
Independent Activities	Mutually Reinforcing Activities
Sporadic Communication	Continuous Communication
Unsupported Efforts	Backbone Organization

Six Simple Rules

… and counting.

Challenge: Evolving Strategy

- Traditional evaluation works best when people work with clear goals, well developed theories of change and fixed measures of success - and keep these stable over time.

- All CI goals and strategies often emerge over time -- and often take radical shifts.

Comparing Two Evaluation Paradigms

TRADITIONAL EVALUATION	COMPLEXITY-BASED\DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION
Renders definitive judgments of success or failure	Provides feedback, generates learning, supports/affirms change in direction
Measures success against pre-determined goals	Develops new measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge & evolve
Positions evaluator outside to assure independence& objectivity	Positions evaluation as an internal function integrated into action & ongoing interpretive processes
Accountability to control and locate blame for failures	Learns to respond to lack of control and stay in touch with what's unfolding to respond strategically
Designs the evaluation based on linear cause-effect logic models	Designs the evaluation to capture system dynamics, interdependencies, and emergent interconnections

Developmental Evaluation: Using Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation & Use. Patton. 2008.

Challenge: Different Pieces

- Traditional evaluation tends to focus on a few, relatively simple, units of analysis.

- Most CI efforts have a large number of moving pieces and/or units of analysis.

Simple Rule #1

Embrace a strategic learning approach to evaluation.

- Make informing strategy – not reporting to funders or testing policy experiments – the primary aim of evaluation activities.

- Emphasize 'real-time' feedback and robust sense-making to help social innovators make timely, data-based, decisions to develop and adapt their strategy.

- Start with a simple and 'roughly right' evaluation design and measures and be prepared to adapt them to co-evolve with the emerging strategy.
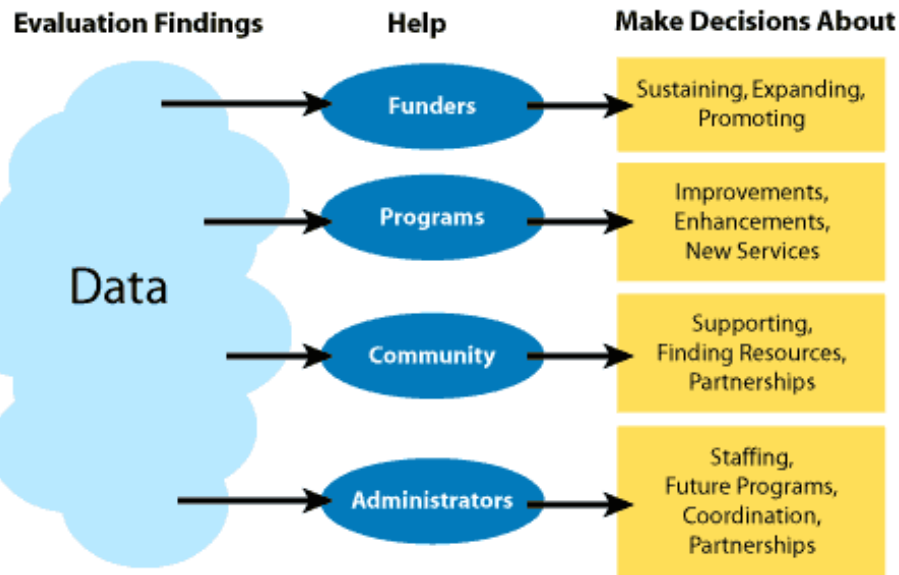
Simple Rule #2

Be clear about the unit of analysis in the assessment.

Example Evaluation Domains

Operations	• To what extent are we manifesting the five conditions of collective impact (e.g. mutually reinforcing activities)? • What is working well, for whom, in what context and why?
Activities	• What are the various interventions in our CI efforts? • What is working for who, in what context, and why?
Results	• What are the most significant results from our work? • To what extent are we addressing the 'systems' underlying complex issues? • What are the cumulative results of our work?
Theory of Change	• What are we learning about the nature of the complex issues we are trying to address and how to address them? • What are the implications for our expected outcomes and theory of change?

Challenge: Diversity of Needs

Evaluation Findings — **Help** — **Make Decisions About**

Data

- Funders → Sustaining, Expanding, Promoting
- Programs → Improvements, Enhancements, New Services
- Community → Supporting, Finding Resources, Partnerships
- Administrators → Staffing, Future Programs, Coordination, Partnerships

- Traditional evaluation 'often' emphasizes developing one clear and shared evaluation framework.

- Collective Impact efforts have multiple moving parts, with different users with different evaluation needs.

Simple Rule #3

Employ Multiple Users and Multiple Designs

- Develop an evaluation scope of work to identify who needs what information, when, for what purpose, packaged in what way, and when.

- Settle on evaluation priorities based on that assessment – you can't evaluate it all.

- Design multiple – sometimes overlapping – evaluation processes for different users.

Example: School-Agency Collaboration

Challenge: Shared Measurements

- *Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.*

- Kania and Kramer. Collective Impact. 2011. Stanford Social Innovation Review

Simple Rule #4

Proceed with shared measurement, but do so carefully.

Shared Measurement …

… is critical but not essential to productive action,

… can limit strategic thinking,

… requires systems change,

… is time consuming and expensive,

… might sometimes get in the way of action.

The case for shared measurement is strong, but proceed carefully.

Challenge: Unanticipated Outcomes

- Traditional evaluation emphasizes tracking progress towards desired outcomes.

- All interventions into a complex system generate a splatter of effects – many of which are unanticipated.

Simple Rule #5

Seek to capture anticipated and unanticipated effects of your work.

- Use post-pre budgets in an addition to a pre-post budgets so people can "chase" emergent outcomes retrospectively.

- Employ participatory "wide net" methodologies to capture outcomes: e.g. outcome harvesting, most-significant change.

- Focus one part of the measurement on assessing "goal attainment" while the other surfaces and elaborates on "what has changed"?
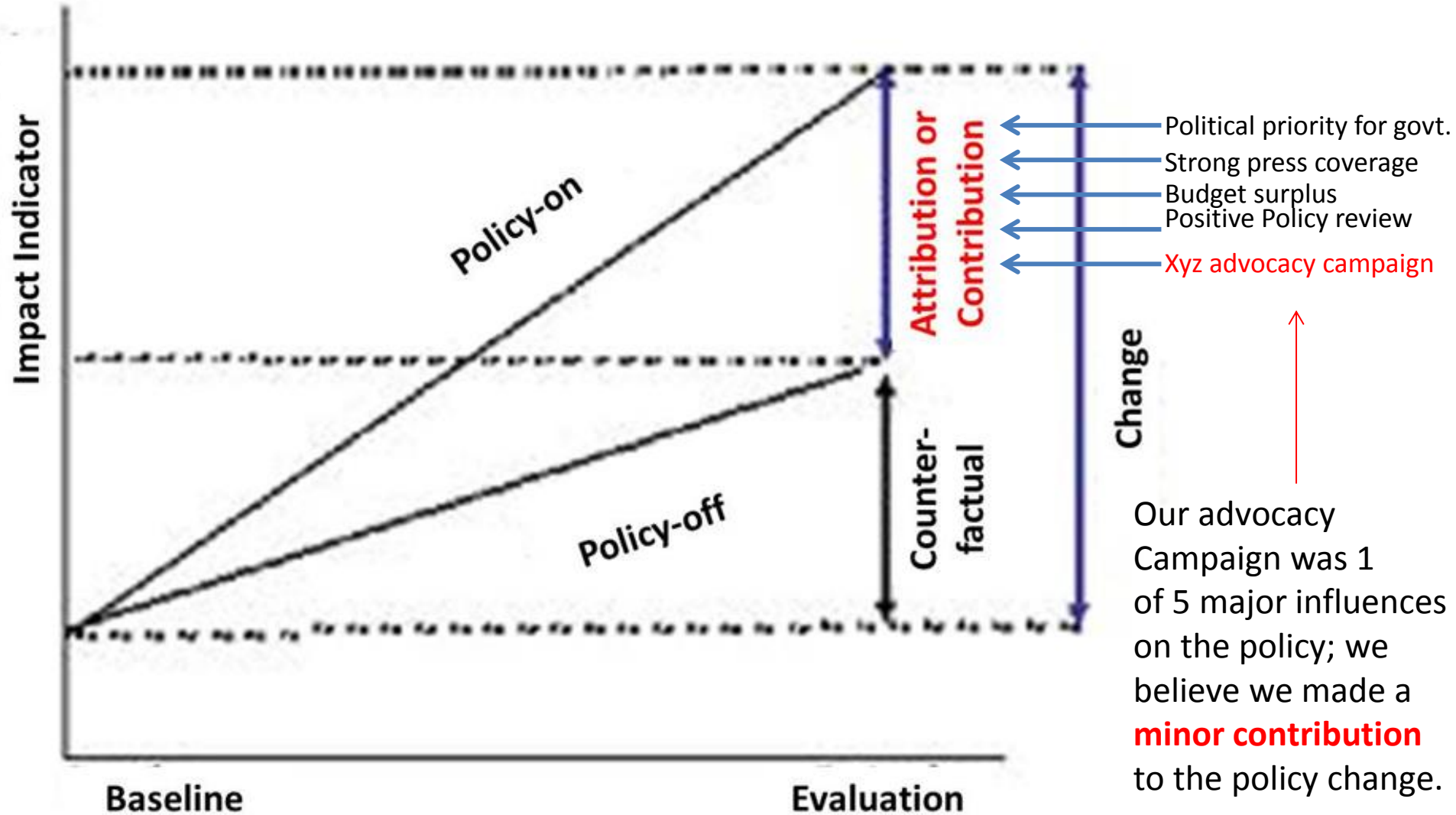
Challenge: Attribution
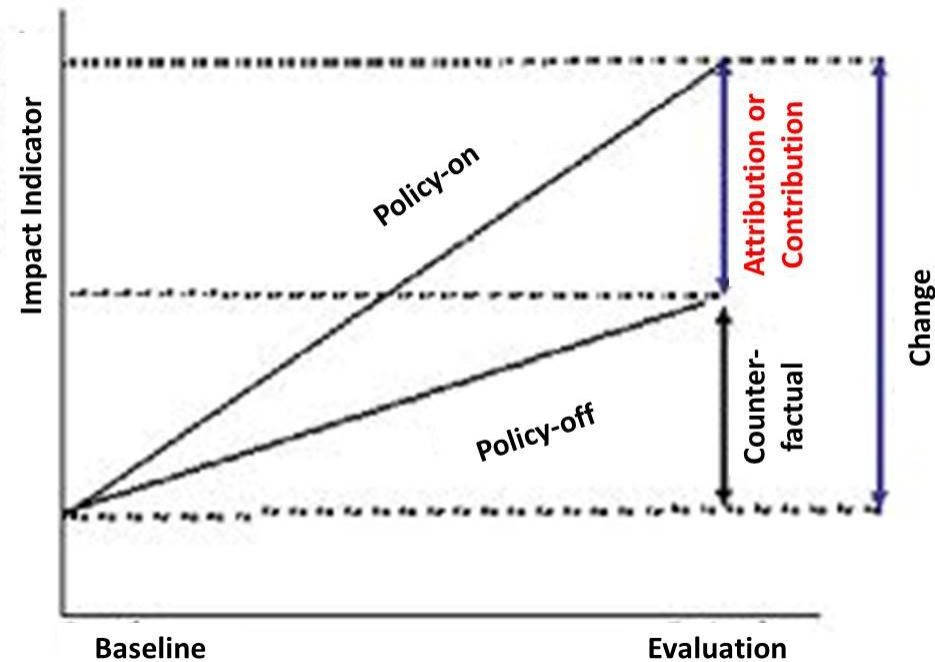
- Traditional evaluation seeks to establish a clear link between innovation activities and results.

- The activities and effects of interventions into a complex system are often only "one" factor contributing to observed changes.

Simple Rule #6

Seek to get a rough sense of contribution to observed changes rather than a definition account of attribution.

- Formally acknowledge the 'attribution and contribution' challenge.

- Use contribution methodology to identify all the other likely contributions to observed changes.

- Develop a rough weighting or rating of a group's activities to observed changes.

Example

Impact Indicator (y-axis)

Policy-on

Policy-off

Attribution or Contribution

Counter-factual

Change

Political priority for govt.
Strong press coverage
Budget surplus
Positive Policy review
Xyz advocacy campaign

Our advocacy Campaign was 1 of 5 major influences on the policy; we believe we made a **minor contribution** to the policy change.

Baseline   **Evaluation**

Questions

Questions

Resources

Resources

- The Philanthropist – May 2015 Special Issue on Collective Impact http://thephilanthropist.ca/index.php/phil

- Collective Impact Forum – Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact - http://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/

- Tamarack – Collective Impact Resources and Community of Practice – www.tamarackcci.ca

Tamarack Learning Communities

Tamarack CCI

For **Collaborative Leaders** who use collective impact approaches to address complex community issues.

www.tamarackcci.ca

Vibrant Communities: Cities Reducing Poverty

For Cities that develop and implement comprehensive poverty reduction strategies

www.vibrantcanada.ca

Seeking Community

For **individuals** who care about community, the vibrancy of neighbourhoods and the unique role of citizens in social change.

www.seekingcommunity.ca

Evaluating Community Impact –
Nov 18 – 20, 2014 Winnipeg, MB

Learn more & register:

http://tamarackcommunity.ca/events.html