



## PREVENTION WITH PURPOSE:

### Promoting Shared Responsibility Using a Collective Impact Framework

Like many other behavioral health and wellness issues facing college students, drug use is a complex social issue that requires the input and involvement of individuals and departments from across the campus community.

*Collective impact* describes an intentional way of working together and sharing information for the purpose of solving complex issues. It is based on the understanding that no single policy, government entity, or organization can tackle or solve deeply entrenched social problems alone. Moving beyond a partnership or collaboration, collective impact calls for a long-standing commitment among sectors to work together toward a common goal.<sup>1</sup>

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In recent years, college students have been arriving on campuses with increasingly complex concerns, including substance use and related risk behaviors. In light of this trend, collaboration and engagement among a wide range of stakeholders and service providers is imperative. We need to move forward with our collective energy and ensure that we are implementing comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies based on a common purpose.” — Dolores Cimini, Ph.D., University at Albany School of Education

## Why Collective Impact?

Drug use on campus does not exist in isolation, and it is affected by a broad range of social influences including, but not limited to, exposure to trauma, history of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, mental health conditions, and availability of mental and physical health care. This intersection of multiple complex issues, plus the stigma that surrounds many of them, makes it difficult to have an impact when working on one issue at a time. A collective impact approach allows sectors from across campus to come together to tackle these complex social issues from multiple angles while staying focused on their primary area of responsibility.

### An example of interconnectedness that exists on campuses is the impact of the use of marijuana by students:<sup>2</sup>

- » **55% of students** report marijuana use in college residence halls.
- » **41% of students** have experienced academic problems related to marijuana use.
- » **36% of students** have experienced mental health issues.

With this data, we see that marijuana use affects multiple departments and programs on college campuses, for example, residence life, counseling centers, student academic services, faculty, police, and other campus community members. Using the collective impact approach, we are working toward reducing marijuana use, but also addressing the multiple intersecting issues that affect one another and the larger system.

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Collective impact takes our work beyond collaboration and cooperation to a place where all players understand the ‘why’ of our shared responsibility to create a healthier environment.”

— Joan Masters, M.Ed., MAPS,  
Missouri Partners in Prevention

## ➔ Collective impact initiatives should include the work of a wide range of campus departments and organizations.

These partners may include:

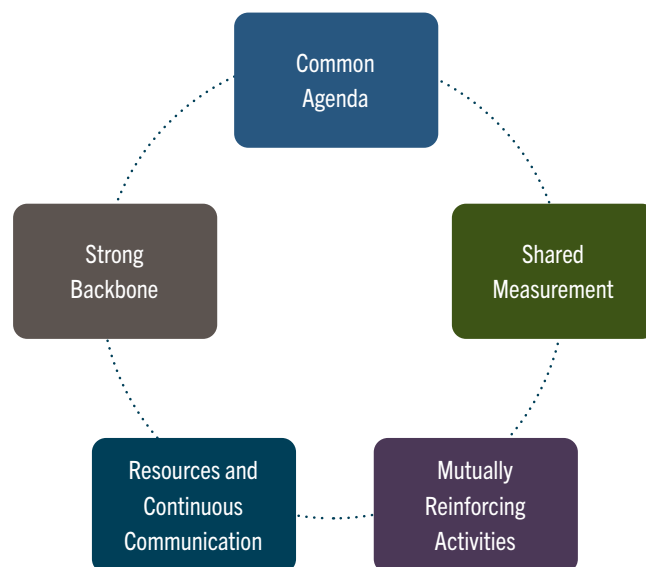
- » Campus law enforcement
- » Campus housing
- » Faculty
- » Fraternity and sorority life
- » Health services
- » Multi-ethnic student affairs offices
- » Office of the dean of students
- » Services for students with disabilities
- » Sexual assault prevention programs
- » Student affairs
- » Student diversity and inclusion programs
- » Student leadership

*This type of diverse representation helps to address the issue of drug use and student wellness from multiple angles and increase the impact of the work of all the engaged partners.*

## Five Conditions of Collective Impact

The following conditions are essential to the success of collective impact efforts:<sup>3</sup>

- » **Common agenda.** Participants have a shared understanding of the work, including a common understanding of the problem and a commitment to solving the problem by coordinating their work.
- » **Shared measurement.** Participants agree on how they will measure and report success to monitor and improve the effectiveness of their work.
- » **Mutually reinforcing activities.** Activities are coordinated and aligned, and all work toward a common goal(s).
- » **Resources and continuous communication.** Resources remain available to keep activities going over time, and communication is consistent and designed to build trust and ensure that all participants remain motivated and stay informed.



- » **A strong backbone.** To be most effective, collective impact processes are coordinated by a “backbone.” This can be the individual, department/program, or coalition responsible for managing the collaboration. “Backbones” provide support in these six areas:<sup>4</sup>

1. Building a common agenda regarding the problem that needs to be addressed
2. Supporting aligned activities to ensure mutually reinforcing activities are implemented
3. Establishing shared measurement practices to collect, analyze, and report the outcomes of the collective activities
4. Building consensus, political will, and commitment to a call to action
5. Advocating for a public policy agenda to address the initiative’s goals
6. Mobilizing and aligning resources to support the initiative’s goals



## Shared Understanding and Shared Goals

Collective impact requires the involvement of individuals working at multiple levels (e.g., campus leadership, program staff, students, faculty, and other stakeholders) and in multiple capacities to identify and address a common goal. Potential participants may include representatives from the office of the dean of students, fraternity and sorority life, campus housing, multi-ethnic student affairs, office of student conflict resolution, recreational sports, services for students with disabilities, sexual assault prevention program, health services, wellness center, student affairs, campus law enforcement, faculty, student leadership, and student diversity and inclusion program. Each sector moves forward toward their goal with an understanding of the way in which they affect the others. This shared understanding of the intersection and common goal provides the potential for much greater impact than working in isolation.

## Potential Barriers to Successful Collective Impact Initiatives

When considering working in a collective impact framework, it is important to understand common barriers that can limit success. Following are some common barriers experienced by collective impact processes and the strategies for overcoming them:

- » **Lack of buy-in.** The support of senior leaders and administrators is essential to a successful collective impact process on campus. Schedule a short meeting with key administrators and use information from [\*Prevention with Purpose: A Resource for Presidents and Senior Administrators\*](#) to begin a conversation about the value of working across departments and programs.

- » **Strategy drift.** Once a common agenda is created, it is essential to prevent strategy drift. Partners need to stay accountable to one another to ensure selection and implementation of strategies and programs that will contribute toward common goals.
- » **Power imbalances.** Power imbalances are inherent in processes that involve multiple levels (e.g., senior administrators, administrative staff, and students). To mitigate these imbalances, dedicate time to building trust among group members and ensure the facilitator of the initiative meetings is skilled at ensuring all voices are heard.
- » **Opposition to change.** Change can be scary. Some people may prefer to stick with how they have always done their work, often in silos. Actively engaging these individuals to create a common agenda and strategic planning process will help to create the buy-in necessary to overcome any opposition to change.

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The problems of college student behavioral health are intersectional and complex, and we cannot solve complex problems with simple solutions. That is like putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. Instead, we must meet the complexity of the moment with a solution that is designed to solve complex problems. Collective impact is an intentional way of understanding our interconnectivity and how we all can achieve a common goal.”

— Joan Masters, M.Ed., MAPS, Missouri Partners in Prevention

## Enhancing Collective Impact Through Strategic Planning

Each partner invested in a collective impact effort comes in with their own unique set of strategic goals and plans. As a collective, it can be useful to use a strategic planning process to ensure you are focused on the five elements of successful collective impact efforts. Using a strategic planning model may be a clear way to ensure the collective has a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, reinforced and continued communication, and a strong organizational backbone. The resource *Prevention with Purpose: A Strategic Planning Guide for Preventing Drug Misuse Among College Students* presents one such process: the [Strategic Prevention Framework](#). The SPF offers step-by-step guidance to systematically assess, plan, implement, and evaluate a campus's efforts.



## Learn More

Now is the time to take action to strengthen the health and well-being of your students using a collective impact framework. No matter the size of your institution you can begin the work of adopting a collective impact model. Learn more about collective impact by reviewing the following resources:

- » [Tackling Complex Social Problems through Collective Impact \(video\)](#)  
Describes what collective impact is and how it differs from other forms of collaboration
- » [Getting Started: Don't Know Where to Begin? \(website\)](#)  
Includes tips on getting started and a self-assessment tool to see if your team is ready to start a collective impact initiative
- » [Is Collective Impact the Right Approach for You? \(webinar series\)](#)  
Describes preconditions for success and how to determine whether collective impact is appropriate for your setting
- » [Essential Mindset Shifts for Collective Impact \(article\)](#)  
Presents key mindset shifts necessary for success through collective impact initiatives
- » [Community Tool Box: Section 5. Collective Impact \(toolkit\)](#)  
Presents an overview of the collective impact approach and links to implementation resources
- » [Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact: Part 1 \(blog post\)](#)  
Describes what it takes to be a backbone organization for a collective impact initiative

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## Endnotes

- 1 Sol Price Center for Social Innovation. (2018). What is collective action? <https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Collective-Impact-Handout.pdf>
- 2 Mary Christie Foundation, University of Maryland School of Public Health, and Hazelden Betty Ford Institute for Recovery Advocacy. (2018). *College substance use: New approaches to a perennial problem*. <https://s1marychris.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/College-Substance-Use-New-Approaches-to-A-Perennial-Problem.pdf>
- 3 Kania, J., and Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36–41. <https://doi.org/10.48558/5900-KN19>
- 4 University of Kansas, Center for Community Health and Development. (n.d.). *Section 5. Collective impact*. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/models-for-community-health-and-development/collective-impact/main>

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