

Report Summary

“Innovating and Learning Lessons to Better Support the Fight Against Poverty in Montreal Neighbourhoods – Report from Phase 1 of the Collective Impact Project”

By Isabel Heck, with contributions from Yannick Sanschagrin, Mariane Rail, Cassandre Ville, Éric Joly and Raphaëlle de Albuquerque. November 2023



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[Read the one-page summary.](#)

GOALS

- Identify the Collective Impact Project’s benefits, strengths and limitations for three components: communities, regional partnerships and systems change.
- Produce knowledge for strategic learning.

CONTEXT

- The CIP has been implemented in a context of austerity policies in Quebec that have forced many networks to cope with budget cuts and the consequences on social inequality.
- Philanthropic foundations are looking to redefine their roles.
- Community development work in neighbourhoods is well established in Montreal and organized around territorial bodies called neighbourhood roundtables.
- Multiple factors and contextual elements have influenced the how the CIP unfolded, such as already implemented practices in communities, the pandemic, and the trend of trust-based philanthropy that gained momentum during Phase 1.

WHAT IS THE CIP?

- The Collective Impact Project arose out of a shared desire to do more to support the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Montreal’s neighbourhoods.
- A unique and innovative partnership between the philanthropic, institutional and community sectors has supported the implementation of collective initiatives in 17 neighbourhoods through financial and non-financial support that totalled \$23 million in Phase 1 (2015–2023).
- This initiative draws from the collective impact approach to strengthen collective action in communities.



METHODOLOGY

This analysis was based on:

- Over 100 activity, evaluation and research reports on CIP neighbourhood initiatives or on the project as a whole.
- 23 individual and group interviews with a total of 35 people (11 representatives from neighbourhoods, 11 from Centraide, 5 from Dynamo, and 8 partners from CIP governance bodies).

Research approach

- This research was carried out by Isabel Heck (CIP and CRISES, UQAM).
- An evaluation committee was involved throughout the process.
- The preliminary results were presented and validated on June 1, 2023 in front of about 50 community, philanthropic and institutional partners.

Results: Community component



What did the CIP contribute to in the neighbourhoods? What are its strengths and limitations?



COMMUNITY COMPONENT : MAIN STRENGTHS AND BENEFITS

✔ A strengthening of collective action in local social development in Montreal, the emergence of innovative approaches, and a strong integration of many conditions of the collective impact approach by the community.

✔ Stakeholders appreciate the CIP's flexibility, multi-year funding model, more systemic approach, lessons learned, support beyond financial resources, and the considerable leeway that lets participating neighbourhoods choose their priority issues and strategies.

✔ The initiatives have generated strategies with positive impacts in the fight against social exclusion and poverty:

New infrastructure created to invest in sectors that lack services.

Raising awareness has prompted representatives and institutions to take greater account of social exclusion and poverty issues.

Citizen mobilization has helped break isolation, strengthen solidarity, and encourage the people most impacted by the issues to speak out.

Many cross-sector collaborations have led to a more effective response to improve food access, housing conditions, and educational success.

✔ The CIP has also helped strengthen many collaborative practices:

Experimentation and innovation through a flexible approach and the ability to take a step back.

Commitment to a common change, which implies a change of mindset for many, and has led to a shift from a sector-based and project management approach.

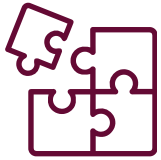
Partner collaboration and commitment – increase in the number and diversity of partnerships and collaborations; strengthening of partnerships; advances in citizen participation.

Evaluation and learning are made easier by the CIP model, which allows for error, in addition to the training and support around evaluation in a collective context

✔ Choosing the neighbourhood roundtables as backbone organizations has strengthened existing structures and positioned a key stakeholder at the heart of each CIP initiative who has excellent local knowledge and already enjoys many existing partnerships.



COMMUNITY COMPONENT : LIMITS AND CHALLENGES



Many context-related factors: general lack of resources in the community; the pandemic; staff instability and turnover exacerbated by the temporary nature of funding.

Territorial inequity from the differentiation of neighbourhoods based on three levels of funding (intensive support, moderate support, no funding).



Cumbersome evaluation process and collective impact approach: the allocated support does not cover the full effort needed to carry out a collective impact initiative.



A number of challenges persist surrounding citizen participation.



Tension between a specific statement of change that meets a target and one that is sufficiently broad to get the whole community on board.

Limited sharing of practices and lessons learned beyond neighbourhood boundaries.

SPECIFICS OF THE CIP EVALUATION



“Rather than rely on external evaluators, the leaders of CIP initiatives are the ones who evaluated their actions with support from Dynamo’s training and coaching service on how to evaluate actions in a collective context. Short loops were carried out on particular issues [to apply lessons learned to subsequent projects]. The CIP experience shows the relevance of encouraging lightweight and flexible evaluation and learning practices that are adapted to the interests and resources of communities and that let stakeholders take a step back, draw conclusions about the impacts of actions, and adapt their practices.”

(Heck 2023: 85)

Results : Partnership component



How has the partnership between players involved in CIP governance bodies evolved? What are the benefits and limitations?

MAIN STRENGTHS AND BENEFITS



Innovative partnership with the philanthropic, institutional and community sectors.



Greater ties, collaboration and shared knowledge both inside and outside the CIP (reflex of working together; better understanding of community development). Example: Community real estate initiative. Partnership impacts exceed targets for collaborative capacity.



Good general support for the project, confidence in the expertise of Centraide as the operator.



Adaptation and adjustments in many areas along the way thanks to a mindset of listening and reflection (in terms of governance and communication) – evolution toward greater power sharing.



Transformation of practices at Centraide and, to a lesser extent, at other partners (in particular a more bottom-up approach; Centraide's role as a convener).

LIMITS AND CHALLENGES



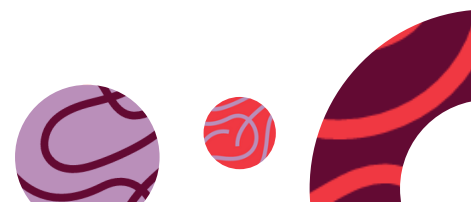
The goals of influencing institutional policies and practices and getting partners to contribute beyond funding are more difficult to meet. Clarifying CIP action at the regional level is a challenge due to concerns about legitimacy, duplication, leadership and the partners' uneven ability to commit. Lack of clarity about different roles.



Few regional relationships between neighbourhoods and partners from CIP governance bodies (except for the operator); untapped potential for collaboration in this area.



Limited transfer of lessons learned and practices between philanthropic and institutional partners.



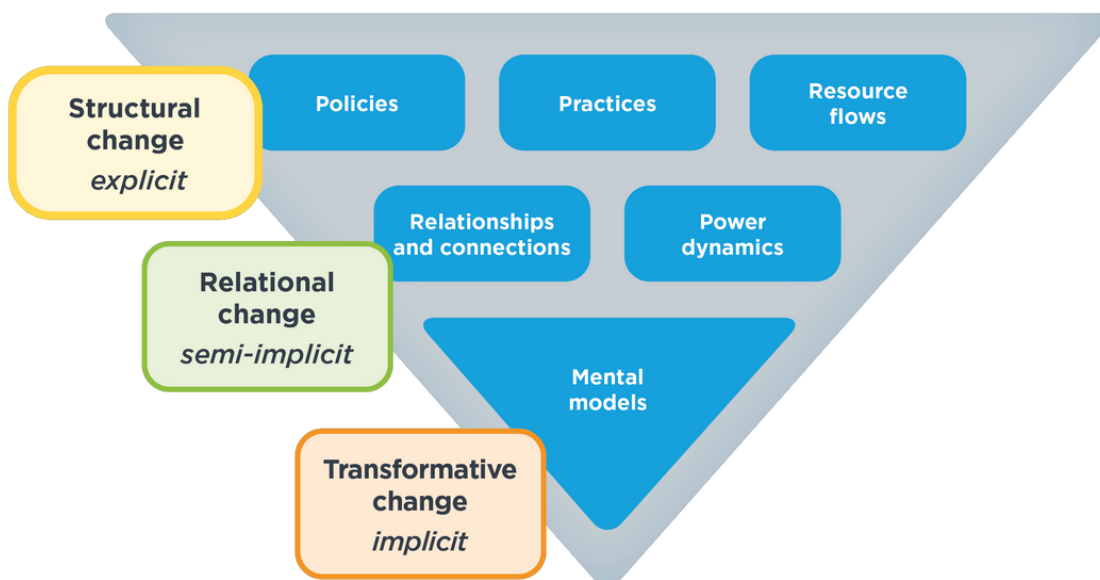
Results: Systems change component



How do stakeholders perceive the progress made towards systems change?
What are the main advances and limitations?

A FEW OBSERVATIONS

- The notion of systems change is still strongly associated with the transformation of public policies and institutional practices. Most respondents feel that little progress had been made in this area. Given the lack of documentation on this subject, it is more difficult to recognize transformations that have already been effectively applied, as these transformations are therefore often taken for granted.
- Many steps have been taken to clarify the CIP's positioning in relation to systems change. During Phase 1, the partners tried to understand the challenges and opportunities related to food and housing issues and then promote local initiatives. This last point did not turn into action, notably due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- By applying the inverted pyramid of six conditions of systems change (Kania, Kramer and Senge, 2018) as an analytical framework, we can show the many advances in various conditions in terms of both neighbourhood initiatives and the regional partnership.



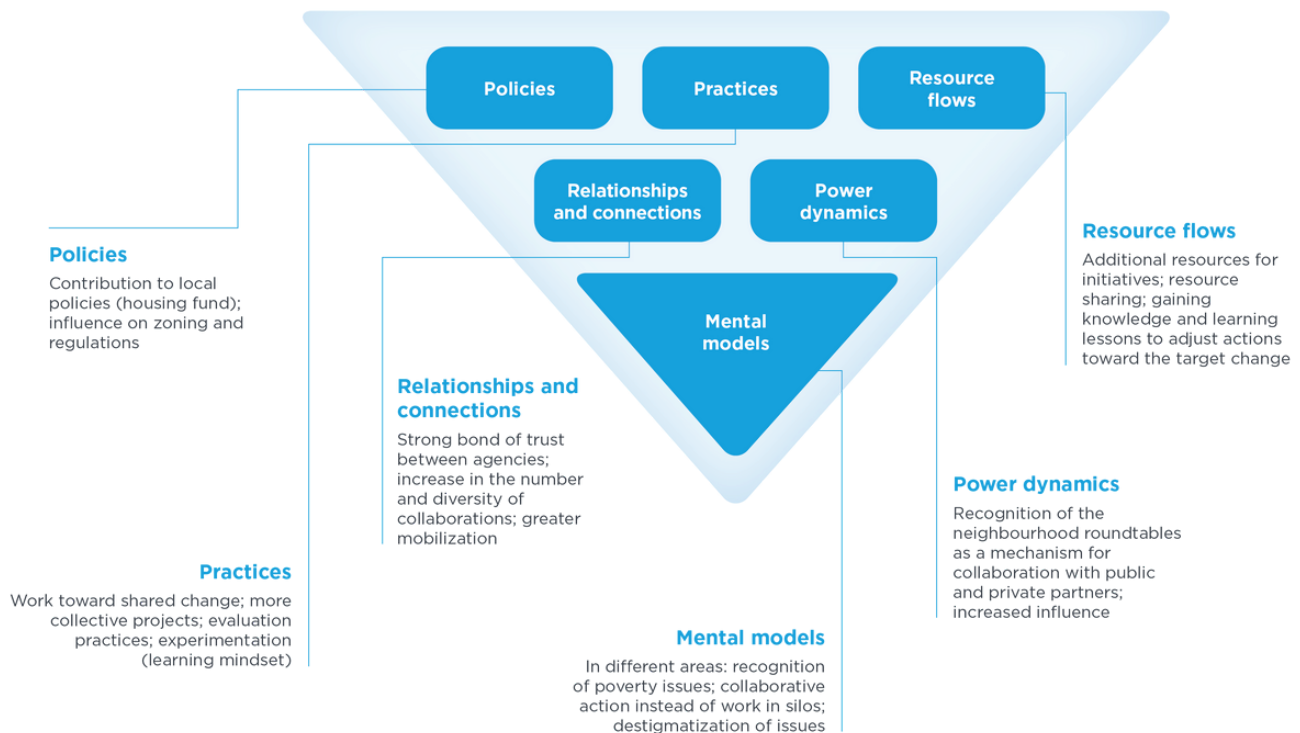
Results: Systems change component (continued)

CHANGES AT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL

- ✓ A cross-sectional analysis of neighbourhood initiatives reveals transformations in relation to each of the conditions of systems change, including policies.
- ✓ Integrated advances do not take place within a single sectoral system (e.g. housing or food), but rather within that of social development aimed at fighting poverty and social exclusion on a local scale.
- ✓ In this way, they contribute to transforming the interrelationships, in a very broad sense, between the players and resources of an area or neighbourhood, be they elected representatives, local institutions, community players, citizens or the private sector.
- ✓ A number of advances have been made, despite a lack of collaboration on targets at regional level and limited sharing of learning.

Systems change

NEIGHBOURHOOD INITIATIVES - CROSS-CUTTING ANALYSIS



Results: Systems change component (continued)

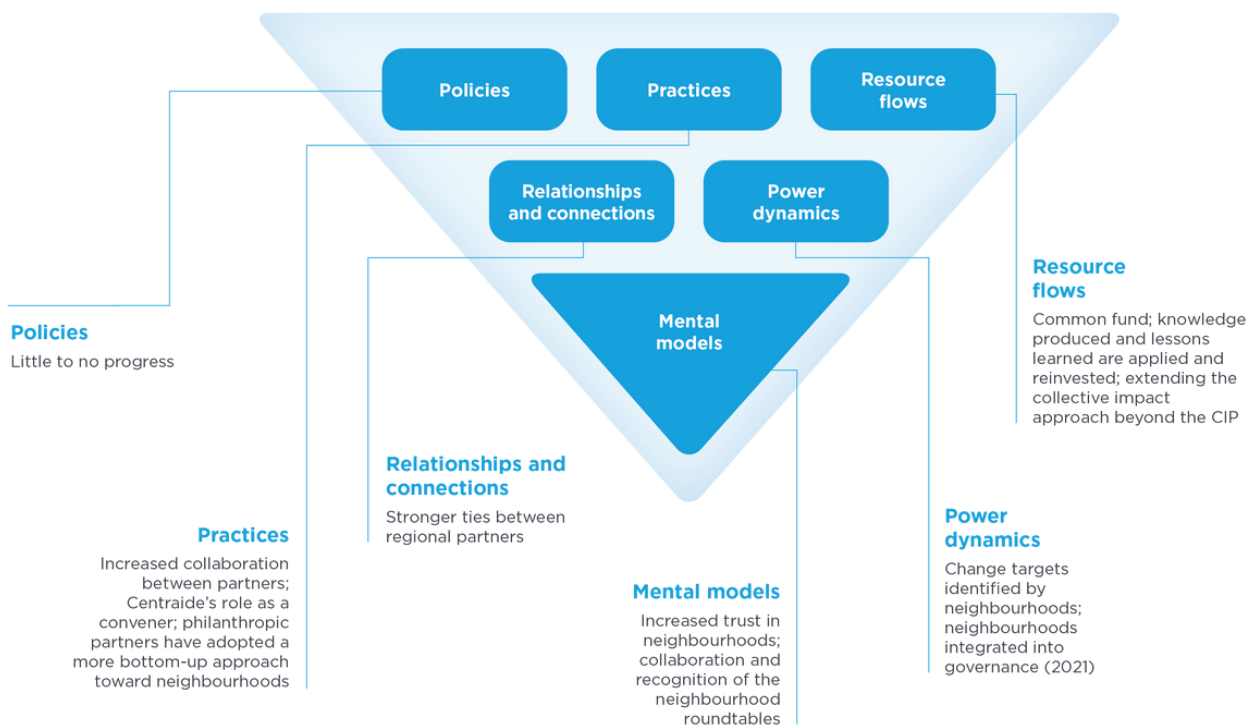
CHANGES IN THE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

✔ A range of practices and mindsets have been significantly transformed and effectively integrated into the CIP partner ecosystem in relation to most conditions for systems change.

⚠ No contribution has been noted in terms of changes to public policies or institutional practices.

A shift toward a collective target at the regional level remains a challenge.

Systems change PARTNERSHIP COMPONENT



✔ Despite some observed limitations, the transformative impact of the CIP in terms of neighbourhood initiatives or the CIP partnership at a regional scale has been greater than most respondents perceive.



On one page: results and recommendations

Summary of main results and recommendations

| COMMUNITY COMPONENT | PARTNERSHIP COMPONENT | SYSTEMS CHANGE COMPONENT |
|---|--|--|
| <p> The CIP's flexibility and multi-year funding let neighbourhoods deploy a variety of strategies with concrete benefits to better address the challenges of poverty and social exclusion.</p> <p>Strengthening of many collaborative practices, including evaluation in a collective context and backbone organizations.</p> <p> Lack of sustainable funding in a context of instability and a lack of resources; territorial inequity.</p> <p>Limited sharing of lessons learned between neighbourhoods.</p> | <p> Innovative partnership between philanthropic, institutional and community sectors lead to greater mutual understanding and collaborations outside the CIP; foster trust in communities and more power sharing.</p> <p> Beyond financial support, the role of regional stakeholders is difficult to define and exercise; limited transfer of practices and lessons learned; untapped potential for collaboration between partners from CIP governance bodies and neighbourhoods.</p> | <p> Neighbourhood initiatives are leading to progress in the six conditions of systems change (from mental models to policies) within the local social development action system.</p> <p>Practices, relationships and mindsets have been transformed and integrated within the CIP partner ecosystem for five of the six conditions.</p> <p> Movement toward a collective regional target remains a challenge.</p> |
| <p> RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>Confirm the relevance of lightweight and flexible evaluation and learning practices that are adapted to community interests and resources, rather than impact measurement.</p> <p>Consider how to broaden support: what space should be given to informal or citizen groups and action?</p> <p>Explore complementary ways in which the CIP can contribute to the sustainability of initiatives and the stabilization of the environment.</p> | <p> RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>Eliminate "logjams" that keep partners from taking action on a regional level: clarify positioning and make adjustments (if necessary) in terms of legitimacy, leadership, resources and solutions to avoid duplicating the work of other initiatives in the ecosystem.</p> <p>Clarify intentions to transfer CIP practices to the philanthropic and institutional sectors (including the operator) and implement mechanisms to transfer these practices.</p> <p>Create spaces and mechanisms to strengthen relationships between regional partners and partners involved in CIP neighbourhood initiatives.</p> | <p> RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>Share learning and experiences related to work on the various conditions for systems change.</p> <p>Set collective targets for systems change between different CIP initiatives and do so at the regional level between philanthropic, institutional and community stakeholders.</p> |



In conclusion



A cross-analysis of these results shows that the CIP has made very satisfactory results regarding its contribution to strengthening our collective capacity to fight poverty and social exclusion at both the neighbourhood and regional partnership levels.



Despite a clear strengthening of the capacity for action, major challenges and limitations persist in terms of community resources. This points to a need to do more to stabilize allocated resources and help neighbourhoods get involved in inter-neighbourhood and regional collaborations. A priority would be to secure the long-term viability of CIP initiatives and expand multi-year funding practices that promote community autonomy.



The collective impact approach, which has demonstrated its relevance in the CIP context, continues to be a source of inspiration so long as the conditions for collective impact are adapted to the context of each neighbourhood. Collaboration and cross-sector work become catalyzed in the CIP thanks to a commitment to shared change and the ability to step back and improve collaborative efforts. Other aspects to stress include the conceptual clarity of the approach, the importance it places on strategic learning, and the goal of working toward common change, all of which go beyond sectoral logic and individual priorities to include collective aspirations.



The changing context, progress during Phase 1, and the application of lessons learned to Phase 2 (which encouraged the CIP promoters to review their own practices by emphasizing a relational approach, reflective practice and experimentation) give us a glimpse into the CIP's potential to move beyond territorial philanthropy to social change philanthropy, which signifies "foundations that aim to transform social reality and also strive to operate internally in a way that embodies this new goal by putting it into action" (Lefèvre and Berthiaume, 2016: 31).



Read the full report (French version only)

