Appreciating Systems Change
NOVEMBER 10, 2017
The Importance of Systems Thinking

“Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes.”

-Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*

Systems thinking is a framework for revealing the interconnected and layered nature of social systems and social problems. By definition, this framework is:

- Iterative
- Emergent
- Not Hierarchical
Systems are generally designed to produce and support the status quo.”
- Unknown

Systems change starts with systems thinking; problem resolution is attempted with the whole in mind.

Systems change is a process that aims to alter the status quo in a sustainable way.

The complex dynamic nature of systems has a tendency to produce unintended consequences.

Questions for Jumpstarting Systems Change
1. What is the future we want to create?
2. What are the key levers for enabling this vision? What has kept us from getting their already?
3. How do we influence the key levers to bring about our desired vision?
Systems Change is the Only Way to Sustainably Address Complex Social Problems
Change happens at the speed of trust
Tips for Approaching Systems Change

Remember that everything is CONNECTED. Complex problems cannot be treated in isolation.

LIVED EXPERIENCE may provide better insights than traditional evidence or experts.

MEASURE your progress USING SHARED TOOLS.

Allow room for EXPERIMENTATION.
Tips for Approaching Systems Change (cont’d)

BUILD on EXISTING TRENDS and momentum in the system.

Employ RIGOR after the strategy has been developed.

BE THE CHANGE by building internal ADAPTIVE capacity.
Benefits of a “Collective” Approach to Systems Change

1. Understand pressing systemic community challenges
   - Understanding the issues
   - Clarify questions that arise about the challenge

2. Co-create solutions
   - Spark innovative problem-solving rooted in “lived experience” of the community
   - Identify and spread unique solutions that exist within the community

3. Verify the direction and prioritization
   - Get feedback on specific strategies and indicators from selected communities, particularly those who will be the end users of new programs or activities

4. Expand the reach of strategies
   - Expand the reach of adoption of initiative strategies
   - Evoke and sustain the will to take aligned action

5. Build community capacity to lead and sustain change
   - Train stakeholders in skills of effective collaboration and strategy execution
   - Share resources and learning across the community to help scale best practices
Authenticity and Iteration are Key

Increasing Level of Stakeholder Engagement

- **Inform**: To **provide the public with balanced and objective information** to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions.
- **Consult**: To **gather feedback from targeted stakeholders on the project’s goals, processes, shared metrics, or strategies for change**.
- **Involve**: To **work directly with stakeholders to ensure that concerns are consistently understood and considered**.
- **Collaborate**: To **partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decision-making, including the development of alternatives and priorities**.
- **Co-Lead**: To **place final decision making in the hands of stakeholders so that they drive decisions and implementation of the work**.

Source: Adapted from Tamarack Institute Community Engagement Continuum
Tips for Sustaining Systems Change and Appreciating the Journey

- **MOBILIZE** new allies and resources.

- Support advocacy efforts to improve **PUBLIC POLICY**.

- Contribute to the **EVIDENCE** base. 
  
  *If necessary, create the EVIDENCE base.*

- **BUILD PUBLIC WILL** by changing hearts and minds.

- **KEEP THE MAIN THING, THE MAIN THING!!!**