

SYSTEMIC COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND RAPID CITY'S ONGOING SUCCESS STORY

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Abstract

Cross-sector and inter-disciplinary coordination for complex social change requires the strategic narratives and insights that can come from systemic collective impact, also known as community-based system dynamics. Systemic collective impact is a community engagement approach that uses system dynamics and collective impact to address problems arising in complex social *systems*. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's website describes system dynamics as helping "us understand, design, and manage change. Using data and technology, *System Dynamics* models the relationships between all the parts of a *system* and how those relationships influence the behavior of the *system* over time" (2019). Rapid City, South Dakota, undertook a systemic collective impact approach in 2015. Results from the work have been excellent and are a tribute to the commitment of a cross-disciplinary collaboration of Native American leadership, nonprofits, government, business, faith communities, and citizens who use the social service systems.

Keywords: Systemic Collective Impact, System Dynamics, Collective Impact, Social Change, Community Engagement Practices, Native American, Community Based System Dynamics

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Lives are being saved, community pride is being built, and historically at-odds cultures are working intensely together for the first time in Rapid City, South Dakota, a city of 80,000 and center of a region of 200,000. Rapid City has a long

history of mistrust between Native Americans (about 25% of the population) and non-Natives. The remarkable movement in the city is occurring through the work of hundreds of citizens and a vision, a shared narrative, and joint action growing out of Rapid City Collective Impact (RCCI), an initiative that began in 2015 (Linderman, 2016). During its first two foundation-building years, RCCI's backbone team used a combination of system dynamics and collective impact - what we are terming systemic collective impact. Systemic collective impact offers communities facing complex issues a coordinated means for improving the community and a process for accomplishing their objectives, while helping them recognize and avoid potential unintended consequences of considered courses of action.

Here are recent results (as of Spring 2019) from Rapid City as reported by personnel including the Director of Human Services and the Sheriff of Pennington County, Rapid City's Police Chief and mayor, Native American elders, and others:

- Community partners have invested more than \$30 million in a comprehensive approach to citizens suffering with addiction, facing challenges in finding affordable homes, and in need of workforce training. The approach consists of two adjacent campuses with full wrap-around services and with additional support given based on the constituent user's preferred spiritual path. The \$14 million Care Campus, operated by Pennington County, has been up and running since late 2018. The OneHeart Center has raised \$16 million and has begun construction. The OneHeart Center is Native/non-Native created and designed, and will be jointly led and operated. As Lakota elder Gene Tyon states, "This is the first time in history that the communities (Native and non-Native) have come together in this way."

- Human lives have been saved. Law enforcement staff note that several people would have likely died during the recent winter, the harshest in the city's history, were it not for the Care Campus.
- Savings of more than \$500,000 have been documented in the first eight months of the Care Campus operations. Savings of over \$1 million are expected by end of its first year of operation.
- More than 9,000 times, individuals have admitted themselves to the Safe Solutions program, a portion of the Care Campus, in its 8 months of operation. Law enforcement staff note that most of these self-admissions would otherwise have necessitated the engagement of law enforcement and the court system.
- The Care Campus has generated considerable positive interest from Northern Plains tribal nations.
- Pennington County and the Rapid City Police department are employing tribal members as community liaisons.
- Rapid City's Assistant Chief of Police and Pennington County's Deputy Sheriff have been engaged in learning the Lakota language for years.
- Most police officers have participated in the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies (CAIRNS) Lakota Lands and Identities tour and classroom learning.
- RCCI's Guiding Council includes 4 Lakota leaders, and the overall initiative has a Native Leadership Council of 12.

THE HOPE OF SYSTEMIC COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Communities can be transformed by prioritizing the connecting of ideas, people, and systems thinking processes in ways that take advantage of what every sector can contribute to the whole. However, it takes a collective effort in which

individuals and organizations (government, nonprofits, business, faith communities, and citizens) give time, energy, money, and skills, in return for the benefits of a high-functioning, prosperous, and collaborative community, one that can respond to the fast pace of change that communities experience.

Starting from the situation for communities in the United States (though the approach works well in communities of other Western countries), this article presents how systemic collective impact counters the individualistic narrative that often thwarts collaborative action. It then details the work in Rapid City to serve as an example for other communities. One additional note: Though this article focuses primarily on local geographic communities, the author and others engaged in system dynamics work have successfully used the approach in complex organizations and industries, entities which operate in many ways as communities.

EXCAVATING A TRUTH BURIED IN OUR NATION'S FOUNDING

Language in the Declaration of Independence (Jefferson 1776) and U.S. Constitution make it clear that supporting local communities - the proverbial "we the people" (U.S. Const. Preamble) - is just as important to the country's success as establishing individual freedoms. Unfortunately, the past century has seen a dramatic movement toward radical individualism at the expense of community. The rise of car culture and suburbanization, the dramatic shrinking of American industrialism, and the creation and proliferation of the Internet as a means of commerce and discourse have led to greater isolation and, as a result, further movement toward a type of individualism that limits many citizens from being active participants in a community. In many areas today, a sense of local community struggles to exist. This loss threatens the emotional, psychological, material, and spiritual prosperity of our nation.

The United States Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution reveal the framers' fundamental assumption that individuals must be connected to their local communities in order for a free, open, and happy society to exist. Each of these community-centric phrases appears in the 1,339-word Declaration: "The public good"; "large districts of people"; "consent of our legislatures"; "colonies have been suffering"; "our common kindred"; "free and independent states"; and "for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor." Likewise, the very nature of the Constitution's representative system of democracy is based on building and participating in local communities, and references to this system are too numerous to list.

Certainly, the founding documents also highlight the importance of the individual, such as espousing freedom of speech, freedom of religion, equal rights, and equal protection under the law. Indeed, the most well-known phrase from the Declaration focuses on the individual: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, in a widely cited 2005 lecture at the National Conference on Citizenship, noted that in modern times there exists an almost purely hedonistic component to the definition of happiness, even though the framers of the Declaration of Independence defined happiness as "that feeling of self-worth and dignity you acquire by contributing to your community and to its civic life" (Bridgeland 2013). In other words, happiness encompasses an individual's contribution to society, not just pursuits of self-advancement and self-gratification.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES: CHANGING OUR NATION'S PSYCHE

In order to reconnect individuals to community, we must craft a new ethos that champions the core values of community. We must rewrite narratives - the stories we tell ourselves = so that we can eliminate unconscious biases and processes built into our hyper-individualized nation. We must transform our communities to prioritize connecting ideas, people, and processes in ways that take advantage of what each individual has to contribute. We need caring for the welfare of all, that leads to the collaboration that allows us to respond to the accelerating change we see around us.

Whether aware or unaware, most people share interest in the commonwealth of their communities. We all want our neighbors to be good neighbors, our schools to provide a quality education and environment for our kids, local businesses to be ethical and treat employees well, and government to function efficiently and effectively. Improving the quality of life for every citizen will take an effort in which individuals and organizations give time, energy, money, and skills, in return for the benefits of a high-functioning, prosperous, and collaborative community.

Because of the significant shift in thinking and behavior that is required to move from principles of an Industrial Age to one fit for our connected age, there will be natural resistance, especially on the part of people who expect to see quick outcomes and tangible products. It is important to understand that until people begin to see practical reasons to change within a futures context, they will resist. Nurture new thinking, and people will see the need to transform over time. Systemic collective impact provides the pathway to nurture new thinking and the means for co-creation of local solutions to complex challenges, while showing, through the movement represented by systems models, options for adaptive

planning. The work in Rapid City has been a comprehensive, bi-partisan effort, generally devoid of the ugly side of politics. The message of a local community taking the initiative to understand and solve its own issues resonates across partisan lines.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND THE ART OF USING SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Systemic collective impact builds on the simple genius of collective impact as a means for communities to come together around difficult social issues and address them in a cross-disciplinary and coordinated fashion. In a seminal article on collective impact, Kania and Kramer (2011) assert that “substantially better progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems regarding housing, jobs, education, hunger, family services, health, and the like when nonprofits, businesses, healthcare, philanthropy, governments, and the public put service to the community first and collaborate to create Collective Impact” (p. 36). Many funders and nonprofits overlook the potential for Collective Impact because they are used to focusing on independent action or isolated impact, with their inherent turf protection and potential failure to do what’s best for the community, as the primary vehicles for social change. The approach, while in its relative infancy as initiatives across the globe work with its set of high-level principles, is beginning to produce learning that can advance its practice.

Kania and Kramer (2011) present five conditions for collective impact:

1. Common Agenda - All participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed-upon actions.

2. Shared Measurement - Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures that efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities - Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
4. Continuous Communication - Consistent, open communication is needed to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
5. Backbone Support - Creating and managing Collective Impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and to coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

Today, just eight years since Kania and Kramer published their article, use of the collective impact approach pervades social services.

Systemic collective impact is an advancement in the art of doing collective impact, as it brings in a sixth condition to the five noted above, by incorporating system modeling from the rich system dynamics field. Systemic collective impact also mandates the engagement of all sectors, particularly end-users of a system.

“What makes the Rapid City work interesting is how successfully the team was able to bring diverse stakeholders to the table and create an environment in which they learned for themselves, while building a greater sense of shared vision and collective identity.” (J. Sterman, 2018)

SYSTEM LEADERSHIP AND SYSTEM MODELING

System leadership has been defined as having three core capabilities: (1) creating an ability to see the larger system, (2) fostering reflection and genuine conversation, and (3) shifting focus from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015).

In Rapid City, beginning in 2015, an outside backbone team, exemplifying system leadership, spent months interviewing nonprofit, government, Native, and faith community leaders and members, culminating in a 3-day workshop to understand the system of the city's interconnected sectors, create and model these interconnections, and craft a shared language. One of the many models (see Figure 1) produced by the community shows interrelations of variables identified by the 100 individuals from business (CEOs and bank presidents), government (Mayor, city council members, Police Chief), faith (several Christian and Native spiritual leaders), nonprofit (many Executive Directors), health care (CEO of the largest system, other leaders), arts, and everyday citizens. Today, more than two years after the original model's creation, leaders across the city are able to explain the causal loop model. It has been used in all kinds of community conversations.

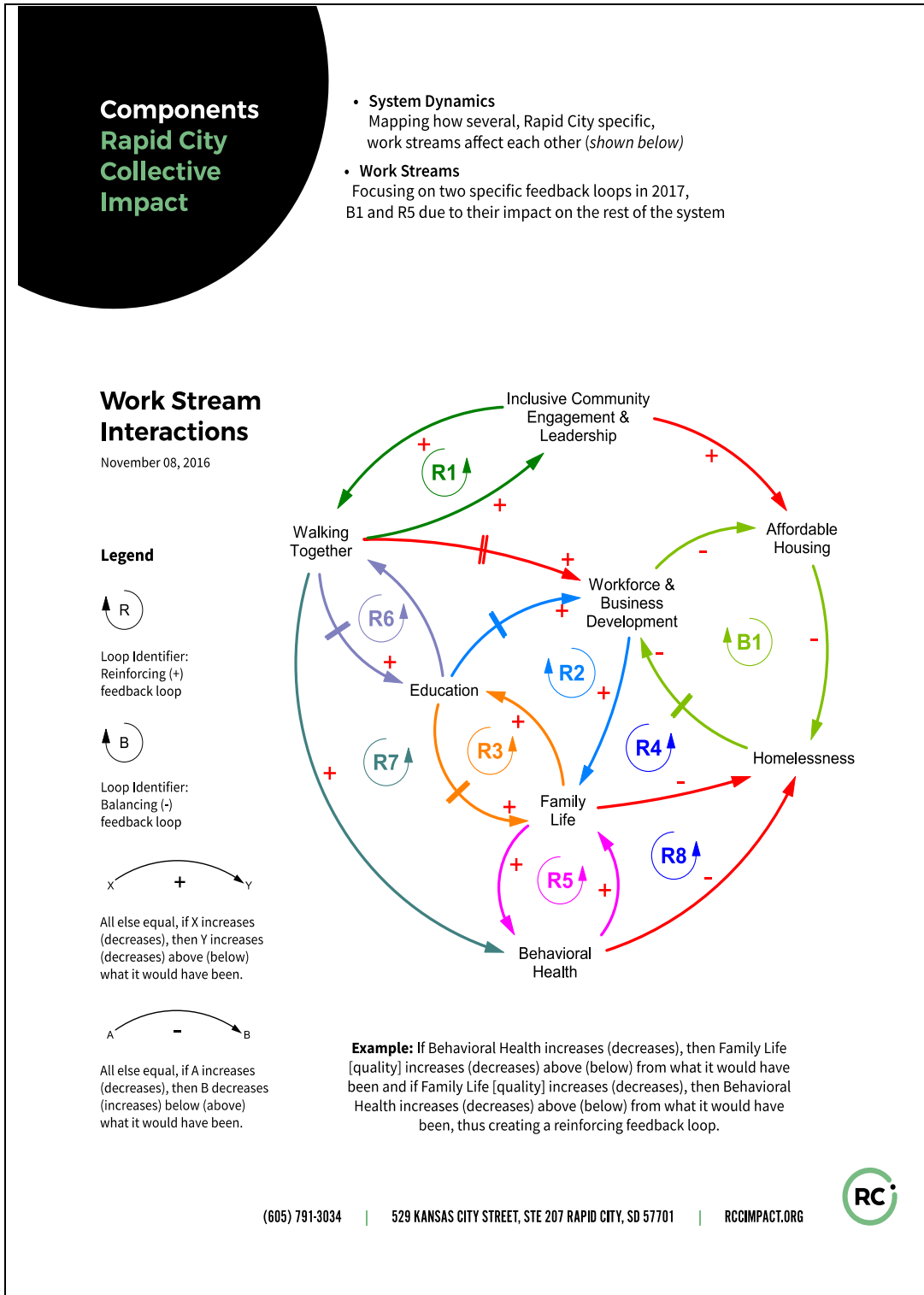


Figure 1: System Model for Rapid City

After the initial 3-day workshop, workstreams corresponding to the variables of the model began meeting bi-weekly or monthly and created and refined system models for their areas. Approximately 10 individuals from a variety of sectors (business, government, nonprofits, and the like) constituted a workstream. Each group gathered additional data and insight to help develop their models and to begin crafting recommendations for addressing issues. Groups of workstreams also met together to learn and coordinate. As an example, the Affordable Housing, the Workforce & Business Development, and the Homelessness workstreams form a balancing loop, B1, and met together every other meeting to enhance their understanding of the issues they were addressing as a “loop” and to craft supportive strategies. The interactions of the workstreams have led to several concurrent initiatives, and the work of the modeling continues to inform adaptive planning strategies.

THE “FEEL, SEE, ACT” APPROACH

RCCI’S backbone included three facilitators from the field of Community-Based System Dynamics (Hovmand, 2014). The backbone team coordinated their work under the framework of an approach summarized as “Feel, See, Act” (Heath & Heath, 2010). These words refer to 1) the emotional impact of issues being addressed (feel), 2) the understanding that comes from cross-sector interaction (see), and 3) the coordination of strategies to achieve agreed-upon goals (act).

The backbone team strove to communicate “Feel,” the momentum of difference-making opportunities, in every meeting and through media use. The system model for Rapid City pictured above is not only useful for planning. It tells a story of the city, one that is easy to tell and follow and one with strong emotional tones. Elements of this “feel” include:

- experiencing that “we are all connected,”

- absorbing emotional reality of the lived experience of community members who struggle with making life work,
- members feeling the impact both of being heard, and of feeling good as a result of being part of the solution-creation process, and
- generating strong positive community energy through media and the ongoing socializing of the co-created model.

The odel also helps the community “See” the community’s web of interconnections. This new sight includes:

- co-creating models so key representatives from all sectors, including end users, generate shared understanding of the interrelated complex set of variables defining problem statements,
- focusing on root causes and their relationships,
- sharing new understanding and learnings within sectors by key representatives who become champions for the initiative, and
- understanding the system’s interrelations and understanding the language being used in the same way

As Mayor Steve Allender noted:

“RCCI allows us to examine issues differently than we are accustomed to examining them. Some of what we’ve learned with their guidance is new—we’re seeing things we’ve never seen before—and some is confirming to what we thought, but all of it has given us confidence in moving forward.” (S. Allender, personal communication, July, 2017).

System modeling has also helped the community know how to “Act.” The power of the “Walking Together” (the name of the group for Native/non-Native

relations) variable in the model communicated to all who listened to the story of the model just how critical the causal ramifications are of race relations and how that “lever” could do more good for the community than just about anything else. It has informed how the community created The Care Campus and particularly the OneHeart Center. This new ability to act is leading to:

- evolving the ways individuals think about how community works.
- refining community narratives,
- forging cross-sector relations and joint action planning, and
- agreeing on the forces and causal relations at play, prioritizing levers to bring about desired change, and collaborating for collective impact.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The principles undergirding systemic collective impact include:

The importance of crafting a systemic collective impact narrative. The rationale for why a community undertakes such a comprehensive approach to the improvement of quality of life is told again and again with a consistent story that can be shown in models. Systemic collective impact has been established in Rapid City as a community practice - “It’s the way we do things,” not an organization, though there is a backbone organization in place. After two years of outside backbone facilitation, the work of coordinating and facilitating was handed over to local leadership - in this case, the Black Hills Area Community Foundation.

Work from an asset mindset, not a deficit mindset. Everyone knows that the community has what it needs to address its issues; it’s a matter of collaboration and coordination.

Facilitate relationships and trust between community leaders and those on the margins, and engage all constituents, including end users, from the beginning

Leverage the best of all sectors in ways that reinforce one another. This involves overcoming some turf protection issues, but when organizations agree that it is more efficient and effective in addressing social issues, they usually rise to the occasion for the betterment of the community.

Establish an emerging leaders cadre (next generation's leaders) drawn from all sectors. This insures that systemic collective impact is not just a program but a way of working together for the betterment of all.

The backbone team understood that power is created when invitations are issued and new people gather and act in new ways. The future is created one room at a time, one gathering at a time. Each gathering needs to become an example of the future we want to create. In these conversations, people who have been on the margins of society bear special gifts and outsiders' sensitivity to the way things are, a greater awareness of others.

The work in Rapid City would not have succeeded without some foresight by philanthropists. The Hillenbrand Foundation provided a large portion of the support of the work of RCCI. Other monies from individuals, foundations, and government provided additional ongoing support.

TIMELINE

In Summer 2015, RCCI began with this definition and problem statement: “[Rapid City Collective Impact is] A community-supported initiative involving members of local government, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, businesses,

grassroots citizens, and a backbone organization who share the common goal of improving quality of life in Rapid City, particularly for those who struggle to make it” (Linderman, 2016). Specific initiatives were expected to emerge in Phase 3.

Phase 1

- Fall 2015 to Winter 2016: Backbone leader interviews 150 service program leaders and reports on overlaps and gaps in services

Phase 2

- Spring 2016: Backbone leader hires two Community-Based System Dynamics (CBSD) experts to support the work and begin system modeling
- May 2016: Facilitators convene, design, and lead a 3-day CBSD workshop with 100 individuals/ Includes Mayor, Police Chief, Sheriff, CEOs, Native elders, non-profit Executive Directors, business leaders, faith community leaders, and regular citizens. The workshop design includes:
 - Hopes + Fears
 - Quality of Life: Behavior Over Time
 - Variable creation
 - Variable naming
 - Systems model, causal-loop diagram iterations
 - Loop naming
 - Empathy: Walking through the loops
 - Work flows- strategy and goal setting
- Summer/Fall 2016: Workstream meetings

Phase 3 and ongoing

- Winter 2016 to Spring 2017: Birthing of initiatives (Largest initiative is The Care Campus and OneHeart Center)
- Summer 2017": Food security initiative begins
- Fall 2018 to Summer 2019: Housing initiative begins
- Fall 2018: The Care Campus Opens

- Summer 2019: All dollars and legal issues for OneHeart Center are in order and construction begins

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