© *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, Volume 21, Number 1, p. 6, (2017)
 eISSN 2164-8212

Achieving Collective Impact: Reflections on Ten Years of the University of Georgia Archway Partnership

Mel Garber and Katherine R. Adams

Abstract

Collective impact is a model for achieving tangible change and improvement in communities through a series of well-defined parameters of collaboration. This article provides a 10-year reflection on the University of Georgia Archway Partnership, a university–community collaboration, in the context of the parameters of collective impact. Emphasis is placed on the backbone organization and the opportunity for universities to serve as backbone organizations. The outcomes achieved through the Archway Partnership support the principles of collective impact and demonstrate the viability of a new model that could facilitate university–community engagement for regional and land-grant universities.

Introduction

Within higher education institutions, calls for engagement have been building the impetus to create partnerships with communities *(Boyer, 1991, 1996)*. This challenge paved the way for a change in what is thought of as citizenship, community engagement, and university–community partnerships. However, despite recent progress, researchers have found that community members recognize the inability of governments and existing societal structures to effectively address society's problems, and are now seeking alternatives that include more participant accountability *(Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2012)*. Failures of seemingly promising endeavors are often associated with disparate interests, lack of coordination, and inadequate resources *(Kania & Kramer, 2011; Wandersman, Goodman, & Butterfoss, 2005)*. In 2011, Kania and Kramer proposed a new initiative designed to further collaborative partnerships in addressing these concerns: collective impact. This reflective essay will explore a sustained university–community partnership, the Archway Partnership, through the lens of collective impact theory as a model for an effective backbone organization. The essay includes the founding program director and co-creator's reflections on the Archway Partnership,

which spans 10 years and is intended to inform and build on the value of backbone organizations.

Understanding Collective Impact

Collective impact is a structured process that relies on the commitment of all stakeholders involved in partnerships to move beyond the initially proposed ideas and continuously work on addressing collectively agreed-upon larger social problems. Kania and Kramer *(2011)* stated that collective impact focuses on social problems within communities because this initiative is based on changing stakeholders' behaviors to bring about social change. Kania and Kramer found that successful collective impact initiatives possess five conditions: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

Common Agenda

To form a common agenda, a group must hold a shared understanding of the problems confronting their communities and create a shared vision for approaching those issues. Additional research suggests that creating a common agenda requires establishing boundaries within the issues to be addressed and developing a strategic action framework *(Hanleybrown et al., 2012)*. Whether issue based, knowledge based, or geographically represented, these boundaries serve to create direction and clarity. As a means of generating a comprehensive understanding of relevant social issues, a strategic action framework is essential to building a shared agenda.

Shared Measurement

A shared measurement system reflects agreement on how outcomes will be evaluated through a mutual means of data collection and an accompanying collective process of analysis. Through this process, accountability is shared among participants, and various stakeholder groups benefit from an opportunity to learn. Edmondson and Hecht *(2014)* built on the concept of collective impact's measurement system by disaggregating data and sharing the independent results, thus furthering the impact of collected data. "Disaggregating data to understand what services best meet the needs of all [participants] enables communities to make informed decisions" *(Edmondson & Hecht, 2014, p. 6)*. Through this means, stakeholders can receive clearer evidence of all the vis-

ible disparities that may exist, and the collective impact agenda of large-scale social change is further supported.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

When multiple organizations or participants act as isolated groups, the lack of interdependent concepts hinders progress toward community solutions. Collective impact involves the formation of a strategic plan for coordinating the various activities occurring within a diverse partnership to ensure continuously reinforcing mutual actions. "Each stakeholder's efforts must fit into an overarching plan if their combined efforts are to succeed" (*Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 40)*.

Continuous Communication

Sandmann and Kliewer *(2012)* proposed that clear lines of communication between university–community partnership members can promote recognition of the visible and unseen structures that can impede reciprocity. Collective impact suggests that continuous communication and the creation of a common vocabulary are core for effective engagement *(Kania & Kramer, 2011)*. Keeping communication engaged throughout a partnership supports equity among partners. Listening to people can be an important technique to gain trust and ensure consistency among interdependent groups. Collective impact recognizes the value of maintaining a dialogue with all stakeholders to learn what knowledge, passion, and concerns exist, and how to communicate them to maximize their utilization for learning and problem solving.

Backbone Support Organizations

According to Kania and Kramer *(2011)*, "coordinating large groups in a collective impact initiative takes time and resources, [and] the expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails" *(p. 40)*. They proposed that a backbone support organization is critical to collective impact. Backbone organizations have many roles, the most important of which are assisting with clarification of goals, managing the details of implementation, and facilitating communication. Possessing a dedicated staff who are separate from any participant organization and "who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation . . . needed for the initiative to function smoothly" *(p. 40)* is a core component. Backbone staff and functions can be shared across different mem-

bers of a partnership to assist in building group consensus, support, and trust.

Background activities play an important role in planning and sustaining successful collaborations. Backbone organizations provide direction, supportive backbone staff, improved communications across sectors, and backbone leadership *(Turner, Merchant, Kania, & Martin, 2012)*. Such organizations take into account the contextual aspects that go into planning initiatives, such as phase, capacity, geographic reach or scope, and structure. A supportive backbone organization is a vital key to sustained initiatives of collective impact.

The Archway Partnership

The Archway Partnership was created in 2005 after a comprehensive review of community-engaged programs at the University of Georgia (UGA) by its two major outreach units, Cooperative Extension and Public Service and Outreach, and was recognized by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities as the Southern Region representative for the Magrath Award for community–university engagement in 2009 *(Garber, Creech, Epps, Bishop, & Chapman, 2010)*. All 17 academic colleges at UGA also had engagement programs; however, these were appropriately focused on serving their respective disciplines. The Archway Partnership was established to foster the UGA land-grant mission by engaging the entire university on community-identified needs. A key assumption was that an organization that added value to the community and the academic institution, as well as performing a neutral facilitator role, would enable greater collaboration within the community, within the institution, and between higher education and the community.

UGA stakeholders agreed to start the program on a small scale, relative to the ultimate vision of numerous programs geographically dispersed throughout Georgia. The first step was a one-county, pilot-scale program small enough in scope to allow correction of inevitable start-up problems but of sufficient scale to indicate the program's viability and scalability. A mutually agreed-upon minimum timeframe to achieve results and determine viability of the program was 2 years. In the initial discussions with the inaugural community, it was clearly articulated that the Archway Partnership was at the concept stage and needed a partner to help develop a program that could be shared with other communities. This created an atmosphere of entrepreneurship and leadership within the com-

munity. The community leaders saw their role as helping to develop something that could be shared and thus position their community as a leader in the state.

In the Archway Partnership process, two partnerships were created. One partnership was in the community and focused on economic development, and the other was on the UGA campus and focused on faculty and student involvement. This created a shared sense of responsibility and a strong desire not to fail. Now based in several counties around the state, Archway brings together stakeholders from across various sectors, such as business, local government, education, nonprofit organizations, and public health, and creates opportunities for community members to partner together in conjunction with assistance from UGA (and other entities such as other higher education organizations) in order to create sustainable change for complex social issues and economic development. In this role, Archway performed the essential activities of a backbone organization, thus facilitating collective impact in the participating communities.

Backbone Support Staff

The Archway Partnership's first action as a community backbone organization was to find and develop the staff to support the partnership development and efforts. The support staff of a backbone organization is vital to the achievement of collective impact *(Kania & Kramer, 2011)*. The Archway Partnership developed strong staff positions (director, operations coordinator, and Archway professional) and responsibilities to meet the needs of the backbone organization to ensure quality support and sustainability.

In the pilot stage, the heads of Public Service and Outreach and Cooperative Extension served as coleaders and worked as a team with the initial Archway professional and the chair of the community executive committee. The director position was formalized and staffed as a full-time position after the 2-year pilot stage, when the decision was made to expand the program to multiple communities in Georgia. The director's role evolved with expansion and maturation of the program so that in addition to personnel, budget, and planning functions, the position focused on development of new partnership communities (a process that generally required 12 to 18 months); formation of partnerships with academic colleges and public service units within UGA and with other University System of Georgia institutions, technical colleges, and state agen-

cies; setting the strategic direction of the program; and supporting the operations coordinators and Archway professionals.

Next, the operations coordinator position was created to facilitate access to higher education and other resources for the director and communities. Responsibilities included identifying emerging resource requirements, initiating relationship-building with appropriate academic units, coordinating work of the numerous graduate students, and working with academic faculty to develop meaningful internship and capstone experiences. The operations coordinator, along with the director, had responsibility for identification and development of the Archway Partnership communities.

The Archway professional facilitated community on-site daily activities and relationship building, student and faculty engagement, and implementation of results. This proved to be the most critical and treasured position in the Archway Partnership program. Although embedded in the community like the Cooperative Extension county agent position, the Archway professional was not represented as a content expert but rather as a skilled organizational facilitator. This allowed the Archway professional to perform the critical role of neutral third-party facilitator in the community, and to focus on mobilizing resources to address community-identified needs and issues. Within the community, the Archway professional facilitated the formation of the executive committee, which generally consisted of six to 12 representatives from key community organizations, elected and nonelected leaders, businesses, and nonprofits. The Archway professional and the executive committee meet monthly, solicit community input, make final decisions on priority areas, track progress of the work plan, and garner resources for work product development and implementation of results.

Archway and the University

In the early stages of partnership development, the community learned that one role of the Archway Partnership was connecting their needs to the vast array of resources at UGA and other institutions of higher education. Community partners developed genuine excitement as they began to think about the possibilities. It also became apparent that most community members have only a vague idea of what is available from higher education and how these resources can facilitate economic development. Although rich in resources, universities tend to exist in isolation from communities

that are need intensive but resource limited. This is especially true for smaller communities.

The engagement of academic faculty is important to a sustainable collective impact initiative. Most faculty are appointed to teaching and/or research positions, and thus their outreach activities are not necessarily supported by incremental compensation or recognized in the promotion and tenure process *(Holland, 1999)*. A key early assumption, influenced by faculty conversations over many years, was that faculty would like to share their knowledge and participate in engagement activities. Therefore, the Archway Partnership endeavored to make it easy for faculty to engage with communities, a simple but important operating principle. The operations coordinator position was able to facilitate the dialogue needed for understanding the interests of faculty and the constraints on their community engagement in order to enable maximum faculty participation. With a thorough understanding of community priorities and researcher interests, the Archway Partnership was able to create a competitive advantage for faculty seeking grants for applied community-based research.

University students began participating during the pilot phase, and it became readily apparent that their role, in addition to contributing to project outcomes, could be pivotal in bringing together university and community partners. Community partners also indicated that they were energized by students and wanted to be involved in the training of students during community-based projects *(Adams, 2014)*. At the same time, faculty became more engaged as student participation increased. The Archway Partnership managed the institutional process to help strive for constructive experiences and outcomes for community partners, faculty members, and students.

Archway Partnership as a Backbone Organization

Turner et al. *(2012)* consider backbone organizations the primary cause of the success or failure of collective impact initiatives. As defined by these theorists, backbone organizations are distinguished from other partners in that they seek to "improve social outcomes by organizing cross-sector groups of partners to transform an often inefficient, fragmented system" *(Turner et al, 2012, p. 3)*. The Archway Partnership was invited into communities that were composed of multiple cities, community organizations, and government agencies, and brought them to a space that enabled

shared communication to address their collective social needs. Defined as "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem," collective impact theorizes that multisector partnerships are more effective than isolated approaches in addressing problems with no known solution *(Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 36)*. The initiatives of collective impact focus on "a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda" *(p. 38)*. Specifically, backbone organizations have been identified as pursuing six common activities: guiding vision and strategy; supporting aligned activities; establishing shared measures; building public will; advancing policy; and mobilizing funding. The Archway Partnership found evidence of these six common activities of backbone organizations within its mission (Table 1).

The Archway Partnership performed each of the functions of a backbone organization.

Guiding vision and strategy. It was established early in the start-up for each partnership that the proposed collaboration would be a partnership of equals between the community and the university, and the Archway Partnership would serve as a neutral facilitator for all partners. The community was assured that the Archway Partnership would not be an expert-driven model but would start with community-identified needs. The strategy was to start small, develop local and campus ownership, and then expand the geographic reach.

Initially the two goals of the Archway program were (a) creation of a cohesive working relationship within the community so the community priorities could be developed and (b) the formation of a mutually beneficial relationship between the community and the university. Early in the formation of the community partnership, it was important to emphasize that the community needed to establish its goals and priority issues. Community members tended to expect the university to determine the priorities or solutions. The university helped to inform the process of priority setting and acquisition of resources but did not make final decisions.

At the community level, one challenge was translating the needs and interests of individual organizations into a community vision and list of priorities. Initially, each executive committee member advocated for the interest of the organization they represented as top priority. The result was an array of silo-based priorities but no

Table 1. Best Practices for Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact

Backbone Organization Activities	Archway Partnership Best Practices
Guiding vision and strategy	Archway as a neutral facilitator Establish community-based priorities Reciprocity between university and community through creation of mutually beneficial projects
Supporting aligned activities	Annual listening sessions to solicit community-wide input to develop project goals Collaborative dissemination of implementations and outcomes Archway Professional serves to align the overall process
Establishing shared measures	Measurements change as partnership evolves More active and diverse participants; the increase of community progress Community and university share responsibility for outcomes through established commitments to implementation of project outcomes
Building public will	Create early, strong sense of local ownership Identification of engaged citizens and university partners Involvement of experiential learning opportunities for students and faculty
Advancing policy	Ongoing communication with key decision makers Partnering with influential entities (chamber of commerce, board of education) Policy decisions should align with priorities and resources
Mobilizing funding	Shared financial investment from all partners Annual MOUs and funding commitment renewals provide incentive and sustainability Joint financial support of backbone organizations establishes mutual accountability

identification of community priorities. Eventually executive committee members were asked to check their organizational hats at the door and to wear their shared community hats. This helped everyone to move past their individual organizations and think about their common or overlapping priorities. Establishing community-identified priorities before utilizing university resources made it possible to achieve trust and form reciprocal relationships. There proved to be sufficient opportunities to share new technolo-

gies, resources, and skills of the university, which in turn influenced the final priorities.

An example of guiding strategies for collective impact can be seen in results obtained by the Archway Executive Committee in Dalton–Whitfield County in 2009–2010. Through a community-wide visioning process that reached hundreds of citizens, economic development, education, and a vibrant living environment were identified as top priority areas. Over the next year, hundreds of citizens engaged in issue workgroups to address the long-term goals the visioning process had identified in each of these areas. Through this process, local leaders began to notice a trend. Regardless of the goal the issue workgroups coalesced around, the tactics involved early intervention for the next generation of the workforce. As a result, the community embarked on a multifaceted workforce development effort. Local leaders worked with the Technical College System of Georgia to bring Georgia Northwestern Technical College to the local Career Academy campus. The local University System of Georgia institution, Dalton State University, reached out to area manufacturers to create long-term plans for workforce development needs. The Chamber of Commerce hired its first workforce development coordinator, who spearheaded career exposure programs for high schoolers, as well as a design, engineering, and manufacturing camp for middle schoolers. The development of this cohesive vision for strategies to guide the life of the programs demonstrates how long-term ventures can be developed and implemented.

Supporting aligned activities. Generating and sustaining enthusiasm for complex community work over long periods of time has proven to be a challenge for collaborations within a community *(Gray, 1989; Kegler, Rigler, & Honeycutt, 2010)* and between university and community *(Hawkins, Shapiro, & Fagan, 2010)*. The steps developed through the Archway Partnership that proved effective for creation of aligned activities began with annual listening sessions with the broader community and solicitation of input on future priorities, and continued with regular monthly updates for the executive committee regarding current projects, a cumulative list of completed projects, and implementation status. Another effective support process was the dissemination of outcomes and implementations. These were communicated within the community by publishing project progress in local news media and social media, and within the institution by reporting the progress and outcomes of the involved student and faculty member to their academic department and college. A culture was developed through

the executive committee to pause and celebrate small accomplishments on a regular basis, which in turn energized the group to prepare for future activities.

The Archway professional position served a critical role in the overall functioning of the process in the community by ensuring that community organizations and resources were coordinated in the establishment of priorities, completion of projects, and implementation of results. In particular, the position supported alignment of activities when the process occurred over several years and involved numerous community and higher education partners. Aligning the scope and timetable of community needs with the academic timetable of semesters and internships was a challenge that the partnership met primarily through clear understanding of community priorities, early adjustment of expectations on the part of the community, and utilizing a mix of undergraduate and graduate students to ensure steady availability of resources.

Establishing shared measures. In the community, the measurement of outcomes changed with the duration of engagement. In the beginning, attendance and active participation at the executive committee meetings was a key barometer of community interest. The number of active projects became more important over the course of the first year. Eventually, the key measures included the number of issue workgroups and implemented projects. Of equal importance was the number of community participants and the diversity of participants, with particular attention to representation of groups not generally involved in community decision making. In 12 community programs conducted over 10 years, the best progress occurred in communities with the largest number of active volunteers and the greatest diversity of participants.

In several communities, the partners revealed that university faculty and students had previously been involved in projects. However, it seemed that little in the way of information or work products actually resulted, and thus these projects yielded a lack of recognizable change. It was acknowledged that the community and the students and faculty shared responsibility for the outcome. There was a strong desire to ensure implementation of findings, recommendations, and results from faculty and student projects. Therefore, a commitment was required of both partners to stay engaged until recommendations and results were implemented and change had occurred. Providing feedback to faculty and students proved to be one of the most important steps for ensuring university faculty and student enthusiasm and continued involvement.

Measured achievements were influenced not only by projects completed but implementation of plans and a visible effect in the community. Executive committee methods evolved toward earlier discussion of the likelihood of implementation before committing to a project. This focused efforts on projects that were not only important but also likely to be implemented. In most programs, the result was a mix of small projects perceived as easily implemented and a few longer term projects that presented more of an implementation challenge. Implementing numerous small projects with a common goal had the cumulative effect of enhancing sustainability in the community and on campus. It also provided the basis for securing greater resources for the larger long-term projects.

A key responsibility of the community was to articulate goals and prioritize needs so efforts could be focused on the top priorities. This was one of the most important responsibilities of the community and one that was often difficult to achieve. It required that multiple segments of the community come together and consider the needs of the entire community, not just individual groups. An example of this process occurred in an East Georgia community, Washington County, that identified the need for additional health care professionals, including medical doctors and registered nurses. An Archway Partnership community group consisting of hospital administrators, medical doctors, nurses, public health department personnel, and interested citizens was formed to identify specific needs and develop strategies. With the Archway professional serving as facilitator, the community group concluded that the initial need was for a larger number of registered nurses (RNs), and the preferred strategy for filling this need was to provide additional training for existing licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and emergency medical technicians (EMTs). The partnership decided to assess interest from the local region in an expedited LPN to RN bridge program, which ultimately included the six contiguous counties where most hospital staff resided. A survey conducted by the Archway Partnership, with assistance from UGA faculty, revealed a high level of interest in the surrounding communities. As a result of the survey, the local technical college, Oconee Fall Line Technical College, hosted an online LPN/EMT to RN bridge program developed by Dalton College. By 2010, the program had graduated 27 students. At the end of 2014, the program had graduated a total of 262 RNs, with a 98% pass rate on the state board exam. The early stage priority setting and strategy development were key to developing a program that was effective and sustainable. The collaborative efforts of the community, the Archway Partnership, the local

technical college, and a University System of Georgia institution resulted in an ongoing program that is addressing the critical need for health care professionals and benefiting the local and regional economy.

Building public will. To ensure a high level of involvement and enthusiasm by community members in the Archway Partnership, it was considered important to create a strong sense of community ownership early in the process. This was achieved through a commitment to two principles: The work plan was driven by issues of greatest importance to the community, and the partnership operated on a shared governance and decision making model so that all parties acted as equal partners. This gave the community partners confidence that their investment of time and money would be directed to issues of greatest importance locally. On the university's part, this required that the Archway Partnership spend substantial up-front time helping the community organize and determine their priorities. Once the priority needs were identified, university resources could be engaged.

The building of public will on campus was aided primarily through involvement of students and facilitation of a meaningful initial work experience. The involvement of undergraduate and graduate students led to greater faculty involvement and eventually administrative support. The rallying of community and university involvement was greatly enhanced by sharing stories from student portfolios; college administration shared these stories with alumni. The sharing of faculty and student achievement stories in the community through feedback of this information to students and faculty members generated enthusiasm and renewed commitment in the community and university.

The building of public will occurred in the community progressively over time through several actions. In the beginning, identification and engagement of citizens who exemplified good leadership was critical. These boundary spanners *(Adams, 2014)* quickly understood the potential of the Archway Partnership and generally engaged the initial core of motivated community leaders. Community listening sessions during the start-up phase and annually thereafter increased community commitment and evolved into participation in issue workgroups. The presentation by issue workgroup members to the executive committee also added to understanding of the process and sustained participation to project completion. The longer term driver of community involvement came from the broader community transformation that occurred. For instance, recognition at every level in the community that educa-

tion is important and must be a community priority, not just a school priority, energized several communities. The involvement of newly trained leaders led to the formation of new organizations and engagement of new citizen groups, which served also to energize and sustain the process.

An example of community transformation was Dalton–Whitfield County, which had experienced a decade of rapid growth in the Hispanic population. The parents generally did not have a high school diploma and rarely attained a postsecondary degree, yet their children represented the majority of elementary school students. With the long-term viability of the community in mind, the Archway Partnership Executive Committee focused on preparing children and their parents for kindergarten. The priority, viewed as critical, was to address the birth-to-5 segment of the population. Stakeholders from industry, education, the chamber of commerce, and local education groups formed Readers to Leaders, an initiative that served as an umbrella for many birth–work education initiatives. The local library established a workforce development center to provide citizens with resources and classes. A local First Five task force was created to address prenatal to pre-K gaps. The local Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership began efforts to launch a prenatal care program for uninsured mothers. In addition to helping children and parents learn to read, the initiative helped integrate the Hispanic population into the community, since all citizens had a common goal of enhancing the education of children. In this example, the four core beliefs were that (1) healthy communities support education from birth to work, (2) teachers are everywhere, not just in the classroom, (3) early investments in education have a higher return, and (4) community engagement is essential. The results of this program demonstrated that building grassroots programming toward public will can guide program development.

Advancing policy. In the early stages of the Archway Partnership, a common frustration was the lack of implementation of recommended and completed projects. This was addressed in part through more extensive and ongoing communication with public and private decision makers, which allowed for timely policy decisions and alignment of priorities and resources. In addition, the Archway Partnership platform provided a neutral table in the community where other higher education institutions from the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) could cooperate as partners, an important policy initiative for both systems. During a span of 10 years,

about 50% of the USG and TCSG institutions participated in the Archway Partnership with the 12 Archway Partnership communities. In some communities, these institutions were asked to serve on the governing executive committee, further enhancing cooperation between higher education institutions and communities.

A key policy initiative in several communities was improvement of graduation rates and workforce preparation. In one rural Georgia community, Pulaski County, this was accomplished through development of a local leadership program and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Pulaski Tomorrow, which empowered graduates to develop specific leadership initiatives. The leadership program has continually increased community participation and deepened the relationship with area technical colleges as well as UGA. In 2014, the organization partnered with the local board of education and the chamber of commerce to implement a similar leadership curriculum for high school students to address high school completion rates, postsecondary education, and life skills. Life League, a program to help at-risk youth prepare for postsecondary education, was created. The organization initially used basketball as a motivator to get youth involved, and then utilized basketball sessions to instill interest in postsecondary education. During an early meeting, the students were asked if they had considered postsecondary education, and only one of 30 students raised their hand. To encourage students to envision themselves in a place of higher education, the Archway Partnership hosted their championship basketball game on the UGA campus. Their visit included touring the campus and, at the end of the day, meeting with UGA Admissions. Life League has helped over 300 at-risk young men and women prepare for a bright future. Participants in the program graduated from high school at a 91% rate, nearly 20 points higher than the local and state average. In post survey self-assessments, all participants responded that the program had improved their leadership and life skills.

Mobilizing funding. In recognizing an important effect of mobilized and shared funding on successful collective impact initiatives, Kania and Kramer *(2011)* found that "funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive" *(p. 41)*. The Archway Partnership was structured to ensure that the community and university partners had a vested interest in a positive outcome. In addition to the commitment to focus on community needs, joint financial support of the backbone organization (Archway Partnership) established

mutual accountability. The university and community agreed on the total annual contribution required to operate the program, and the community decided how to share costs among members of the executive committee. This kept responsibility for the community contribution at the local level and not with the university. Although the Archway professional facilitated the annual memorandum of understanding (MOU) renewal, the primary responsibility for securing local funds resided with the community. Contributions varied among community funding partners, but an equitable sharing was maintained so one partner did not appear to "own" the program or carry undue influence. For instance, if the county commission contributed 50% of the funds, other partners tended to view the Archway Partnership as a county program, when the Archway Partnership goal was to establish a community program. Annual MOUs and funding commitments provided incentives to all partners to achieve measurable results so they could be accountable to constituents. As the backbone organization, the Archway Partnership served as a neutral third-party facilitator within the community and contributed financially. Each member of the executive committee contributed to funding unless exempted by consensus of the group. The university established the total funding needed for basic operations and institutional staff. Additional funds needed for special studies or project implementation were secured from funding sources in the community.

The Archway Partnership ensured that partnering communities were always motivated to participate in the partnership. This was accomplished in part by requiring the communities to contribute financially and to renew their financial commitment on an annual basis. Communities that recognized the value of shared buy-in to the collaboration proved to be highly motivated partners with the desire to see changes through to implementation. The initial funding of the initial community established the parameters used throughout the subsequent partnerships. The two internal UGA partners and the community, Colquitt County, each provided one third of the funding to form the first partnership. This ratio of funding demonstrated both that the university was serious about working with the community and that the community needed to contribute to funding of the project. Additional funding for specific projects and for implementation was generally forthcoming since it was well established that these were high-priority community projects and goals. For instance, Colquitt County, located about a 4-hour drive from Athens, addressed the issue of distance and housing of long-term visitations by purchasing a house for

use by Archway Partnership interns. The Archway professional also assisted communities with obtaining grants from various foundations, industry, and state agencies to support implementation of projects. A College of Public Health researcher obtained a 5-year USDA grant in which the reviewers cited the existing relationship in the Archway Partnership community as a competitive advantage over other applicants. The Archway Partnership provided a platform for the community and university researchers to discuss key research needs, and these discussions guided researchers as they determined grants to seek. The executive committee partners also assist in providing annual financial support to cover ongoing personnel and operating expenses for the Archway Partnership. For instance, when the executive committee includes a representative of the county commission government, it provides an opportunity for direct questioning by the commissioners and a better understanding of projects pursued and future hurdles. This is much more effective than a presentation at the end of the project, followed by a request for funds. Commissioners can share this information with constituents and plan months in advance for financial resources required for future programs.

Reflections and Recommendations

As this 10-year retrospective indicates, the Archway Partnership clearly encompasses the roles and characteristics of a backbone organization, and the overall initiatives of collective impact theory apply to its functions. The establishment of a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization were very important to addressing the larger social impact of collaboration within the Archway Partnership. The Archway Partnership developed several best practices that reinforce the five conditions of collective impact (Table 2) as described in the literature.

Upon the reflection of these activities, a number of key points emerge as recommendations to those seeking to engage in collaborative partnerships. These key points include creating a new model, practicing leadership development, valuing backbone organization staff, and creating a sustainable program.

Table 2. Best Practices of Collective Impact

Conditions of Collective Impact Theory	Archway Partnership Best Practices
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*	Priorities developed by community and not by university, although facilitated by university Not an expert-driven process but rather a mobilization of university resources in response to identified community needs University performs proactive backbone organization role rather than a passive anchor organization role
Shared measurement *Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable*	Start with simple, easy-to-measure results that do not require much time by community Focus on implemented results and impact and not reports/recommendations that usually sit on a shelf
Mutually reinforcing activities *Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.*	Cost sharing by university and community to enhance ownership by both parties Leadership development achieved through the Archway process to build local capacity
Continuous communication *Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation*	Monthly status updates to community executive committee on projects and implementation of results Regular articles in local news media on priorities, student and faculty involvement, and resultant changes in the community Circulate community articles on faculty and students to college administration, who in turn share with alumni
Backbone support organization *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 coordinate participating*	Archway Professional serves as neutral third-party facilitator in community Archway Professional is an organizational facilitator rather than content expert

Note: Adapted from *Kania & Kramer, 2011*

Creating a New Model

The Archway Partnership was created to help the University of Georgia continue its historic mission as a land-grant institution connecting the university to the people of Georgia. The university had a proud and long tradition of community engagement

through units such as Public Service and Outreach and Cooperative Extension. The academic colleges had outreach programs appropriately geared toward continuing education of their alumni and affiliated constituents. What appeared to be missing was a mechanism to facilitate connecting the resources of the 17 academic colleges to the priorities of communities for the advancement of economic and community development. The Archway Partnership incorporated several features of Cooperative Extension, such as an embedded position in the community, but it differed from Cooperative Extension in that it connected all academic colleges at UGA to the community, and it was a time-limited program (albeit of several years' duration) intended to build capacity in the community to continue the program once the formal relationship ended. This resulted in ongoing community conversation about how to make sure the process continued once UGA ended the formal phase, which in turn made sustainability an ongoing part of the conversation. This approach allowed the Archway Partnership to shift resources to other communities and kept the overall cost of the program within the realities of today's public funding. Another important distinction from existing UGA community engagement programs was that the Archway Partnership did not develop or deliver its own programs, which enabled the organization to perform the critical and needed role of third-party facilitator in the community and on campus. It was found that it is important when creating university–community partnerships that the community organization is viewed as an equal partner. University personnel may bring certain technical information, but community leaders have a deep understanding of issues and requirements for implementation of technology or practices.

Leadership Development

Creation of a new model for interacting with communities required creation of new leadership development within the backbone organization and within the community. The Archway Partnership performed a different role from other community engagement organizations, and the Archway professional was the key position within the backbone organization for success in the community. Archway professionals needed to work effectively with a diverse set of community and university leaders and to navigate community and university politics. Archway professionals came from diverse educational backgrounds and prior work experience. The selection criteria emphasized facilitation and leadership skills as opposed to content expertise. Archway Professionals received

extensive ongoing professional development through facilitation training, in-service training through bimonthly Archway meetings, and professional development seminars related to community priorities. Community leadership development occurred through the monthly community partner meetings where key issues were discussed and solutions identified. Each of the community members became more informed regarding their community and how to engage others within and outside the community to help address local needs and opportunities. The process employed by the Archway Partnership became a leadership development process for the community. The process was consistently praised by the community as a great way to develop a new and diverse pool of leaders.

Leadership development during the direct involvement of the Archway Partnership as the backbone organization (usually 5–7 years) is critical to sustaining the process once the program relocates to another community. Although the Archway Partnership has so far graduated only a few communities, successful continuation has been enhanced by strong local leadership and the continued functioning of established issue work groups that appreciate the need to function as facilitators of broad community needs. However, it has also been apparent that a neutral backbone organization is critical to a high level of community accomplishment.

Value of Backbone Organization Staff

The Archway Partnership staff was instrumental in the achievement of community goals and enhancement of university participation. Contributors ranged from the Archway professional, who nurtured the process within the community by facilitating priority setting, keeping the community partnership together, and ensuring implementation of projects, to the operations coordinators and director, who cultivated academic partnerships and managed student involvement. The Archway organization clearly demonstrated the necessity and benefits of a university-staffed backbone organization. The Archway Partnership was able to foster community collaboration that previously had been difficult to achieve and assist communities in accessing higher education resources. It created a seamless transition from community to campus and campus to community. The process started with formation of the local community group and identification of priorities and subsequent conveyance to the operations coordinator on the UGA campus. Prior to discussion of specific needs, the operations coordinator developed an understanding of the operation of each college and identified one or more key contacts. The connection between commu-

nity and academic unit was simplified to a single clearly identified person in Archway, the operations coordinator, who served as the intake and coordination portal and who interacted with one person in each academic college (usually the internship coordinator or associate dean for outreach and engagement).

Alignment of needs from the community vis-à-vis the operating constraints on campus was an iterative process. The communities were particularly interested in receiving a work product that could be implemented or built upon by subsequent students. The managed process implemented by the Archway Partnership helped each participant (community, student, and faculty member) understand their role and the expectations of the other partners. Once the community and academic unit were in contact, the Archway professional monitored and provided guidance to achieve timely delivery of a work product while ensuring that student and faculty needs were met. The Archway professionals have been seen as the connectors and facilitators of the programs, and the community members perceive the role as very connected to the community *(Tetloff, 2012)*.

Creating a Sustainable Program

Several early-stage decisions on approach, community engagement, organization structure, and campus incentives have been key to the pilot, expansion to eight simultaneous programs, and sustainability of the Archway Partnership throughout 10 years and counting. This suggests that sustainability should be considered at the early stages of program formation. One key recommendation is a clear understanding of the incentives for each partner to come to, and stay at, the table of collaboration. The engagement effort must be a win-win situation for the community and university to be sustainable over a long period of time. Creating ownership on the part of the community partner was key to their continued involvement as they dealt with very difficult issues. Local ownership was cultivated and maintained by focusing on priorities determined by the community; establishing a local executive committee where higher education and community partners sought consensus; maintaining shared financial support for the backbone organization (Archway Partnership) and the community, which created mutual accountability; celebrating small achievements; and maximizing visibility and communications in the community. On campus, the partnership was sustained by ensuring that academic faculty and students benefited from the program. For students, the real-world needs of communities represented valuable experiential learning opportu-

nities to apply their classrooms skills. In short, sustainability was achieved by ensuring that both the community and the university benefited.

Conclusion

Collective impact suggests that viable partnerships depend on the implementation of certain conditions, as well as backbone organizations that play an essential role in providing the tools, support, and strategies for the achievement of productive collaboration *(Kania & Kramer, 2011)*. The success of the Archway Partnership serves as evidence for the value of collective impact theory as a foundation for an effective backbone organization. This reflective essay explored this theory using case studies and experiences of the founding program director and co-creator of the Archway Partnership from a 10-year period to demonstrate the value of backbone organizations. The director also shared reflections and recommendations for future collaborators within the higher education system. Creating a new model, practicing leadership development, valuing backbone organization staff, and creating a sustainable program were areas of achievement associated with the Archway Partnership.

In addition to the many generic features of collective impact and backbone organizations, the Archway Partnership illustrates a number of characteristics specific to higher education: (a) Institutions of higher education can perform the role of the backbone organization in communities; (b) communities need a trusted facilitator organization to help bridge the inevitable divisions that occur, and higher education is uniquely situated in society to perform the role of neutral facilitator; (c) students want to give back to communities and the state that educated them, but a mechanism is needed to enable them to engage in a meaningful manner; (d) faculty are generally interested in giving back and applying their research, but because of teaching and research time constraints, a mechanism is needed to simplify faculty engagement in current high-priority community needs; and (e) resources are available for this type of work once the program has demonstrated a willingness to work on priority local needs and work products have been generated and implemented. The Archway process created a system change in the communities as individual organizations that previously worked in isolation began to ask, "Who can I collaborate with?" as an early step in achieving their goals. These individual organizations began to talk about their community needs and goals and found that seeking the resources of external partners would

develop their needs while sharing their experiences with the academic community. Evidence that the Archway Partnership changed the relationship between Georgia communities and the University of Georgia comes from a partner in Colquitt County who captured the changed relationship between community and higher education during a meeting of Archway communities: "Before the Archway Partnership, we never thought to reach out to UGA for help; now they are always in the conversation." The Archway Partnership demonstrates the effectiveness of collective impact as an approach to community and economic development; further, it shows that higher education can play a key role in achieving collective impact by serving as a backbone organization.

Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge Dr. Arthur N. Dunning, President, Albany State University, as co-creator of the Archway Partnership (while at UGA), the Archway Partnership faculty and staff, and the many community leaders and university administrators, faculty, and students who worked together so effectively to develop the Archway Partnership into a model for university–community engagement.

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About the Authors

Mel Garber is director emeritus of the University of Georgia Archway Partnership. He retired from UGA in 2015 after a diverse career as an Extension specialist and director of Cooperative Extension. He received his Ph.D. from Cornell University.

Katherine R. Adams is a graduate program coordinator at the University of Georgia. Her research interests are boundary spanning, community engagement, community perspective, and community leadership. Adams earned her Ph.D. in adult education from the University of Georgia.