

Democrat and Chronicle

Speaking Out

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More than a Collaboration

All of us hope that, this time, we're going to tackle poverty in Rochester differently than we ever have before. We're talking about doing it better. No more blue ribbon panels. No more idealistic dreams that lack the resources to succeed. No more isolated initiatives that tackle only a piece of the problem or engage all but the people most affected by poverty.

This time we'll be systemic, acknowledging that poverty is caused and sustained by many factors that have to be tackled at once. We will engage people who experience and understand the pain and challenges of poverty first-hand because their expertise is as important as that of the professionals, policymakers and agency experts. We'll be methodical and tenacious. We're going to commit ourselves to a strategy of **collective impact** that holds all institutions and institutional leaders accountable for not only working together to make change happen, but to changing how and what we do in ourselves and our own organizations to achieve our community's anti-poverty goals.

We have to be ready to change.

And, for that change to be real and long-lasting, it has to be woven into the fabric of our organizations and cultures. This is why it's so important that **we all commit ourselves** to a rigorous understanding of **collective impact**.

Collective impact *really* is much more than collaboration! Collaboration happens when we meet together; collective impact is what we do when we're alone.

Collaboration happens when we choose to sit in the same room and work together on the same project because we share an interest in accomplishing a shared goal. This is a good and productive process as long as the collaborators continue to meet. But it's not enough: it doesn't necessarily change how we behave, and it doesn't always change decision-making in an ongoing way. The contribution of each collaborating organization often ends when its representative stops attending the meetings.

On the other hand, collective impact **focuses on change inside each partner organization**. It begins when we, as a community, agree to a set of shared outcomes (RMAPI has chosen the Guiding Principles of Structural Racism, Community-Building, and Trauma) and then, individually, go back into our home organizations and work with our staffs, boards, and volunteers to figure out what we – individually and organizationally – can best do to achieve those shared goals and then choose to make changes to accomplish this. When each of our organizations chooses to shift and align our own work and priorities in this way, we set changes in motion in all portions of our community. And these changes will last a long time.

"Collective impact" can't be a catchphrase; it has to be a commitment. This time we have a chance to significantly reduce poverty in Rochester and Monroe County if each of us – in our lives and in our work - is ready to make a long and personal commitment to do things differently than we have before.

Leonard Brock is director of the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative.

Hank Rublin is vice president for community programs at Rochester Area Community Foundation and author of Collaborative Leadership: Developing Effective Partnerships for Communities and Schools (Corwin Press, 2009).