



**COLLECTIVE  
IMPACT FORUM**



## **Creating a Culture of Learning and Continuous Improvement in Your Collaborative**

National Veterans Intermediary | November 18, 2019

# Today's presenters

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**Robert Albright**  
**Director of Programs**  
**Collective Impact Forum**



**Joelle Cook**  
**Director**  
**FSG**

# About FSG

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- **Nonprofit consulting firm specializing in strategy, evaluation and research** with offices in Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, DC, Geneva, and Mumbai
- Partner with **foundations, corporations, nonprofits, and governments** to develop more effective solutions to the world's most challenging issues
- Recognized **thought leader in social impact, philanthropy and corporate social responsibility**
- Staff of **150 full-time professionals** with **passion and experience** to solve social problems
- **Advancing collective impact** via publications, conferences, speaking engagements, client projects

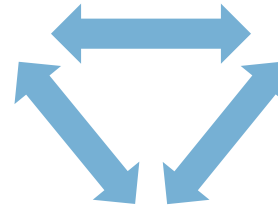


# FSG facilitates effective cross-sector collaboration in three mutually reinforcing ways

## HANDS ON SUPPORT

- ✓ Juvenile justice in NY State
- ✓ Substance abuse on Staten Island
- ✓ Cradle to career in King County
- ✓ Health in the Rio Grande Valley
- ✓ Early childhood in Houston

## THOUGHT LEADERSHIP



## LEARNING COMMUNITY



[www.collectiveimpactforum.org](http://www.collectiveimpactforum.org)

*The **Collective Impact Forum** is a field-wide partnership between FSG and the Aspen Institute to help curate and disseminate knowledge, tools, and best practices that support effective collective impact*

# Please introduce yourself

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- Your name
- Your organization
- Your city/state
- Your level of familiarity with collective impact
  - Not at all familiar with collective impact
  - I have heard the term “collective impact” but am not really sure how it differs from other forms of partnership
  - I know about the collective impact approach but am not currently involved in a collective impact collaboration
  - I am involved in a collective impact collaboration

# A Brief Refresher on the Nuts and Bolts of Collective Impact

# Achieving large-scale change through collective impact involves five key elements

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1

## Common agenda

- **Common understanding** of the problem
- **Shared goal** and framework for change

2

## Shared measurement system

- **Collecting data** and **measuring results**
- Focus on **performance management**
- **Shared accountability**

3

## Mutually reinforcing activities

- **Differentiated approaches**
- **Coordination** through joint plan of action

4

## Continuous communication

- **Consistent** and **open communication**
- Focus on **building trust**

5

## Backbone support

- Dedicated **staff**
- Resources and skills to **convene** and **coordinate** participating organizations

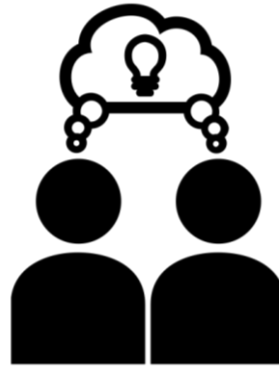
# Several elements make up a common agenda

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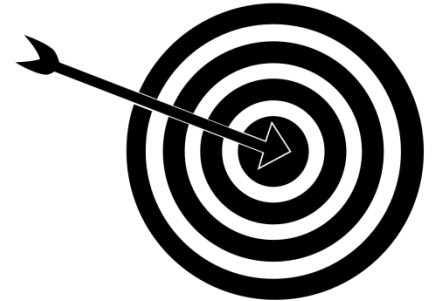
## PRINCIPLES

*How are you going to work together?*



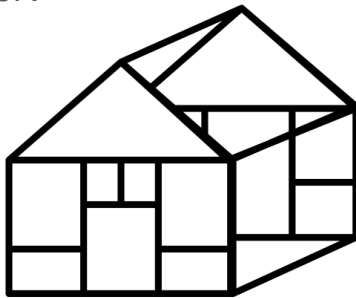
## PROBLEM DEFINITION

*What is in and what is out?*



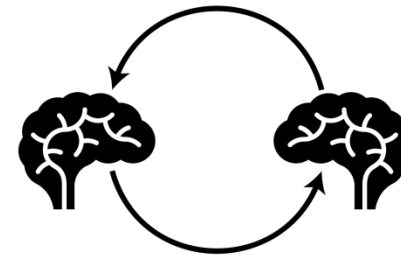
## GOAL

*How will you define success?*



## FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

*How are you going to split up the work and prioritize?*



## PLAN FOR LEARNING

*How will you track progress and learn?*



# Creating a Culture of Learning and Continuous Improvement

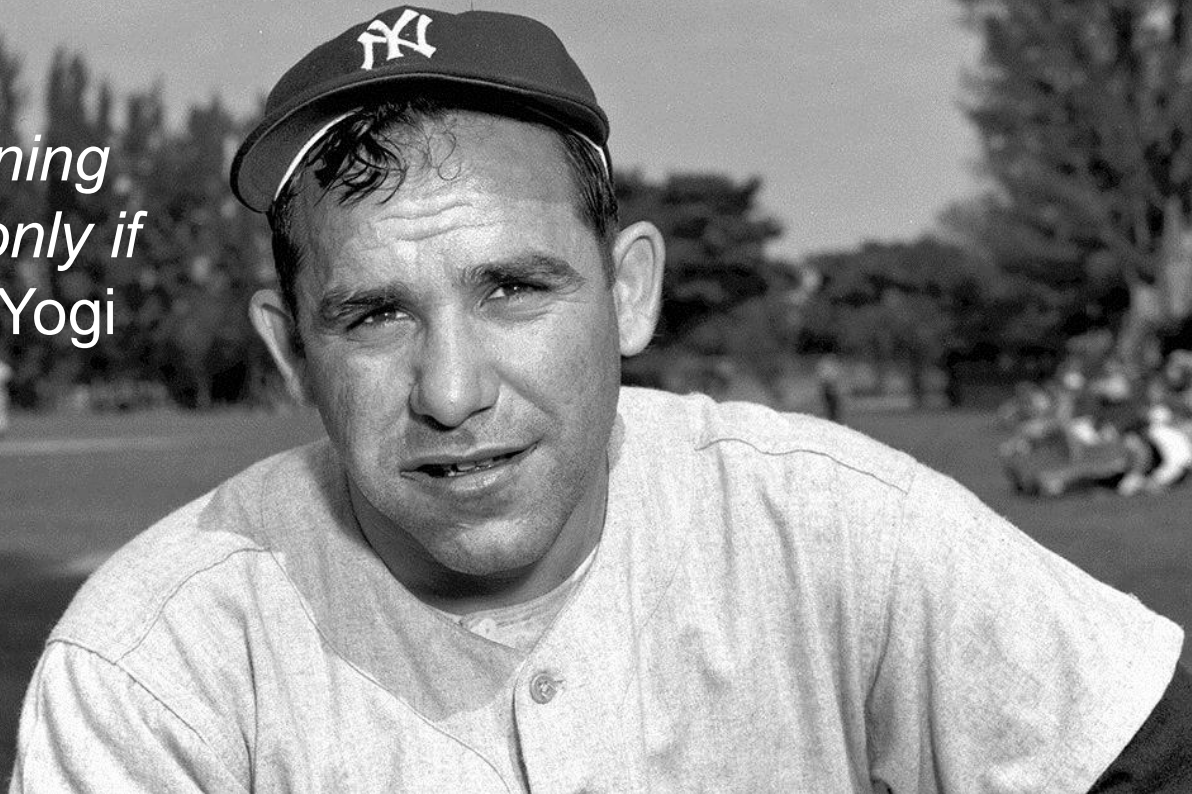
# Warm-up activity: one recent learning

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Share **one thing you have learned** recently. This could be from your work, travels, or life that got you thinking.

*“Life is a learning  
experience, only if  
you learn.” – Yogi  
Berra*



“Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.” – Abigail Adams

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“A commitment to **learning requires time, effort, and resources**. That is, to support ongoing learning, whether it is in an organization, in long-term partnerships, or in learning communities, people need time to come together, with a **clear purpose** for learning, with **adequate planning** and preparation, and with **skilled facilitators**”.\*

# The fields of strategy and evaluation have borrowed a lot from the military

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“The contemporary word *strategy* derives from the ancient Greek word *strategos*, which meant **to think like a general**. The term originated, then, as a reference to military strategy, but in ancient Greece military leaders were often also territorial governors. *Stratego*i, then, were politicians as well as generals.”

– Michael Quinn Patton and Patti Patrizi, 2010,  
Evaluating Strategy

# Why build a culture of learning?

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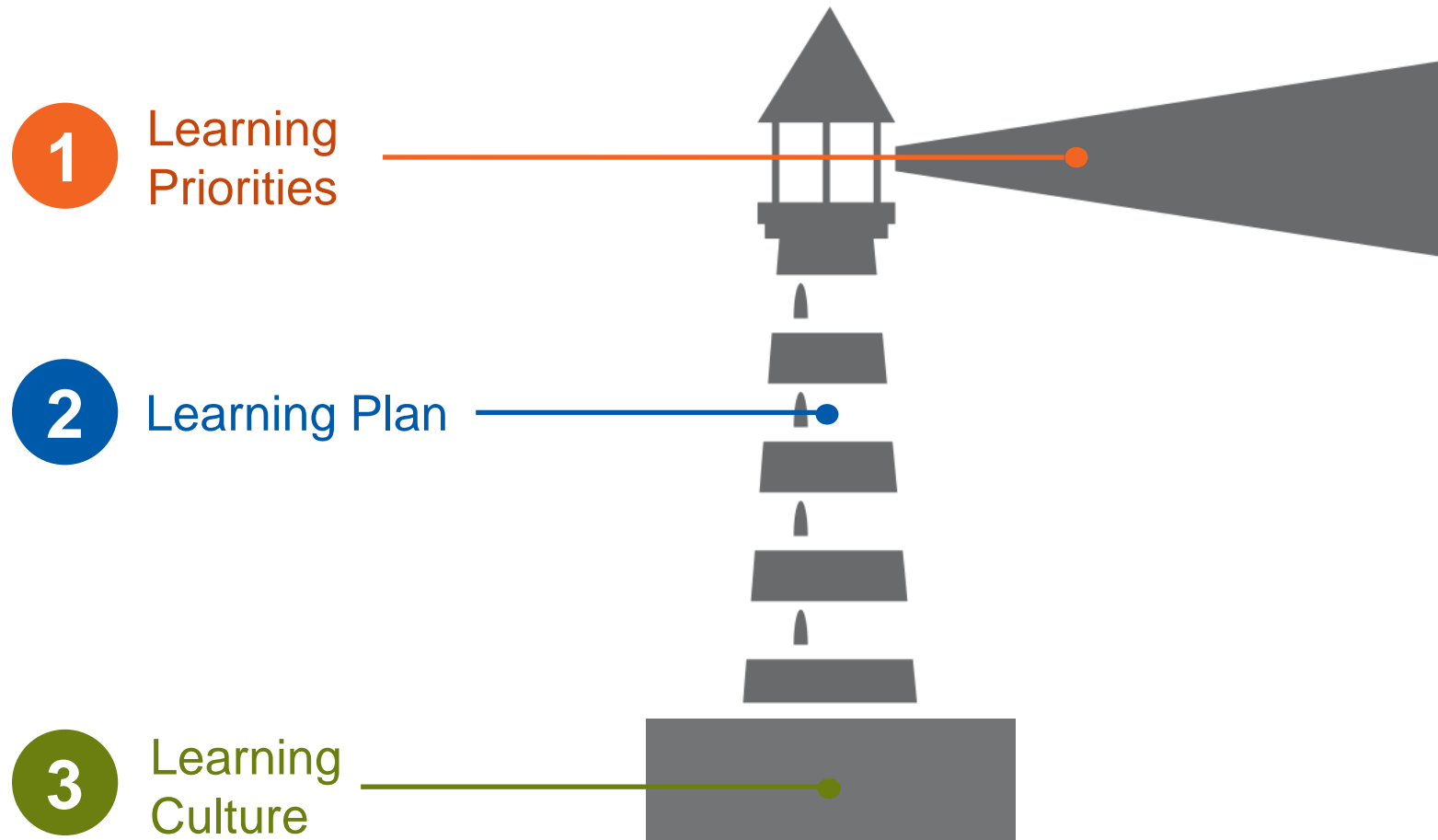
Learning and adapting in complex contexts means using data and experiences to test assumptions and understandings, to co-construct meaning among stakeholders, and to generate possibilities and future actions.

Learning requires space and time for reflection and dialogue, and, ultimately, learning processes and activities need to be embedded in the normal course of doing one's work.

***Learning helps you to continuously improve***

# How do you learn together? Three elements of continuous learning

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Graph created by Isabel Martinez from the Noun Project

# 1. Learning priorities

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What do you want to know about? What are your questions?

Three possible categories of learning questions:

## Operations

*How are our partners working together? Who do we have at the table?*

## Progress

*What progress have we made in our efforts? What is working well? Where are we falling behind?*

## Changes in context affecting the effort

*Is funding for our issue increasing or decreasing in our city? To what extent, and how are funding flows changing?*



## 2. Learning plan

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Includes a set of processes and activities to engage partners in meaningful dialogue, data interpretation, and insight generation on the learning priorities.

### Considerations for Developing a Learning Plan

**A. Include opportunities for learning from formal and informal data collection activities**

**B. Have clear goals to facilitate learning and use appropriate methods or activities**

**C. Create intentional spaces for learning in current and new organizational structures**

### 3. Build a learning culture

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Structures, processes, and practices that support increased knowledge sharing, idea generation, and collaboration

#### **Essential Ingredients of a Strong Learning Culture**

**A. Establishing cultural norms that support openness, trust, and risk-taking**

**B. Gathering feedback and insights from community members**

**C. Fostering a culture of learning, experimentation, and transparency**

# Groups that have a strong learning culture:

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- Learn and recreate themselves.
- Set and focus on challenging new goals.
- Have a spirit of inquiry and action research capability.
- Be self-directed and reflective.
- Dialogue and think insightfully together about complex issues.
- Take innovative, coordinated action.
- Do things that they were never able to do before.
- Invent together and experiment with their inventions.
- Evaluate progress on issues and effectiveness of ideas.
- Re-perceive their organization, its programs, personnel and their groups, and their Interrelationships.
- Extend their capacity to create and be part of a major generative process in an organization's operations and processes, productivity and effectiveness, and life and activities.

# To build a space that fosters learning, you might:

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**Provide spaces for participants to get to know each other**

*Example*

*Schedule a social hour after meetings to allow partners to learn more about each other*



**Ensure confidentiality during meetings**

*Example*

*Start your meetings reminding everyone that what is discussed in the meeting will only be shared externally if everyone approves*



**Develop a set of agreements for dialogue**

*Example*

*Co-develop a set of agreements for engagement: assume good intent, respect others opinions, disagree respectfully*

# To gather feedback from your community:

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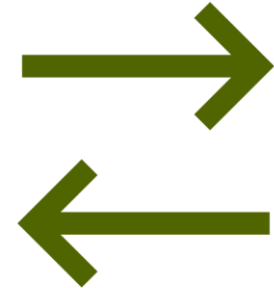
## Be intentional

*Allocate appropriate resources (time and \$\$) to regularly gather feedback and insights from community members*



## Accommodate community members' needs

*Provide the resources required for community members to be at the table (e.g., provide child care, translation, and transportation if needed)*



## Make it a two-way conversation

*Develop bi-directional feedback loops and opportunities for sharing with and learning from the community*

# To foster a culture of learning:

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**Demonstrate a genuine commitment to learning**

## *Example*

*Asking questions, using data to make decisions, encouraging others to explore assumptions*



**Embrace failure**

## *Example*

*Share examples of moments when things didn't go as planned, and what was learned from that experience*



**Provide resources**

## *Example*

*Allocate sufficient financial, personnel, and capacity-building resources to support continuous learning*

# When you are together: dialogue, not debate!

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## Debate

Assuming that there is a right answer, and you have it

Combative; participants attempt to prove the other side wrong

It's about winning

Listening to find flaws and make counter-arguments

Defending assumptions as truth

Critiquing the other side's position

Defending one's own views against those of others

Searching for flaws and weaknesses in others' positions

Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position

## Dialogue

Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer, and that together they can craft a new solution

Collaborative; participants work together toward common understanding

It's about exploring common ground

Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement

Revealing assumptions for re-evaluation

Re-examining all positions

Admitting that others' thinking can improve on one's own

Searching for strengths and value in others' positions

Discovering new options, not seeking closure

# Socratic questions are one way to inspire dialogue and critical thinking

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- Questions of clarification (*What do you mean? Can you explain?*)
- Questions that probe assumptions (*How you're coming to that conclusion?*)
- Questions that probe reasons and evidence (*What evidence supports that?*)
- Questions of viewpoint and perspectives (*What makes you say that?*)
- Questions that probe implications and consequences (*What will that mean for us?*)
- Questions about questions (*Why is that an important question?*)



# Discussion

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## Reflection Questions

1. What have been challenges you've experienced in trying to engage in learning?
2. What might you try to encourage learning within your organization?  
With your partners?



## Coming Up: Collective Impact Office Hours with Robert Albright and Jennifer Juster of the Collective Impact Forum

### **Collective Impact Office Hours with Robert Albright and Jennifer Juster**

- **Thursday, Nov. 21: 4-5pm EST**
- **Thursday, Dec. 19: 4-5pm EST**
- **Tuesday, Jan. 21: 4-5pm EST**

***Bring your collective impact questions  
to these informal office hours***