Systemic Approaches and Community Change

Miles McNall
Associate Director, Community Evaluation and Research Collaborative
University Outreach and Engagement
Mess

• A system or complex and dynamically interacting web of ill-defined or wicked problems... (Alpaslan & Mittroff, 2011, p. 169).

• Hard to solve
Pre-term Birth and Hypertension

Adapted from Miller, 2008
CLIMATE CHANGE
LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT
POVERTY
SCHOOL DROPOUT
MUNICIPAL BANKRUPTCY
GUN VIOLENCE
RACISM
HEALTH CARE
MUNICIPAL BANKRUPTCY
• How can universities best partner with communities to effectively manage messy situations?
Beyond the *Isolated Impact Approach*†

- Addresses a single problem
- Limited attention to context
- Modest short-term effects within a narrow range of outcomes for targeted population
- Dynamics of system are unchanged
- Lack of coordination among efforts

†Kania & Kramer, 2011
Systemic Engagement

- Systemic engagement involves universities as partners in systemic approaches to community and systems change.
Systemic Approaches to Community Change

• Use **systems thinking**

• Tackle **whole systems of problems**

• Recognize **complexity**

• Support **transdisciplinarity**
Systemic Approaches to Community Change

• Systemic Action Research
• ABLe Change Framework
• Collective Impact
• Strategic Doing
## Five Conditions for Collective Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Agenda</td>
<td>Common understanding of problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared vision for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Measurement</td>
<td>Data are collected and results are measured continuously across all participants to ensure alignment and accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutually Reinforcing Activities</td>
<td>Activities are differentiated, but coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Communication</td>
<td>Consistent and open communication across players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbone Support</td>
<td>A separate organization with staff and a specific set of skills serves as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinates the activities of partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other Promising Features of the Models

• **Focus on implementation factors (ABLe Change):**
  - Readiness, capacity, diffusion, sustainability

• New approach to evaluation: “next generation”
Next Generation Evaluation

• Shared responsibility for data collection and learning across multiple organizations

• Collection and use of data as part of ongoing practice

• Shorter cycles, more real-time feedback using alternative formats

Gopalakrishnan, Preskill, & Lu (2013)
Recap: Most Promising Features of Models

• Systems thinking
• A coordinated, multi-stranded approach to community change
• A more nimble, flexible approach to evaluating and learning
• A focus on implementation factors
Role of Universities in SE

- Models don’t specify roles for universities
- *How can universities become effective partners in systemic approaches to community change?*
What Can You Do?

• Help us build, refine, and use systemic engagement in key areas.

• Join our Systemic Engagement Design Team
  – Sign-up sheet
Resources

• **ABLe Change** (Foster-Fishman & Watson)
  http://systemexchange.msu.edu/

• **Collective Impact** (Kania & Kramer)
  http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

• **Systemic Action Research** (Burns)

• **Strategic Doing**
  http://www.pcrd.purdue.edu/What_We_Do/SD/default.aspx
  http://www.edmorrison.com/category/strategic-doing/
  Bob Brown provides training in Strategic Doing (brownr23@msu.edu)