

Cultivating Influential Champions

The presence of influential champions or catalysts, who command the respect necessary to bring together cross-sector leaders and beneficiaries, is a critical precondition for using a collective impact approach. As stated in *Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work*:

“The most critical [precondition] by far is an influential champion (or small group of champions) who commands the respect necessary to bring CEO-level cross-sector leaders together and keep their active engagement over time. We have consistently seen the importance of dynamic leadership in catalyzing and sustaining collective impact efforts. It requires a very special type of leader, however, one who is passionately focused on solving a problem but willing to let the participants figure out the answers for themselves, rather than promoting his or her particular point of view.”

Across collective impact initiatives, influential champions can emerge from a broad range of organizations. As described in *Channeling Change*:

In the case of GAIN, four individuals with deep experience in the development field—Bill Foege, the former director of the US Centers for Disease Control who is largely credited with eradicating small pox, Kul Gautam, a senior official at UNICEF, Duff Gillespie, head of the Office of Population and Nutrition at US Agency for International Development (USAID), and Sally Stansfield, one of the original directors at The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—came together to look at large scale opportunities to address malnutrition in populations at risk in the developing world. Together they galvanized the 2002 UN General Assembly special session that led to the creation of GAIN and to the subsequent engagement of hundreds of government, corporate, and nonprofit participants.

Other collective impact initiatives have been catalyzed by champions from a range of sectors, including leaders of local nonprofits, program officers from private foundations and community foundations, influential local leaders with a background in city government, leaders from the business sector, elected officials, and leaders from public agencies, school districts or postsecondary institutions.

While these champions come from a range of sectors, they share similar qualities including:

- The ability to **raise the profile** of the issue that the initiative will address and galvanize action
- **Credibility** with people from organizations that the initiative aspires to convene
- The ability to **persuade other leaders** to join the effort, and to keep them there
- The **passion for improving outcomes** related to the specific social or environmental issue
- Focused on solving problem but allows participants to **figure out answers for themselves**

The case studies included on the Collective Impact Forum's website provide additional examples of how initiatives were launched, including the role of influential champions in the process. Learn more at www.collectiveimpactforum.org