

Collective Impact Case Study: Memphis Fast Forward



Discovering better ways
to solve social problems

This case study accompanies a [video interview with Blair Taylor](#), the backbone leader of Memphis Fast Forward.

Summary

Launched by a coalition of business and government leaders, Memphis Fast Forward (MFF) is a multi-layered collective impact initiative designed to increase economic prosperity and quality of life in Greater Memphis, Tenn.

Problem

The region of Greater Memphis faced significant challenges in workforce quality, economic competitiveness, crime, and education. By 2005:

- Regional crime rates were among the five worst of all US cities, with violent crime rates in Memphis up to 3.9 times higher than the national average.
- The graduation rate in Memphis was only 66%, below both the statewide rate of 78% and state goal of 90%.
- Government expenditure growth was exceeding revenue growth.

Key stakeholders across the region were aware of these problems, but there was no aligned strategy to resolve them.

Collective Impact Beginnings

Two mayors from the Greater Memphis area approached Memphis Tomorrow, an existing association of chief executive officers of Memphis' largest businesses, to discuss their concern about the lack of a strategic plan for addressing the community's issues.

Together, the mayors and business leaders decided to use what ultimately became a collective impact approach to solve the city's critical challenges. Memphis Tomorrow's leader began bringing a range of cross-sectoral community partners to the table and building the infrastructure of what is now Memphis Fast Forward.

Key Facts

Initiative / backbone name: Memphis Fast Forward / Memphis Tomorrow

Year initiative formed: 2005

Mission: Accelerate economic growth and improve the quality of life of the Memphis region

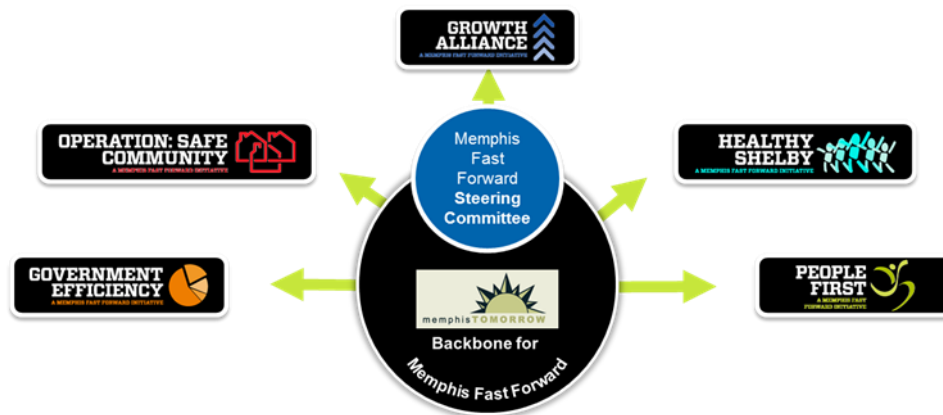
Geography: Greater Memphis, TN

Impact area(s): Education and Youth, Community Development, Health, Employment / Workforce Development, Economic Development

Structure

Memphis Tomorrow serves as the backbone for the broad collective impact effort, Memphis Fast Forward. In turn, Memphis Fast Forward provides an organizing structure and support for five separate issue-specific collective impact initiatives: Operation Safe Community (crime), PeopleFirst (education), Growth Alliance (the economy), Government Fiscal Strength (the government), and Healthy Shelby (health and wellness). Memphis Fast Forward is overseen by a 20-person steering committee consisting of key elected and business leaders. This steering committee monitors data, makes decisions, endorses and advocates the initiative's work, and provides some funding for initiative partners. The below image illustrates the organizational structure of Memphis Fast Forward:

Organizational Structure of Memphis Fast Forward



Each issue-specific initiative has a distinct backbone organization, strategic plan, scorecard, program chair, and leadership team. Each initiative also has a team of partners (government agencies, businesses, and non-profits) that collaborate to implement the initiative's plan, and the leader of each initiative sits on the steering committee for Memphis Fast Forward. This layered structure gives the broad effort a decentralized management model, but ensures connections for shared impact and learning.

Results

Memphis Fast Forward has achieved impressive early results across all initiatives:

- **PeopleFirst** supported significant public school reform efforts which have resulted in a 50% increase in the number of students in pre-k, changes to the teacher evaluation system to include

student outcomes data, and an expanded number of high-potential teacher candidates, (one year saw an increase from 21 to 1,800).¹

- **Growth Alliance** is the successor initiative to MemphisED (a regional economic development plan), launched as the global economic recession began to cripple cities across the US. Despite this additional challenge, the initiative was able to spur the creation of more than 17,000 new jobs. Additionally, they were able to generate new capital investments of \$4.2 billion.²
- **Operation Safe Community** reduced major violent crimes and property crimes by more than 23% each in the first five years after the initiative launched. Additionally, bank, business, and car robberies decreased over 60%, and a family safety center was established for victims of domestic abuse.³
- **Government Fiscal Strength** worked with three mayors to improve government impact and efficiency. Their joint activities saved the city more than \$75 million.⁴
- **Healthy Shelby** was formed in 2012 and has been focused on building infrastructure to improve health, care, and the cost of care in the community. To date the initiative has a backbone, common agenda, and core group of committed funders.⁵

Five Conditions of Collective Impact

Common Agenda

Memphis Fast Forward's common agenda focuses on "creating good jobs, a better-educated workforce, a safer community, a healthier citizenry, and a fiscally strong and efficient government in Greater Memphis."⁶

Each initiative also has a common agenda developed by a range of stakeholders and multipronged strategy for achieving those goals.

Shared Measurement

Each initiative of Memphis Fast Forward has separate goals and metrics that are tracked, monitored, and shared with the community through public reports. Progress towards each initiative's goals is captured in

¹ Memphis Fast Forward: The Power of Collective Impact Results from 2007-2011. Accessed May, 2013. http://memphisfastforward.com/assets/1705/mff_report_2007-2011_final.pdf

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴ Memphis Fast Forward: The Power of Collective Impact Results from 2007-2011. Accessed May, 2013. http://memphisfastforward.com/assets/1705/mff_report_2007-2011_final.pdf

⁵"Healthy Shelby," Memphis Fast Forward. Accessed May, 2013. <http://memphisfastforward.com/healthshelby>

⁶"About Us," Memphis Fast Forward. Accessed May, 2013. <http://memphisfastforward.com/overview>

an individual dashboard, and the data is then aggregated into a publicly available “macro-dashboard” that tracks the overall progress of Memphis Fast Forward.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

Each of the five initiatives of Memphis Fast Forward ties back to the vision articulated in the overall common agenda and links with the work of the other initiatives. For example, economic development relies on a well-educated workforce of graduating students, who also require a vibrant economy to provide employment.

Activities within initiatives are mutually reinforcing of that initiative’s goals as well as of the broader effort.

Continuous Communication

Continuous communication happens both within and between initiatives. Within initiatives, regular meetings are complemented by initiative-specific websites that communicate progress and clearly lay out strategies, dashboards, and success stories.

Mimicking the broader organizational structure, the website of each initiative is connected through Memphis Fast Forward’s website. Additionally, the leaders from the five initiatives meet monthly to discuss progress, share common challenges, develop strategies, and learn from one another’s successes and mistakes.

Backbone Support

Memphis Tomorrow, registered as a 501(c)(3) S30 economic development organization, serves as the administrative infrastructure for Memphis Fast Forward, providing staff and support for the broad collective impact effort. In the early days of Memphis Fast Forward, much of Memphis Tomorrow’s role was focused on identifying backbones for each of the initiatives. That role evolved into playing coordinator and primary funder for the initiatives’ backbones and championing the design of shared measures. Additionally, Memphis Tomorrow has coordinated pooled funding efforts for specific programs and strategies of the five initiatives, relying on board involvement to raise the funds. In one such effort, \$35 million was raised over a five-year period. Memphis Tomorrow has two staff dedicated to supporting both Memphis Fast Forward and Memphis Tomorrow’s work beyond the collective impact initiative.

As mentioned above, each initiative also has its own backbone organization. Each of the initiative backbone organizations has its own name, website, two to three staff dedicated to the initiative, and a public-private leadership team. Of the initiative backbones, four were existing organizations, and one new organization was formed (to support PeopleFirst). Additionally, four are registered as 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, and the Government Fiscal Strength Backbone is led by the mayors of the Greater Memphis area. The four non-profit backbone efforts each have an average annual administrative budget of approximately \$300,000. Programs and strategies of each initiative are funded by an array of public and private sector sources.

Lessons Learned

Gain and maintain political support: According to Blair Taylor, President of Memphis Tomorrow, “having sustained mayoral leadership in Memphis Fast Forward was essential.” It was through a meeting with the mayors that the collective impact effort was incubated, and their support proved critical long after incubation. “We depend on them to [mobilize] resources, to support advocacy work, to build political will, and to use their pulpits to say this work and these priorities are important.” Regular conversations and communication of impact, and genuine alignment around the Memphis Fast Forward priorities, has enabled Memphis Fast Forward to sustain political support despite shifting political tides.

Celebrate successes: Memphis Fast Forward realized that celebrating successes and sharing credit were critical motivating factors to keep partners engaged and active. Blair Taylor noted, “Really make time to celebrate the progress of an activity. Do it loudly, and give people the credit they deserve.” Memphis Fast Forward’s newsletter is one space where they do this exceptionally well. The newsletter celebrates successes with data and discusses the contributions of deserving stakeholders across the initiative. Memphis Fast Forward has also been very proactive about communicating and celebrating results through their local media, as well as through regular community convenings that have ranged in size from 150 to 800 people.

Seize opportunities as they emerge: Adapting their work to changes in context has allowed Memphis Fast Forward and its partners to take advantage of new opportunities. For example, in 2012, the backbone leader of PeopleFirst discovered that qualifications for a state scholarship had changed, opening the scholarship to low-income partial-completers of college, but there were a number of challenges that would make it difficult for prospective students to utilize this funding. How would the coalition recruit eligible partial-completers? Could the coalition fund the first hours of college credit to move low-income adults who had not started college into partial-completer status? At this point in its evolution, Memphis Fast Forward had developed a habit of systematically looking across partners for existing resources that could be leveraged to overcome challenges. They surveyed existing partners, including public universities, state government, businesses, and local nonprofits, and discovered existing outreach mechanisms and funding that could be used to recruit partial-completers and to fund the first credit hours for eligible low-income adults who had not yet started college. Memphis Fast Forward attributes their ability to seize this resource to the existing collective impact structure, culture, and intentionality around embracing emergent opportunities.

Contact

For questions or comments on this report,
please contact:

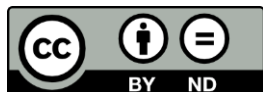
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