



SUSTAINING COLLECTIVE IMPACT:

Recommendations for the Orange County
Home Preservation Coalition

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The Community Practice Lab



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Executive Summary

Safe, high-quality, and accessible housing is foundational to the quality of life of homeowners.¹ Yet, in Orange County, NC, there is a significant need to address housing defects that cause owner-occupied homes to remain unsafe, inaccessible, or substandard. Recent data show that over 170 low-income homeowners in Orange County, NC are currently seeking assistance for critical home repair and accessibility modifications on their homes.²

The Orange County Home Preservation Coalition (OCHPC), “a collaborative of organizations that provide home repairs and modifications to Orange County residents” has proven to be a creative and collaborative approach that can effectively address the needs of low-income homeowners with repair needs in Orange County, NC.³ Findings from a recent two-year funded pilot of the OCHPC led by the Triangle J Council of Governments, Rebuilding Together of the Triangle, and the North Carolina Justice Center found that the coalition approach in the home repair system effectively decreased organizational inefficiencies caused by isolation and removed barriers for homeowners seeking assistance.⁴

Pilot funding for designing and administering the OCHPC ended in 2021, placing the OCHPC at a crossroads for sustaining impact. With decreased capacity for implementing the coalition approach, the collaborative’s ability to serve current needs and its potential to make long-term systemic change is in jeopardy.

Fortunately, a robust field of research on approaches for building and sustaining coalitions and inter-organizational partnerships exists that can guide future directions of the OCHPC. In particular, the Collective Impact model developed by John Kania & Mark Kramer in 2011 has emerged as a simple yet effective approach to guide coalitions.⁵ The Collective Impact model can provide partners and invested stakeholders of the OCHPC with a structure, best practices and driving questions to help ensure this collaborative approach continues to make a collective impact in the affordable home repair system in Orange County, NC.

¹ Coleman, et al, 2016

² Orange County Home Preservation Coalition data obtained via AirTable on April 15, 2022

³ Orange County, NC, 2022

⁴ Cooper et al., 2021

⁵ Kania and Kramer, 2011



Isolated Impact in Affordable Home Repair

A 2018 Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia Report found that it would cost nearly \$130 billion to repair all housing deficiencies nationwide. This report found that low-income households and households of color represent a disproportionate amount of this need.⁶ Inadequate housing conditions are associated with numerous health and safety concerns, including asthma, lead poisoning, and decreased independence among residents.⁷ Access to affordable home repair is critical to sustaining safe, quality, and accessible housing.

Numerous programs offered by public and non-profit agencies provide free or low-cost services to low-income homeowners seeking assistance. These various program work to address critical home repair, accessibility, energy efficiency, and other housing defects. Organizations that provide home repairs often receive financial support from a mix of federal, state, and local funding sources, each with varying eligibility criteria, structures (such as loans, grants, and cost-sharing products), and repair capacities. Repair organizations compete with one another for these funding sources and when receiving funds deliver and administer programs separately from one another. Agencies then spend significant administrative time matching homeowners with eligible funding, complying with funding requirements and deadlines, and completing necessary repairs within funder deadlines.⁸

The isolated and competitive approach to home repair has led to insufficient coordination between organizations, delayed or inefficient service delivery, and a complicated landscape of programs that is difficult for homeowners seeking services to navigate. Paradoxically, this disjointed system has often resulted in long waitlists for homeowners seeking assistance and unspent funding for organizations providing repairs due to limited capacity to match applicants with eligible funding sources. These systemic challenges prevent low-income homeowners with housing deficiencies from obtaining critical services.⁹

Systemic challenges and barriers caused by isolated approaches are not unique to the affordable home repair field in Orange County, NC. Decades of deindustrialization, deregulation, and decreased government spending has created a fragmented, competition-based social service system in education, health, community development, and numerous other sectors.¹⁰ Sustained decreased public funding has led to the cutting of essential programs and services, increased strain on existing resources, and increased the need for competition among stakeholders trying to address community needs. Under this system, public, private, and non-profit organizations have long been incentivized to seek individual achievement rather than coordinate with one another to address complex social issues.¹¹

⁶ Divringi et al., 2019

⁷ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2022

⁸ Cooper et al. 2021

⁹ Cooper et al. 2021

¹⁰ Taylor and Luter, 2013; Kania, and Kramer, 2011

¹¹ Christens and Inzeo, 2015; Weaver, 2016



About the Orange County Home Preservation Coalition

In response to these systemic challenges, a committed collaborative of organizations that provide home repairs and modifications to Orange County residents established the Orange County Home Preservation Coalition. In 2017, the OCHPC formed with the primary goal to “increase communication and collaboration among organizations to decrease burden on clients and service seekers, many of whom are older adults.”¹² The OCHPC consists of several non-profit, public, and higher education partners including:

- **Non-profit** – Rebuilding Together of the Triangle (RTT), Habitat for Humanity of Orange County, NC (Habitat), Marian Cheek Jackson Center for Saving and Making History (Jackson Center), Central Piedmont Community Action Inc., Hope Renovations, Orange Water and Sewage Authority, and the North Carolina Justice Center.
- **Government** – Triangle J Council of Governments, Town of Carrboro, Town of Chapel Hill, Town of Hillsborough, Orange County Department on Aging, and Orange County Housing and Community Development.
- **University** – UNC Chapel Hill’s Partnerships in Aging Program and UNC CH’s Community Practice Lab.

Organizations in the Orange County Home Preservation Coalition provide a breadth of home repair and modifications to low-income homeowners seeking to address housing defects. Repairs range from minor home safety improvements (such as installing grab bars and railings) to extensive critical repairs (including roof replacements, plumbing and electrical) and accessibility modifications (such as ramps or accessible bathroom renovations.)

The OCHPC developed as a product of the 2017-2022 Orange County Master Aging Plan process led by the Orange County Department on Aging. Through a collaborative and community-engaged process, the five-year Master Aging Plan identified key priority areas to improve quality of life for Orange County’s growing older adult population.¹³ Several organizations providing home repairs to older adults, including RTT, Habitat, and the Jackson Center participated in the planning process. In these meetings, partners and community residents identified several inefficiencies and gaps in services caused by the siloed approach to home repair service delivery in the county. Findings from the Master Aging Process helped diagnose these needs and create a sense of urgency for change among housing partners.¹⁴

In 2019, the Triangle J Council of Governments (TJCOG), RTT, and the North Carolina Justice Center received a \$249,000 capacity building grant from the Southeastern Energy Efficiency Alliance, Inc (SEEA) to launch a two-year pilot of a coalition approach in home repair in Orange County (along with neighboring Chatham County.) These funds compensated coalition stakeholders for participation in forming and developing the collaborative. The grant also established collaborative tools for inter-

¹² Orange County, NC, 2022

¹³ Orange County Master Aging Plan, 2017

¹⁴ Cooper et al., 2021



organizational home repair and energy efficiency systems. These tools included a unified intake process, shared database, centralized home assessment, and collaborative case management.¹⁵

Initial findings detailed in the Partners in Home Preservation Program Report, a comprehensive report on the pilot program, indicate improved communication and collaboration among organizations, increased access to repair services for Orange County residents, and the first-time development of a county-wide data collection effort to further understand repair needs and assess joint progress.¹⁶ The initial investment of the SEEA-funded pilot program produced significant positive outcomes for home repair providers, homeowners seeking assistance, and funders. However, now that the pilot program has concluded, funding for administering and delivering the coalition model as well as supporting partner participation has ended. Without sufficient investment going towards building coalition infrastructure, including the support team (comprising a coalition coordinator and home assessment manager) and collaborative tools (including a shared information system), progress towards long-term systemic change is at risk.

Collaborative Approaches for Building and Sustaining Coalition

At this pivotal time for the Orange County Preservation Coalition, invested partners and stakeholders can employ best practices from a growing field of research on approaches for coalition-building and inter-organizational “partnershiping”. Competition-based, isolated approaches have proven ineffective at addressing complex social issues and creating lasting impacts.¹⁷ In response, stakeholders, including government agencies, academic researchers, foundations, and nonprofit organizations have sought out alternative models to challenge this status quo. In this search for change, a robust field of research on collaborative approaches to social change has formed. In a comprehensive review of this literature, Flood et al. (2015) identified several successful models for collaborations and coalition building, including

- Butterfoss and Kegler’s (2009) Community Coalition Action Theory,
- Bandura’s (2004) Theory of Collective Efficacy,
- Lasker, Weiss, and Miller’s (2001) Partnership Synergy; and
- Wolff’s (2010) Power of Collaborative Solutions.
- Kania and Kramer’s (2011) Collective Impact model¹⁸

There are benefits and drawbacks to employing each of these approaches. In this robust field, the Collective Impact model developed by Kramer and Kramer (2011) has gained prominence since its creation just over a decade ago. The model has been widely adopted by initiatives seeking multi-sector social change in many diverse settings and scales across the United States and the world.¹⁹ For these reasons, Collective Impact is recommended as a framework for the OCHPC.

¹⁵ Cooper et al., 2021

¹⁶ Kania & Kramer, 2011; Flood et al., 2015; Walzer et al., 2016

¹⁷ Flood et al., 2015

¹⁸ Kania, & Kramer, 2011; Walzer, Weaver, & McGuire, 2016; Flood et al., 2015

¹⁹ Kania, & Kramer, 2011, 1

Recommendation: Collective Impact Model

Collective Impact is a framework developed to create systems-level social change through multi-sector collaboration. Kania and Kramer (2011) initially define their approach as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.”²⁰ Since the model was developed in 2011, the model has been utilized across the United States and world in varying contexts and scale. Central to this framework are five conditions and three phases that provide a structured yet adaptable approach for addressing complex social issues through collaboration.²¹ The five conditions critical for collective impact include:

Five Conditions of Collective Impact

1. **Common Agenda** – Participants have a shared understanding of the social problem and a mutually-agreed approach to addressing it.
2. **Shared Measurement** – Organizations collaboratively collect data and measure progress through a commonly agreed upon set of indicators.
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities** – Participants support a specific set of coordinated activities that support the overall plan for change.
4. **Continuous Communication** – Participants maintain frequent and ongoing communication to build and maintain relationships and trust.
5. **Backbone Support Organization** – An independent organization with staff and specific resources is dedicated to support the entire initiative.

Adapted from Hanleybrown et al., 2012

Since its inception in 2011, the creators of the Collective Impact model have followed up with several adaptations and modifications to the original framework.²² Most recently, in their article, *Centering Equity in Collective Impact*, Kania et. al. (2021) incorporate concerns around racial equity and community participation. In this response, the authors revise their original definitions to redefine collective impact as a “network of community members, organizations, and institutions that advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems-level change.”²³ The authors revise the original framework by naming “centering equity” as a precondition and propose five equity-centric strategies for collective impact. These five strategies include:

- 1) grounding the work in data and context
- 2) focusing on systems change
- 3) shifting power within the collaborative,
- 4) listening to and acting with the community, and

²⁰ Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011

²¹ Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Hanleybrown et al., 2014; Kania et al., 2021; Kania & Kramer, 2011, 2015

²² Kania et al., 2021

²³ Kania et al., 2021

5) building equity leadership and accountability.²⁴

We believe these strategies are integral to a coalition process that centers equity and addresses historical injustices among both the housing and home repair sectors. Therefore, we recommend continually reflecting on and reinforcing them in practice. Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) also outline essential pre-conditions and three distinct phases initiatives seeking collective impact can utilize to start, coordinate, and structure their approach to ensure positive and sustainable results.²⁵ The authors assert that three primary prerequisites are needed to successfully launch a collective impact initiative; these include having one or more influential champions that can garner momentum with diverse groups of stakeholders, adequate financial resources to implement the initiative, and a sense of urgency for change. Once these core ingredients have been identified, the authors found that there are three phases successful initiatives typically follow to achieve and sustain collective impact. These phases include:

- 1) **Initiate Action:** This phase begins with gaining an understanding of the primary stakeholders and existing work being done to address the issue. Initial data is utilized to establish baselines and create a justification for collaboration. Community involvement further helps identify priorities and assess needs. Key stakeholders and “champions” for collaboration begin to convene. An initial cross-sector group and governing structure is formed to support the initiative.
- 2) **Organize for Impact:** At this phase stakeholders collaboratively establish common goals and strategies for change. Work is done to begin aligning the member organizations towards these common goals and shared measures. The wider community continues to be engaged to build public will. Infrastructure to support the initiative, including backbone support and processes, is formed.
- 3) **Sustain Action and Impact:** During this phase, organizations coordinate action on key priorities, align their activities around shared goals, and instill sustainable processes. The community continues to be engaged and involved through advocacy efforts. A shared set of measures is systematically collected to continuously monitor progress and evaluate processes. The backbone support structure is continually refined to best support the initiative.

Amble research shows that central to sustaining collective impact is a strong backbone support organization.²⁶ The model initially developed by Kania & Kramer suggested that backbone support include a separate organization with designated staff and resources to aid the initiative in sustaining impact.

The University of Kansas’s Community Tool Box identifies six main functions that backbone organizations provide collective impact initiatives. Backbone teams:

- 1) guide vision and strategy
- 2) support aligned activities
- 3) establish shared measurement practices
- 4) build public will
- 5) advance policy, and
- 6) mobilize resources.²⁷

²⁴ Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011

²⁵ Turner al., 2012; Kania and Kramer, 2011, 2015; Splansky, 2022

²⁶ Splansky, 2022

²⁷ Hanleybrown et al., 2012



Upon review of past successful collective impact initiatives, Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) found that there are six primary types of backbone support including: funder-based, government-based, shared across multiple organizations, utilizing an existing nonprofit, or establishing an entirely new nonprofit.²⁸

Collective Impact offers an effective framework that can be used and adapted in many settings while providing coalition members with a structure and set of best practices to aid their pursuit of collective impact. The model’s five conditions and three phases work in diverse settings and contexts and ensure common ingredients for creating and sustaining systemic change. Finally, continued adaptations of the model further make Collective Impact stronger and an enduring and effective model for collaboration.

Collective Impact in Home Repair in Orange County, NC

The Orange County Home Preservation Coalition is at a crossroads. Applying the Collective Impact model to the OCHPC provides a helpful diagnostic tool for assessing current progress and identifying opportunities to sustain the impact of the initiative well beyond the two-year pilot program. Utilizing available OCHPC resources, including the 2021 Partners in Home Preservation Program Report, stakeholder meetings observed during Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, and additional available resources provide some ability to assess the five conditions and three phases of the OCHPC. From this initial review, five conditions of the OCHPC include:

Five Conditions of the Orange County Home Preservation Coalition	
<i>Common Agenda</i>	Common agenda is to “increase communication and collaboration among organizations to decrease burden on clients and service seekers, many of whom are older adults.”
<i>Shared Measurement</i>	Initial shared measurement reported in Partners in Home Preservation Program Report: January 2021.
<i>Mutually Reinforcing Activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified Screening Tool and Intake Process • Shared Database • Centralized and Comprehensive Home Assessment • Collaborative Case Management
<i>Continuous Communication</i>	Continuous communication through monthly partner meetings, periodic funding meetings, database coordination and information sharing.
<i>Backbone Support</i>	Initially supported by the OCDOA, moved into grant-based, and is now shared across multiple organizations.

²⁸ Orange County, NC, 2022



The essential pre-conditions needed to launch a collective impact initiative include influential champions, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency. Influential champions for the OCHPC have included several stakeholders, to name a few key organizations, the Orange County Department of Aging, Rebuilding Together, and Triangle J Council of Governments have all played significant roles to support and grow the OCHPC. Financial resources were initially limited with partners meeting primarily on a volunteer basis until the SEEA-funded pilot program in 2019. An urgency for change was created through the findings of the 2017-2022 Orange County Master Aging Plan. The OCHPC's three phases for collective include:

- 1) **Initiate Action:** Master Aging Plan (MAP) process builds understanding of primary stakeholders and repair work being done in Orange County. The Master Aging Plan process establishes baseline data and builds the case for change via engagement with community and stakeholder engagement. The Departments of Aging and Housing and Community Development, RTT, Habitat, and the Jackson Center act as an initial cross-sector group that regularly met to form the coalition.
- 2) **Organize for Impact:** SEEA-funded pilot program (2019-2021) provides a grant-based backbone support team and compensates participating agencies. Common agenda established to increase communication and collaboration among organizations. Initial shared metrics established and shared in 2021 Partners in Home Preservation Program Report. Participants maintain continuous communication through monthly partner meetings, periodic funding and special topic meetings, and shared case management.
- 3) **Sustain Action and Impact:** With conclusion of SEEA funding in 2021, backbone support structure shifts towards sharing responsibilities between organizations. RTT conducts assessments and supports case management, Department on Aging, UNC Community Practice Lab, and Habitat assist with database support and meeting facilitation. Shared metrics continuously tracked through a shared database. Partners communicate through monthly partner meetings, periodic special topic meetings, and database coordination.

Lessons Learned and Driving Questions

Applying the Collective Impact framework to the OCHPC adds structure to understand the coalition's past, current, and projected impact. The Master Aging Plan process helped facilitate the alignment of the essential preconditions for collective impact, including forming or deepening important partnerships and creating a sense of urgency for change. The SEEA-funded pilot program provided the OCHPC with important resources to further initiate action and organize for impact. As the funding ended in 2021, it is apparent that the strong foundation set through the two-year pilot program, including the development of collaborative tools and a core group of invested stakeholders, have helped ensure that the OCHPC is able to sustain action and impact for the time being.

Examining the OCHPC's five conditions sheds light on the initiative's strengths as well as helps identify driving questions for OCHPC members to examine further.

- 1) **Common Agenda:** Over the past six plus years, OCHPC partners have worked together with the primary goal of increasing communication and coordination



among repair organizations in order to decrease burden on clients seeking assistance. The OCHPC has experienced significant progress in working towards this goal, however, is seeing the emergence of potential goals around comprehensiveness of repairs, cost efficiencies, policy advocacy, and service referrals. Yet, addressing all these areas is likely outside the capacity of the coalition.

- a. **Recommendation:** Therefore, at this stage of the OCHPC, it may prove beneficial to work with stakeholders to narrow, prioritize, clarify, refine, or update this common agenda to confirm a mutually agreed upon vision for the coalition's work moving forward.
 - b. **Driving Question:** What is the primary pressing challenge facing the affordable home repair system in Orange County, NC and how can the coalition address it most efficiently?
- 2) **Shared Measurement:** The findings outlined in the Partners in Home Preservation Program Report detail initial outcomes of the coalition – most clearly around communication and collaboration among partners. The continued utilization of a shared database among OCHPC members provides a robust source of shared data collection. However, capacity for data collection and measurement remains limited.
- a. **Recommendation:** Therefore, further prioritizing and defining commonly-agreed measures for success – such as provision of services, comprehensiveness, cost effectiveness, homeowner outcomes, and/or climate impact, are needed to adequately monitor and evaluate coalition progress.
 - b. **Driving Question:** What are the set of indicators that effectively measure OCHPC impact?
- 3) **Mutually-Reinforcing Activities:** The four mutually-reinforcing activities, (including the unified screening tool, shared database, home assessment, and collaborative case management), established by the pilot program all remain in place. Although, the SEEA grant increased the capacity for these activities in some key areas. For example, during the pilot program, partners participated in bi-monthly meetings to define core processes, align activities, and share feedback. Partners also supported a community-engaged education and outreach effort, which is no longer active.
- a. **Recommendation:** Continue current reinforcing activities. Further discussion on the extent and scope of other activities that are needed for effective functioning of the OCHPC may provide helpful insight to guide future directions.
 - b. **Driving Question:** What set of activities lead to OCHPC success?
- 4) **Continuous Communication:** Since the OCHPC formed in 2017, participants have maintained communication through monthly meetings, periodic special topic meetings, and ongoing database coordination. Starting in early 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings moved entirely remote.
- a. **Recommendation:** Continue regular meetings. Confirmation is needed among member organizations on the frequency, structure, and delivery method of meetings and if other forms of communications are desired.
 - b. **Driving Question:** What are the best methods to communicate with OCHPC partners?



- 5) **Backbone Support Organizations:** At the conclusion of the SEEA-grant, the backbone support structure of the coalition transitioned from grant-based to being shared among multiple organizations. Noting this change is important for assessing capacity for impact. While a core team of invested partners continue to support the coalition without SEEA funding, this shift is significant.
- a. **Recommendation:** Discussion of the sustainability of the current backbone support structure is needed. It may prove beneficial to clearly outline current backbone roles and responsibilities each organization is supporting to ensure backbone processes are visible to all OCHPC partners and potential funding agencies. This will assist in identifying future directions for funding and structuring of a successful backbone model.
 - b. **Driving Question:** What type of backbone structure is needed to effectively support the coalition?

Conclusion

There is a significant need to address the home repair and accessibility needs of low-income homeowners in Orange County, NC. Past isolated approaches to addressing this complex issue have proven ineffective. The Orange County Home Preservation Coalition has emerged as an innovative and collaborative approach to address home repair needs by addressing systemic challenges that impede progress. Initial findings from a two-year pilot of the OCHPC indicate that this approach is working. However, with the pilot program ending in 2021, funding and capacity needs hamper the ability to sustain the coalition approach in Orange County, NC. Utilizing the Collective Impact model provides an insightful diagnostic tool for OCHPC partners and invested stakeholders to understand best practices and future directions for managing, sustaining, and growing the coalition. Initial application of this approach produces five area recommendations and driving questions that can further aid OCHPC members in ensuring long-term collective impact in home repair in Orange County, NC and beyond.



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