

Discover the
**Collective Impact
Framework**
Through a Self-Guided Walk!

Time:

- 30 - 60 minutes

Access:

- Ensure your access to a variety of plants, trees, animals, insects, and geographic features
- Try to observe natural spaces with minimal human influence

Suggested Areas Within Calgary:

- Fish Creek Park
- Weaselhead
- Nosehill Park
- Where else can you think of?

**Please take time for personal reflection,
try to make your own connections and
identify your own examples!**

**As you engage in this guided walk,
please approach this exploration as
something you are doing with the land
and the more-than-human communities
you encounter, and not as an
experience to simply be taken from the
land.**

**Consider how you can leave the land
better than you found it as you engage
in this walk.**

Common Agenda & Common Social Species

Developing a **Common Agenda** is key to partnership for the CIF. Partners must develop a shared understanding of the social issue they are working to address as well as a shared understanding of actions needed to address it. [1] It is easy for organizations to believe they are addressing the same issue, and that they share an understanding, but even slight variations between organizations' understanding of the problem, and of goals, can cause efforts to widely differ. It takes time to develop a common agenda by working through each organization's understanding, [2] but this is essential to resolve differences and to advance as a group. [3]

Since you have begun this walk, have you seen any animals or insects? What kinds? Some **Common Social Species** in Canada include geese, deer, and even ants! Ant species form highly organized societies in which certain ants fulfill specialized roles. [4] Ants, in performing their specific roles within the colony, contribute to the overall success of the colony and the survival of their nest.



1. John Kania and Mark Kramer, "Collective Impact," Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact; Fanny Salignac et al., "Understanding Collective Impact in Australia: A New Approach to Interorganizational Collaboration," Australian Journal of Management 43, no. 1 (2018): 91-110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0312896217705178>.
2. Salignac et al., "Understanding Collective Impact."
3. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact."
4. Thomas O. Richardson et al., "Ant Behavioral Maturation Is Mediated by a Stochastic Transition between Two Fundamental States," Current Biology 31, no. 10 (2021): 2253-60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2020.05.038>.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities & Species' Ecological Niche

Within the CIF, participating organizations engage in **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**. Each organization focuses its efforts on areas of individual strength, but actions are coordinated within an overarching plan towards overarching shared goals. [5] This, in part, is why diverse membership in the collective is essential. [6] Different organizations contribute different strengths, including access to different resources, information, knowledge, and connections. It is due to individual organizations focusing on their areas of specialization, within a larger system of collaboration, that a complex and multidimensional 'wicked problem' can be addressed. [7]

Just as different organizations have their unique areas of specialization, so do different species. These areas of "specialization" are called **Ecological Niches**. An ecological niche encompasses the specific roles an organism plays in an ecosystem, determining its interactions with other species, its surroundings, and general position within the energy flow of that system. [8]



5. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact"; Salignac et al., "Understanding Collective Impact."
6. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact."
7. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact."
8. Jessica O. Ellison, "Ecological Niches," EBSCO Research Starters, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/biology/ecological-niches>.

Continuous Communication & Mycelial Fungal Networks

For the development of trust between organizations, as well as continued progress towards shared goals, **Continuous Communication** is essential between all members of the collective. [9] Through long-term continuous communication, partner organizations can come to trust that decisions within the collective will be made fairly and that each organization's interests will be considered. [10] Continuous communication will also help establish a shared vocabulary. [11] Common vocabulary supports shared interorganizational learning, data, and results.

Look around you. How many pathways of communication can you see or hear? Likely birds, maybe other people, but have you considered what is under your feet? Underground, there is a vast **Mycorrhizal Fungal Network** with other fungi, trees, and plants. [12] This network facilitates the transfer of water and nutrients between trees, and has been demonstrated to support seedling survival and increased resilience of trees within the system. [13] Those tapped into the web benefit from the sharing of nutrients, much like organizations benefit from shared information!



- 9. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact"; Salignac et al., "Understanding Collective Impact."
- 10. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact."
- 11. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact"; Salignac et al., "Understanding Collective Impact."
- 12. Suzanne W. Simard, "Mycorrhizal Networks Facilitate Tree Communication, Learning, and Memory," in *Memory and Learning in Plants*, ed. Günther Witzany, František Baluška, and Monica Gagliano (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 191-213, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75596-0_10.
- 13. Simard, "Mycorrhizal Networks Facilitate Tree Communication."

Shared Measurement Systems & Seasonal Change

Shared Measurement Systems enable the collective to align efforts, learn from each other's failures and successes, and allow member organizations to hold each other accountable. [14] Continuous communication helps develop the shared measurements and ensure these measurements are used and not shelved. The mutually reinforcing activities essential for the collective's progress towards its goals rely on these shared measurement systems to not only align actions, but also facilitate the collective learning from the individual experiences of each partner organization. Shared measurements increase the entire collective's ability to identify issues in their efforts, develop solutions, and execute them. [15]



On this walk, have you noticed any examples of **Seasonal Change**? Seasonal changes, like changing daylight hours, temperature, and precipitation, can all be measured. As their measurements change, they cue responses from organisms within the ecosystem, like migration, reproduction, and growth. The function of the ecosystem relies on the cued responses of each of its members, similarly to the need of participating organizations within the CIF to utilize a shared measurement system.

- 14. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact"; Salignac et al., "Understanding Collective Impact."
- 15. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact."

Backbone Organization & Watersheds

The **Backbone Organization** is key to the success of CIF. [16] This organization must be run separately from other organizations in the collective and cannot be tacked onto existing responsibilities. [17] The backbone's responsibilities would be too burdensome for other partner organizations to take on while still carrying out their work. [18] The backbone helps to support communication, share data, complete administrative work, mediate conflict, provide protection, and generate motivation during times of stagnation. [19]

Have you seen any water on your walk? Whether the water you've seen is a puddle, a stream, a pond, or a river, as long as you are in Calgary, this water is a part of the Bow River **Watershed**. [20] A watershed is a giant system where all water drains into a common body of water, and watersheds are vital to the health of ecosystems within them. [21] Healthy watersheds filter water, improve its quality, they also create habitats and support species diversity. [22] A healthy watershed can be seen as a container, protecting and supporting the systems within.



- 16. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact."
- 17. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact."
- 18. Kania and Kramer, "Collective Impact"; Salignac et al., "Understanding Collective Impact."
- 19. Mark Cabaj and Liz Weaver, *Collective Impact 3.0: An Evolving Framework for Community Change* (Tamarack Institute, 2016), https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Events/CCI/2016_CCI_Toronto/CCI_Publications/Collective_Impact_3.0_FINAL_PDF.pdf; Tamarack Institute, "Chapter 7: Backbone Infrastructure," accessed March 15, 2026, <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/collective-impact-toolkit-backbone>.
- 20. Bow River Basin Council, "The Bow River Watershed," accessed June 12, 2026, <https://brbc.ab.ca/the-watershed>.
- 21. Aby Elwood, "Watersheds: The Planet's Circulatory System," Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea, January 31, 2024, <https://www.salishseacentre.org/blog/2024/1/30/watersheds-the-planets-circulatory-system>.
- 22. Elwood, "Watersheds."