



DECADE OF TRANSFORMATION:

From Design to Action: **Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0**

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Letter from Board Chairs

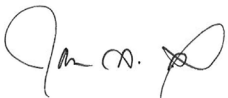
Since our inception in 2013, KConnect and its Network have brought together collaboration and innovation to reshape our community and redefine what is possible when cross-sector partners come together to pursue a common vision. We have built a strong infrastructure of people and organizations. We have developed respected and useful data systems that have grown a data-informed culture across Kent County. We've brought together people across differences to engage with rapport, trust, and credibility. United, our community has demonstrated a strong commitment to systemic change focused on bringing about equitable outcomes across our community.

We extend our deepest appreciation to every Network and community member who has shaped KConnect. Your dedication, support, and commitment to our vision have been the driving force behind our success. As we move forward into this new chapter, we invite you to keep engaging in our collaborative efforts. Complex systemic issues can only be solved via collective, systems-level methodologies. You are the lifeblood of Collective Impact in Kent County.

With gratitude,



Dr. Brandy Lovelady Mitchell, Co-Chair



Jamon Alexander, Co-Chair



Dr. Brandy Lovelady Mitchell



Jamon Alexander



Salvador López

Letter from the President

It is with a sense of profound gratitude and accomplishment that I introduce the Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0. This document is a testament to our collective commitment to creating equitable outcomes for all of Kent County.

The Common Agenda 2.0 is more than just a strategic framework; it highlights our evolution, the lessons learned along the way, and our aspirations for the future. Through candid conversations and thoughtful collaborations, we have crafted a roadmap that will guide us toward even greater impact in the next ten years.

KConnect's pillars—Curiosity, Creativity, and Courage—remind us to explore the unknown, embrace new ideas, and to be open to new perspectives. These three pillars encourage us to question established norms and boundaries by challenging the status quo and, ultimately, dissolving and rebuilding equitable and just systems.

Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to KConnect. As we celebrate and set our sights on the path ahead, I am optimistic and excited, knowing that our collective efforts will continue to foster a world of positive change and opportunity.

With appreciation,

Salvador López,
President, KConnect

Executive Summary

The Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 (The 2.0) were developed in response to the complex and interconnected nature of systemic challenges. This strategic document reflects the input of cross-sector stakeholders and community partners and is designed to guide our collective efforts toward meaningful and measurable change. It sets forth a comprehensive framework for achieving our shared vision by using previous work, building on lessons learned, and setting goals for the future.

The 2.0 is a strategic framework articulating a shared vision, goals, and priorities for our collective efforts. It represents a collaborative endeavor developed through extensive engagement with diverse stakeholders, including community members, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and philanthropic entities.

Central to our approach is a commitment to equity and inclusion. This document prioritizes strategies that address systemic barriers, striving to create a more just and inclusive community where everyone can thrive.

This document reaffirms KConnect's commitment to creating a thriving and equitable community where every individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential. It sets collective goals and strategic priorities that reflect our shared aspirations for the future. These were designed to address systemic issues, drive measurable progress, and enhance the well-being of our community. To achieve these goals, the Roadmap outlines actionable strategies that leverage the strengths and resources of our Network to maximize impact.

KConnect History and Accomplishments

KConnect strives to build a collaborative and inclusive community that provides children and youth with a solid foundation to overcome challenges and seize opportunities. It is evident from KConnect's data collection that those from historically marginalized populations face disparities from birth through their educational career and onto their income potential. In short: a child's path in Kent County varies based on their racial identity. While systemic inequities may persist, focusing solely on these challenges obscures the remarkable potential that children and youth possess.

Before KConnect, our systems in Kent County were disjointed and disconnected. Education, human services, government, philanthropy, grassroots, faith communities, nonprofits, and businesses spent time, money, and effort aimed at improving our most pressing challenges. Still, the results were isolated and were incredibly difficult to scale to reach all children, youth, and families.

In April 2013, KConnect's first Common Agenda and Roadmap was developed and published. Laying the groundwork for this initiative, the Kent County Family and Children's Coordinating Council acted to develop a community-based Collective Impact effort funded by local foundations. Kent County offered project management and convening of a cross-sector Steering Committee of twenty-one leaders from across the county.

The initial Current Agenda and Roadmap have served KConnect and our community well for ten years. In early 2022, the KConnect team recognized the need to honor the first Common Agenda and Roadmap, taking note of the significant accomplishments to date.

Significant Accomplishments

Collective Impact Expertise

When given the Common Agenda and Roadmap 1.0 in 2018, the KConnect Backbone found that the Common Agenda was a theoretical ideation rather than an operational framework. Over ten years, KConnect, the Workgroups, and the APC co-created and affirmed a Common Agenda that unifies a strong vision across the prenatal to career continuum, visualized through our Workplan and on the Data Dashboard.

KConnect has served as a Collective Impact content expert to other Collective Impact and convening organizations worldwide. Some of those communities include Traverse City, MI; Aspen, CO; Greensboro, NC; Cambridge, MA; London, UK, and Israel.

We have also worked closely with local organizations such as Kent County Health Department and the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan to build their capacity around data, convening, and facilitation.

In 2023, KConnect partnered with Corewell Health Healthier Communities and the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan to develop an equitable and accessible funding process to distribute \$200,000 to the Roosevelt Park neighborhood. The process was successful and will be scaled to other communities.

Early Childhood System Support

In 2016, KConnect worked closely with First Steps Kent to revitalize the organization by providing technical assistance refocused on systems, not programs, and by facilitating partners towards an eventually successful early childhood millage.

Redesigning the Housing System

KConnect was approached in 2018 to help the community address the vast racial disparities in the housing and homeless system. Over the span of five years, we collaborated with content experts, analyzed and shared related data, led various Workgroups, and held multiple convenings. We ultimately launched Housing Kent, which now serves as the Backbone organization for the redesigned housing system. We also produced a 30-minute documentary about the experience that has been viewed worldwide.

Increased the Community's Capacity Around Data

Over the past ten years, KConnect has normalized the use of disaggregated data on its Data Dashboard and throughout the community. Modeled after our practices, many nonprofit organizations follow suit and work with disaggregated data to see the full picture of disparities in areas like education and career. Our robust Data and Capacity Workgroup are experts in the field, and often support other entities interested in developing their capacity around transparent data usage.

With other data-focused partners, KConnect launched the Community Data Trust, a concept that allows for open and transparent data sharing and utilization.

In 2017, KConnect worked with local partners to identify a data system that was being sold but ended up being fraudulent. Had KConnect not stepped in, the data system would have cost the community and state nearly seven million dollars.

In 2022, KConnect partnered with the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, the Community Data and Research Lab, and other partners to launch the Spanish Dashboard, which provides prenatal to career to Spanish-speaking populations.

Community Engagement

KConnect's Community Engagement Workgroup developed the community's first Compensation Structure, which advocates for community voice by laying out a framework for compensation to those sharing their context expertise. This document is the starting point for the Community Engagement Guidebook that will be shared in early 2024.

In 2023, KConnect hired its first Postdoctoral Fellow, Dr. Shayla Young, to focus both on Policy and Advocacy and Community Engagement. Dr. Young's Community Engagement Guidebook, updated Compensation Structure, and newly-released Youth Compensation Structure have revolutionized the community's response to authentic Community Engagement.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, KConnect immediately investigated how it might impact local communities and spent months developing actionable intelligence. Multiple stakeholders used this information to inform their approach to community work.

Developing the KConnect Structure

KConnect developed a structure based on Core Workgroups, Cross-Cutting Workgroups, and Align and Design—allowing strategy development across the prenatal to career continuum.

Common Agenda

Vision of KConnect

KConnect's Vision is to advance a collective movement aimed at ensuring all children in Kent County have an equitable path to economic prosperity through quality education, family, and community supports. Fundamental to our vision is that we are committed to nothing less than closing the unacceptable achievement gaps for low-income students and children of color and increasing the achievement for all students from prenatal to college and career.

Mission of KConnect

KConnect is a network of public and private organizations working to advance a collective movement aimed at ensuring all children in Kent County have an equitable path to economic prosperity through quality education, family, and community support.

Values of KConnect



Collective Impact Methodology

Collective Impact aims to create sustainable and lasting change by tackling systemic challenges in an organized and comprehensive way. Successfully implementing a Collective Impact methodology requires significant time, resources, and collaboration from everyone involved and is not a quick-fix solution to redesigning systems.

The key components of the Collective Impact methodology include:

Common Agenda: Stakeholders across sectors define a shared vision and common goals.

Shared Measurement: Stakeholders share an agreement on common Indicators and Success Measures that help track progress and outcomes.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Cross-sector organizations and individuals leverage their shared resources to coordinate activities.

Continuous Communication: This component is vital for maintaining alignment, sharing information, learning from each others' work, and making adjustments as necessary.

Backbone Support: A dedicated organization provides the necessary infrastructure, coordination, and data management. It plays a critical role in supporting the process and ensuring all stakeholders are engaged.

Equity - Our “Why”

KConnect aims to transform systems that perpetuate disparities and injustices by centering equity. We commit to:

Addressing disparities. This includes all measures across KConnect’s Prenatal to Career continuum—such as education gaps, poverty, and systemic racism disproportionality—which impact historically and currently marginalized populations. Our equity-centered approach aims to rectify these disparities by prioritizing those most affected.

Systemic change. This work requires addressing the root causes of social inequity. Our approach recognizes that these disparities often result from historical injustices, structural inequities, and systemic biases.

Inclusivity. By involving underrepresented populations in planning and decision-making, KConnect can develop more comprehensive strategies that reflect Kent County’s needs.

Building trust. Our approach encourages trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders and those with lived experience. When these populations come together, they are more likely to work together to redesign inequitable systems in our community.

Community ownership. KConnect empowers communities to take ownership of the strategies that directly impact their lives and to contribute to the design and implementation of solutions.

Adaptation. We acknowledge that strategies may need to change and be refined based on feedback from impacted communities.

Sustainable impact. We strive for long-term, sustainable solutions that lead to more equitable outcomes for all.

Workplan - Our “How”

The KConnect Workplan serves as a visual representation of both our Common Agenda and Roadmap. It shows our shared vision and agreed-upon goals while inspiring high-leverage activities, actionable tasks, and Network responsibilities. The Workplan is further broken down into Success Measures and Indicators.

As our foundational document, our Workplan is utilized for:

Goal Clarity and Alignment: The Workplan clearly articulates goals and ensures they align with the shared vision identified and affirmed by the KConnect Accountability Partners Council.

Goal Breakdown: Referred to as Success Measures, our goals are broken down into more measurable Indicators, which act as levers of change. They are then further broken down into system-level strategies that are well-defined, measurable, and aligned with an outcome.

Responsibility Assignment: Each Success Measure and Indicator is assigned to a specific Workgroup. This promotes accountability and ensures everyone knows their role and responsibilities.

Data Monitoring: The Workplan aligns with the Data Dashboard, which allows KConnect and the community to measure outcomes and success.

Network Coordination: The Workplan is a reference point for coordinating and collaborating with the Core and Cross-Cutting Workgroups, and the strategy-specific Align and Design Teams.

Designing the Common Agenda 2.0

Guiding Principles

The Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 were developed knowing our work must be:

Equitable and Inclusive - Equitable work ensures that systemically marginalized and underrepresented populations are central to our decision-making and strategies.

Collaborative - Long-lasting, sustainable impact can only be achieved through collective action of cross-sector partners.

Innovative - Curiosity, creativity, and courage create transformative solutions.

Accessible - Stakeholders— especially historically marginalized and underrepresented populations-can easily access information, resources, and opportunities.

Transparent - We clearly communicate our goals, progress, challenges and processes to build trust and demonstrate accountability.

Empowering - Stakeholders feel empowered to contribute their insights, skills, and ideas. We foster leadership development among lived experience experts, centering their ownership in various aspects of the work.

Credible - We use evidence-based practices and data-driven decision-making. We collaborate with reputable partners, experts, and organizations.

Actionable - Our goals are clear and our objectives are achievable.

Collaborative - We foster a culture where diverse stakeholders work together for a common purpose.

Design Principles

The Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 is structured around six strategic pillars.

Collaborative Strategy Development - We cultivate and grow a robust ecosystem of partners, stakeholders, and organizations to develop and implement system-level solutions to our community's most complex challenges.

Innovative Solutions, Research, and Frameworks - We nurture strategies through listening to and learning from marginalized populations, analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, and actionable frameworks and tools that guide the work.

Capacity Building - We strengthen the capacity of the KConnect Backbone and Network by introducing new and inventive ways of addressing systemic challenges and how we work collaboratively to solve them.

Collective Impact Rooted in Equitable Outcomes - KConnect is a container to hold deep systemic problems with explicit collaboration and partner-building to achieve equitable change.

Use of Data - We have a respected reputation built on strong research principles. We convene and facilitate partners to utilize and visualize data to measure change.

Collaboration, Connection, Communication, and Learning - We bring in people and organizations intentionally and effectively to understand the past and present, and move forward together. We are dedicated to personal learning, which is individually, organizationally, and systemically transformational and invaluable.

To guide the work, it's important to clarify what the Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 is and isn't.

The Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 is

- An organizational document to guide the Backbone and our community work.
- It tells our story, focuses our equity work, and paints a broad future.
- Outward communication to the network that shares who we are, why we are here, how others are involved, and what we are doing.

The Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 is not

- Individual strategies
- Programs or programmatic initiatives
- Evaluation of KConnect holistically nor of the Backbone
- Finances - budgets, funding, staffing, salaries, etc.
- A policies and procedures document
- A live document that is updated annually
- An impact or annual report
- Brand guide or marketing document

Roadmap

In Collective Impact, a Roadmap is a strategic plan that outlines key steps, milestones, and activities that the initiative can undertake to address the challenges identified in the Common Agenda.

When KConnect was launched in 2013, and the Common Agenda and Roadmap were created, the Collective Impact methodology was still a new concept across the country, and certainly in Kent County. Therefore, the Roadmap portion of the document was vague and without actionable and measurable high-leverage activities. Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 has rectified that and developed actionable future steps.

Our Process: Learning Through Listening

More than thirty key community leaders and stakeholders participated in focus groups in early 2023 facilitated by Deanna Rolffs, Owner & Principal of L3 Catalyst Group. The participants were chosen intentionally, valuing the thoughts and wisdom of those who have had significant involvement and leadership engagement with KConnect over the past ten years. Salvador López, President, and Mark Woltman, Vice President, collaborated with Deanna Rolffs to design the process and methodology of the focus groups.

The focus groups identified the following strengths and opportunities were identified.

Strengths:

How KConnect Has Been Effective

- Connects people and organizations.
Brings people in very well
- Has built respected and useful data-driven tools and culture
- Practices collective impact framework, resulting in strong community support
- Has built strong relationships, rapport, trust, and credibility
- Facilitates exposure to personal learning
- Demonstrates tenacious commitment to systemic change

Opportunities:

Envisioning the next phase of KConnect via the Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0

- Clarify purpose, commitment, and impact
- Deepen emphasis and focus on racial equity outcomes
- Make required power shifts to center lived experience
- Increase movement building and engagement via policy change
- Celebrate, strengthen, and revise the Backbone and staffing model
- Take time to make space for dialogue, storytelling, and learning
- Make room for different communication & engagement models
- Better engage and clarify the role of business

Focus group participants also identified themes which each identify a particular tension intended to be addressed thoughtfully and intentionally. These six themes led to the development of our High-Leverage Activities. For more information on the focus group themes, please see Appendix I.

Theme 1:
Equity & Collective
Impact Framework

Strengths: Displays strong support for collective impact framework and has deepened emphasis and focus on racial equity outcomes

Opportunity: Clarify purpose, commitment, and impact

Tension to Embrace: This work requires tenacious commitment

Theme 2:
Use of Data

Strength: KConnect is data driven

Opportunity: Include more stories and complexity behind the data

Tension to Embrace: Data challenges assumptions and challenges people to be uncomfortable

Theme 3:
Collaboration, connection,
communication, and learning

Strengths: Connects people and organizations & the personal learning and exposure for network members is transformational, invaluable, and mind-blowing

Opportunity: Take time to make space for dialogue, storytelling, and learning

Tension to Embrace: Make room for different communication & more space for errors and learning

Theme 4:
Backbone Team

Strength: Highly capable and trusted Backbone team that demonstrates a high degree of integrity

Opportunity: Celebrate, strengthen, and revise the Backbone to lead and not always follow

Tension to Embrace: Humbly lead

Theme 5:
Accountability
Partners Councils
(APC) & Workgroups

Strength: Strong and effective APC method and model

Opportunity: Energy being put into workgroup engagement is difficult and places big demands on time

Tension to Embrace: Shifts in APC and workgroups will be critical as people with lived experience are brought into leadership and decision making

Theme 6:
Community engagement
and cross sector
representation

Strengths: Relationships, rapport, trust, and credibility

Opportunity: Better engage and clarify role of business, nonprofit, and lived experience

Tension to Embrace: Shifts in power are required

High-Leverage Activities

High-leverage activities are strategic actions that create significant positive outcomes and drive meaningful change in addressing complex social challenges. These activities maximize impact by leveraging the collective efforts and resources of KConnect's cross-sector stakeholders. Key high-leverage activities recommended for KConnect in the future include:

1 —

Launch innovative system-level strategies that eliminate racialized disparities from prenatal to career

This ambitious goal is a comprehensive approach that tackles inequities across various life stages, from prenatal care to career. Our approach involves a combination of advocacy, policy reform, community engagement, and data-driven interventions to drive systemic change and create more equitable opportunities for individuals across the prenatal to career continuum. By targeting racialized disparities at multiple levels and stages of life, KConnect aims to create lasting impact and foster a more inclusive society.

Collect and Analyze Data Data: Work with the Data and Capacity Workgroup to conduct an analysis of the racialized disparities and historical factors that have impacted the Success Measure and/or Indicator on the KConnect Workplan. If no relevant data exists on the Data Dashboard, identify a proxy measure to understand the scope and impact of the disparities.

Form a Cross-Sector Content Expert Team: Using the Core Workgroups, assemble a team of subject matter experts from various sectors to comprise the Align and Design Team. Ensure that the team represents different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

Define Clear Goals and Objectives: This step includes utilizing content from the Data Dashboard, partnering with the Data and Capacity Workgroup, and presenting to the Accountability Partners Council.

Develop Design Principles: Work with the Align and Design Team to center principles around equity, inclusion, and improving outcomes for historically marginalized populations.

Engage the Community: Work with the Community Engagement Workgroup to involve impacted populations from the outset. Conducting focus groups, community forums, etc. will ensure that the strategy is addressing the needs of the community.

Design the Strategy: Develop a strategy that addresses the underlying systemic issues causing the disparity. These strategies should dismantle barriers, promote equity, and dissolve complex challenges to redesign an equitable system.

Establish Partnerships: Collaborate with organizations, businesses, and institutions with system experience. This helps pool resources, expertise, and influence to drive systemic change.

Communicate and Raise Awareness: Develop a communications strategy that will share the progress, successes, and challenges of the strategy with the community, stakeholders, and the public. Raise awareness about the importance of addressing the racialized disparities.

Dissolving and reimaging systems takes time and requires patience, dedication, and an ongoing commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice. Engaging a diverse team of cross-sector stakeholders and collaborating closely with context experts will be vital in achieving meaningful and sustainable systems change.

Change Policy: Working with the Policy and Advocacy Workgroup, identify policy changes at the local, regional, and national levels that can positively impact marginalized populations.

Pilot: Test the strategy through pilot initiatives to understand the impact. Gather feedback from participants and stakeholders and use the lessons learned to refine the strategy.

2 —

Develop a shared policy agenda, and operationalize advocacy that dissolves inequities in our community

Developing a shared policy agenda involves a collaborative approach that brings together diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, community groups, and individuals affected by systemic injustices. Throughout the process, KConnect will emphasize the importance of centering the voices and experiences of those most affected by inequities, ensuring that their perspectives inform decision-making and advocacy strategies.

Assess the Landscape: Identify specific inequities using KConnect's Data Dashboard and strive to understand the root causes and systemic factors that lead to these disparities. Engage community members, organizations, content experts, and decision-makers to understand these issues and their impact.

Use Shared Vision: Use KConnect's shared vision to guide the work and set measurable goals that address the specific inequity areas.

Recommend Policy: In partnership, conduct research to identify what policies have successfully worked to address similar disparities in other communities. Work with these stakeholders to tailor these policies to Kent County's needs.

Develop the Agenda: After conducting research, prioritize policy recommendations based on their potential to dissolve inequities. In partnership with Convening Partners and other community stakeholders, begin to identify advocacy opportunities at a local, state, and national level. The agenda will include a combination of components to manage, solve, and dissolve policies as we align with existing recommendations and bring forth dissolving recommendations.

Communicate Broadly: Ensure that the Network and the Kent County community are informed of the shared policy agenda, action steps, and potential impact.

Advocate: Develop a strategy that includes organizing Network partners at the state and local level, and engaging with decision-makers and stakeholders who can help drive policy change. Organize advocacy actions such as letter-writing campaigns, petitions, and meetings with policymakers. Highlight the personal stories of community members.

Capacity Build: Support community members and advocates learning impactful advocacy techniques, communication, and public engagement skills. Partner with state policy experts.

3 —

Ensure that community voice is embedded throughout KConnect's structure

KConnect is committed to ensuring that community voices are deeply integrated throughout our structure. This involves fostering an inclusive and participatory approach that empowers community members to actively engage in decision-making processes, strategy development, and implementation efforts.

Inclusive Leadership and Governance: Ensure that KConnect's leadership and governance structure includes representation from communities experiencing inequitable outcomes. This can be done through board positions, advisory committees, and Workgroup leadership.

Community Engagement: Intentionally partner with organizations whose core mission is to engage directly with community members, using feedback sessions, focus groups, open forums, and the Accountability Partners Council to gather input on decision-making processes and strategy design.

Co-Creation of Strategies: Involve community members from the beginning stages to ensure work is tailored to the affected community's needs and priorities.

Transparent Communication: Maintain clear and open communication channels, using a variety of methods.

Capacity Building: Empower community members by offering training, workshops, and resources that help them understand KConnect's work, and ways to engage.

Decision-Making Models: Evaluate the effectiveness of the Accountability Partners Council and its Voting Protocol to ensure it incorporates community voice. Consider aspects like time of the event, ways to participate, virtual options, etc.

Continuous Feedback: Implement mechanisms to collect and analyze feedback from the community.

Representation in Staffing: Hire staff members from the community or with deep connections to the community to bridge gaps and to better align our work with the community's needs.

Empowerment and Ownership: Empower community members to take ownership of Workgroups, Align and Design Teams, and strategies.

Adaptability: Be open to adjusting strategies based on the changing needs and feedback of the community.

4 —

Empower the Backbone to have decision-making authority.

KConnect can harness the collective wisdom of the Accountability Partners Council (APC) while entrusting the Backbone to make tactical decisions and execute the day-to-day operations. The Backbone utilizes their specialized skills and deep understanding of community needs to drive the organization's strategies.

This understanding of responsibility ultimately enhances KConnect's efficiency and responsiveness. It further allows for broad community buy-in, and is nimble enough to quickly meet changes in the ecosystem.

5 —

Ensure sustainability by diversifying funding

Central to the success and longevity of any collective impact initiative is its ability to ensure sustainability. While passion and commitment drive initial momentum, securing stable and diversified funding sources is essential for maintaining impact over the long term.

National Funding: KConnect will seek national partnerships while maintaining strong relationships with local philanthropic entities.

Governmental Entities: We will also identify and secure grants and resources offered by governmental entities.

Lead Nationally: We envision building its capacity to lead in collective impact nationally. This evolution fosters deeper content expertise, enabling the organization to contribute to broader work nationwide.

Private-Sector Partnerships: We will forge partnerships between private-sector organizations and strategies to ensure that private-sector contributions are channeled toward initiatives that align with their philanthropic priorities.

6 —

Increase and better leverage private sector partnerships

Recognizing the potential of private sector collaboration, KConnect will not only increase but also strategically leverage private sector partnerships. By aligning the strengths of the business community with our vision, we aim to amplify its impact, foster innovation, and unlock new avenues for sustainable solutions to complex societal challenges.

Clearly Articulate the Value Proposition: Develop communications that share the social and economic benefits of private sector engagement.

Develop Case Studies: Showcase successful examples of private sector involvement with Align and Design Team strategies.

Create Tailored Partnership Opportunities: Offer various levels of engagement from financial support to skills-based volunteering and technical support.

Highlight Opportunities: Share how private sector expertise can drive innovation within a specific initiative while emphasizing the potential for co-creating new solutions and approaches.

Engage in Skill-Based Volunteering: Invite private sector professionals to share their expertise through skill-based volunteering. Demonstrate how their skills can directly contribute to community success.

Collaborate on Thought Leadership: Co-author thought leadership pieces and research reports. Highlight their thought leadership as a way to contribute to conversations around system redesign.

KConnect's Approach to Complex Systemic Challenges

KConnect believes it is better to dissolve a problem than to solve it. The Dissolution Continuum was developed by CivicLab, a nonprofit institute for civic collaboration, that forms the underlying foundation for the practice of community collaboration. KConnect has partnered with CivicLab since 2017, and has integrated the Dissolution Continuum into our work. CivicLab's approach is to learn what makes community collaboration work at its best, document these discoveries, and teach and share the practices broadly.

In this context, dissolution refers to approaching a problem by redesigning the underlying system or its environment, shaping the conditions that originally caused the problem. There are many acts of dissolution, both big and small. Dissolving problems requires discipline, practice, active listening, and creative thinking supplemented by innovative tools and methods for designing new approaches. It also requires flexibility and humility, knowing our comprehension of complex systems always remains incomplete.

The components of the Dissolution Continuum are critical for the Kent County community to understand and utilize as a core methodology to equitable systems change.

Principles of Dissolution:

Focus on the system, and make it visible.

Ensure that improving the system is everyone's responsibility,

Create and sustain the conditions that empower people to solve their own problems.

Redefine the role of the leader as facilitator of a process that shapes the work itself.

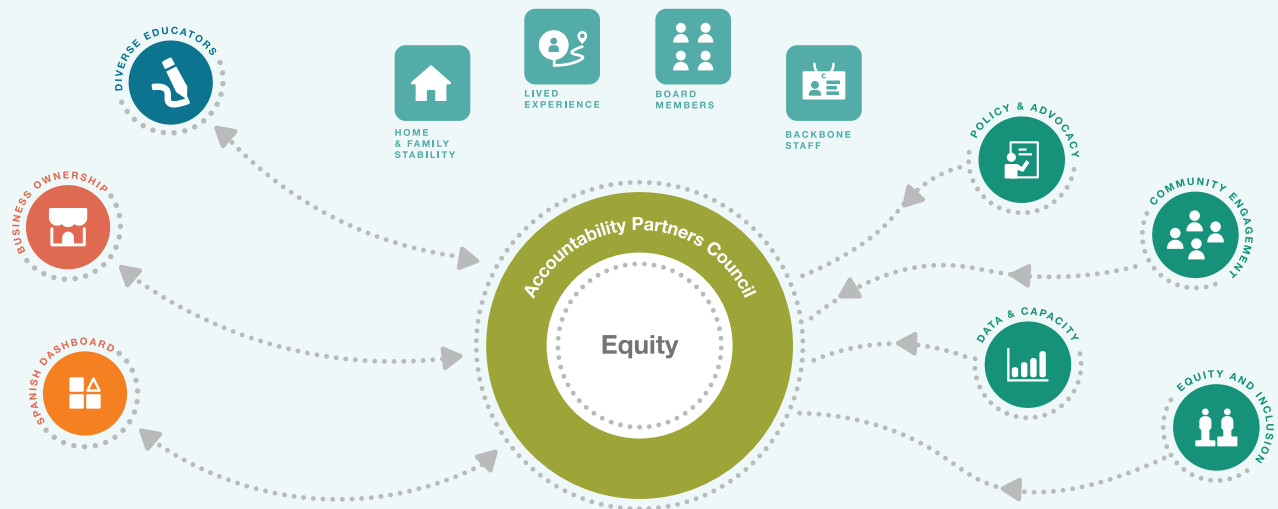
Four Ways of Treating Problems

Absolution: Ignore a problem and hope it will solve itself or go away of its own accord. We may choose to absolve ourselves of a problem when there is no awareness or clarity about the kind of problem that exists.

Resolution: Employ behavior previously used in similar situations, adapted if necessary, to obtain an outcome that is good enough. The approach has little lasting power because it deals with symptoms and short-term effects, not causes.

Solution: Discover or create behavior that yields the best, or approximately the best, possible outcome, one that "optimizes." Unfortunately, few problems, once solved, stay that way; changes in the environment, changing societal goals, and new information cause solutions to deteriorate. Problem-solving may make things better, but it does not fundamentally change the nature of things.

Dissolution: Redesign either the system that has the problem or its context in such a way as to eliminate the problem or the conditions that caused it. If we don't address a problem systemically, then we end up solving the same problem, over and over again.



KConnect's Organizational Structure

KConnect's organizational structure is critical to its strength. Over the past ten years, growth and lessons have led to structural adjustments. More information is in the Glossary.

Learnings and Evaluation

In 2019 iEval conducted an external evaluation with interviews facilitated by Deanna Rolffs regarding KConnect's work, status, and approach, sharing the following primary findings, which are important to include within KConnect's Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0.

KConnect has strength in its credibility and ability to convene. The evaluation's primary point showed that KConnect holds significant community trust, which is critical to achieving its mission. Accountability Partner's Council and KConnect's vast Network illustrate the strong relationships at the core of collective impact; without those the majority of collective impact efforts fail.

KConnect should amplify and support community engagement efforts, not necessarily engage in them directly. As KConnect looks to further develop its community engagement strategy, it should continue to approach this work cautiously and spend time listening as done through the interviews conducted by iEval. It is also through those interviews that we learned that groups working directly with communities don't think KConnect needs to be doing parallel community engagement work, but instead should be partnering with entities who have built trusted connections with people and neighborhoods. Those organizations asked that KConnect take the time to learn about their work, be present, and listen.

KConnect may have a role to play as an intermediary between efforts at the grassroots level and funders. KConnect sits in a unique position. We have built credibility with both grassroots organizations and institutions working across the prenatal to career continuum. We also maintain strong relationships with key funders in Kent County. The Backbone team may look to leverage that position, to match organizations seeking financial support with funders. On the flipside, funders looking to invest in community initiatives might see organizations engaged with KConnect as having a certain level of credibility. This is also a way for KConnect to elevate systems change in the funding community and private sector more broadly.

KConnect should consider how it can improve its reach beyond the Grand Rapids Metro area. While our mission is to serve all of Kent County, KConnect is based in an urban center. As expressed by many urban-based Collective Impact initiatives like ours, there are challenges to expanding to rural areas—especially when most resources exist in that urban center. KConnect is focused on the Grand Rapids Metro area for good reason. There are critical inequities that have to be tackled there. Outcomes for children and adults within communities of color are disparate when compared to white communities.

KConnect needs to stay mindful of boundaries. A key component of systems thinking is clearly demarcating the boundaries of those systems which the initiative is studying, trying to change, or trying to identify. KConnect should continually ask how certain activities or opportunities either fit within or push outside of the boundaries it has set for itself. The housing work, for example, has been an important opportunity for KConnect to expand its engagement, but how does it fit the boundaries it had set for itself? Did the work stretch the Backbone too thin? Is there a way to merge the housing work with the workgroups that already exist? Systems can easily overwhelm, so ensuring there are clear boundaries that guide future decision making will be important.

Housing learnings (high level)

In 2018, KConnect was asked by multiple community stakeholders to redesign the housing system in Kent County. What followed was nearly five years of in-depth community work.

Authentic Community Engagement

Lessons Learned: Meaningful and authentic community engagement is critical. Involve community members from diverse backgrounds and perspectives throughout the process, ensuring their voices are heard, respected, and integrated into decision-making.

Action Taken: KConnect has implemented various engagement tools such as the Compensation Structure, Youth Compensation Structure, development of the Community Engagement Guidebook, holding focus groups, distributing surveys, and doing interviews to gather insights and co-create strategies with the community.

Building Trust and Relationships with System Leaders

Lessons Learned: Building trust among system leaders is essential. Establish strong relationships with system leaders and sectors to foster collaboration and maintain open lines of communication.

Action Taken: Continue investing time in relationship-building activities and be transparent about intentions and progress.

Shared Vision and Language

Lessons Learned: Many stakeholders have their vision and language for system redesign. You can effectively align efforts and resources by co-creating a shared vision and language.

Action Taken: When addressing system challenges and redesign, facilitate workshops and discussions that help system stakeholders recognize the power of a shared language while collectively defining the outcomes they want to achieve.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Lessons Learned: Systems are complex and dynamic. We had to be prepared to adapt our approach as new data and insights emerged or unforeseen challenges came to the surface.

Action Taken: We maintain flexibility by encouraging continuous feedback and iteration based on real-time learning.

Sustainability Planning

Lessons Learned: The newly redesigned system needed a separate entity to operationalize the Common Agenda and Roadmap.

Action Taken: In future system redesigns, start with the knowledge that an entity is necessary to manage the system.

Celebrating Wins and Learning from Failures

Lessons Learned: Celebrate small victories along the way and learn from failures. Both of them will provide valuable insights.

Action Taken: Acknowledge and celebrate milestones, share lessons learned from setbacks, and use feedback to make continuous improvements.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, we have experienced the power of collaboration. Together, we have achieved remarkable progress toward addressing complex challenges in our community.

This Common Agenda and Roadmap 2.0 reflects the aspirations of individuals, organizations, and communities that have come together with a shared vision. It encapsulates our commitment to inclusivity, equity, and collaboration—ensuring no voice goes unheard, and no community is left behind.

As we look ahead, we recognize an ever-evolving landscape. The activities in the 2.0 are dynamic tools that will evolve in response to shifting circumstances. We remain committed to adaptability and innovation, while staying true to our shared values, guiding principles, and vision.

In the next decade, we envision a community that thrives on inclusivity, equity, and shared prosperity. With the solid foundation we've built, we are poised to expand our reach, improve outcomes, and engage in new partnerships that will create meaningful change on a broader scale in Kent County. We acknowledge that Collective Impact requires ongoing dedication, communication, and a sense of mutual accountability. Each member of the KConnect Network plays an integral role, contributing unique expertise and resources that will turn our vision into a reality.

Appendices —

[!\[\]\(5a132f13505a6571904d622757b7a8f0_img.jpg\) 360-Model](#)

[!\[\]\(10f8862fc183b400327470ea85afe9ae_img.jpg\) Align and Design Team Engagement](#)

[!\[\]\(e1d6102fe77919492c04879c8450f1f5_img.jpg\) Align and Design Team Process](#)

[!\[\]\(73002692dd5e7a64e60946be3158e719_img.jpg\) APC Protocol](#)

[!\[\]\(d5d7044e5caf6907399af2dced8d6ff8_img.jpg\) Compensation Model](#)

[!\[\]\(35dc653d59570f8f891c312eeece91a2_img.jpg\) Data Dashboard](#)

[!\[\]\(ab4e2b3fc7e7887b7a72f548aa6f5e60_img.jpg\) Dissolution Continuum](#)

[!\[\]\(104fbf564e2e5a8fbd84f31656d114c7_img.jpg\) Glossary](#)

[!\[\]\(aab88c0d099e5d18d6533a97b13ec28d_img.jpg\) Neighborhood Funding Model](#)

[!\[\]\(b538fe54c1f3a7343e37e85cc2d00497_img.jpg\) Non-negotiables framework](#)

[!\[\]\(5abce1a84a655b073239ab33e1199487_img.jpg\) Youth Compensation Model](#)