



A NETWORK OF WELLBEING

CATALYST INITIATIVE
EVALUATION REPORT
SUMMARY: 2014-2022



This report summarizes key findings from “A Network of Wellbeing: Catalyst Initiative Evaluation Report,” which captures the impact of the Catalyst Initiative from its founding in 2014 through 2022. The report was compiled by Inspire to Change, an organization that leverages data and evaluations to support purpose-driven change and change-makers.

We invite you to explore the full evaluation report at:
CatalystNorth.org

Land Acknowledgment

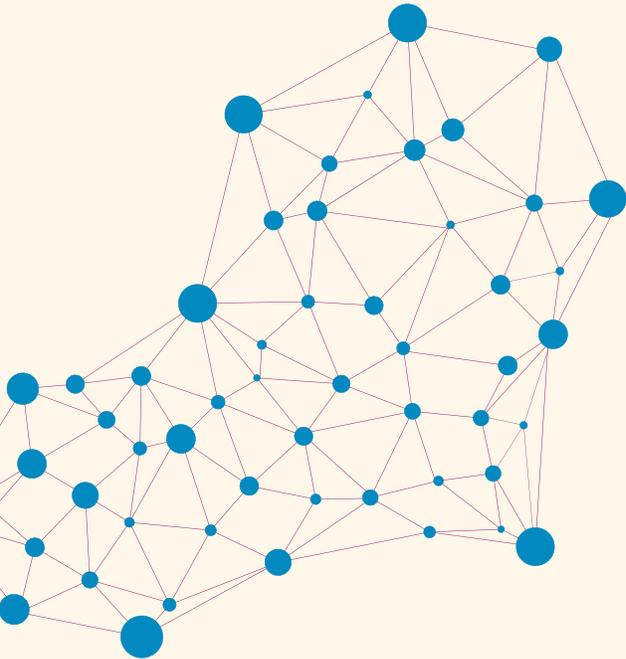
We collectively acknowledge that Catalyst Initiative, its grantees, and Inspire to Change operate within the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of Indigenous people, often referred to as Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan region. We reside on land that was cared for and called home by the Ojibwe and Dakota peoples, as well as other Native peoples from time immemorial.

Ceded by the Dakota and Ojibwe in the 1800's under threat of military force, this land holds great historical, spiritual, and personal significance for its original stewards, the Native nations and peoples of this region. We recognize and continually support and advocate for the sovereignty of the Native nations in this territory and beyond. By offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm tribal sovereignty and will work to hold I2C accountable to American Indian peoples and nations.

We recognize the land as an expression of gratitude and appreciation. It is important for each of us to understand the long-standing history that has brought us to reside on the land and to seek to understand our place within that history. We also recognize that land acknowledgments do not exist in a past tense or historical context: colonialism is a current and ongoing process, and that we must carefully consider our own participation in power structures rooted in historical trauma and oppression.

Introduction

Catalyst Initiative honors and fosters culturally authentic self-care practices to advance the health and wellbeing of communities in need, including people experiencing current and/or historical trauma, toxic stress, inequities, or lack of access to opportunities.



This work is not straightforward, and success may be defined differently in different communities. Trusting community members to know what they need is vital to the process, as is taking risks on visionaries within the community.

As part of this work, Catalyst Initiative hosted a series of events across Minnesota, bringing together more than 4,000 people since 2014, with most being people of color or Indigenous. Highlights from these events are included below to give a sense of what Catalyst Initiative offers communities and how participants responded.

Current and former *seed grantee partners* of Catalyst Initiative came together to present their projects, to help support a broadening network of community collaborations, and to catalyze new connections. This diverse group of program staff, board members, leadership team members, and volunteers engaged in skills-based learning and cultural healing practices.

Catalyst Initiative hosted *Building Resilience: Restoring our Human Capacity to Heal* at RiverCenter in St. Paul, Minnesota. Over 300 people from various walks of life participated to affirm the innate capacity we carry within us to heal from trauma, build resilience, and be well. More than 80% of survey respondents from the event reported that the event was meaningful and productive, and that they would share takeaways regarding resiliency and healing from trauma with others.

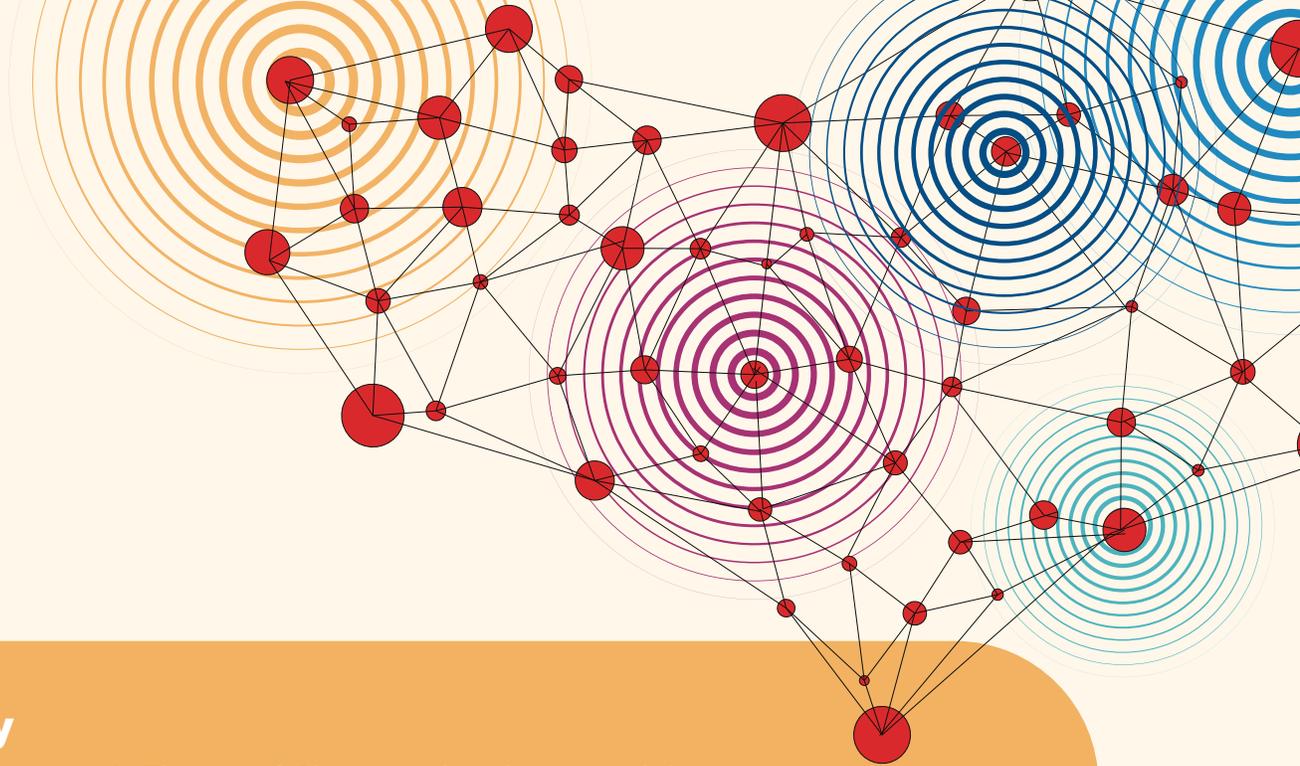
People across the state attended in person and online trainings in the *Healing from Trauma* series, which aimed to increase learning and understanding of traditional healing concepts and techniques for use with historical intergenerational trauma. When asked how they would use the training, people shared things such as, “*I work with young families and children, and this [supports and informs] my work in the community.*”

Evaluation Approach

In light of the complexity of Catalyst Initiative's work, an evaluation must include creative methods that are both useful to the intended users and support ongoing learning, adaptation, and innovation. This report describes the principles-focused developmental evaluation Inspire to Change engaged in with Kristin Johnstad of Johnstad and Associates (evaluation partner), and Catalyst Initiative's funded partners. The 9-month impact evaluation was undertaken with the use of Creative Evaluation and Engagement (CE&E), which combines elements of utilization-focused evaluation, developmental evaluation, principles-focused evaluation, and arts-based evaluation. This approach was employed to produce a deeper understanding and insight into the impact of Catalyst Initiative. The overarching evaluation question was: **What impact are self-care and healing having in the community as a result of direct or indirect support from the Catalyst Initiative?**

Overall Findings

Overall, we found that the Catalyst Initiative was instrumental in contributing to a network of wellbeing in Minnesota. They did this in four key ways: First, Catalyst Initiative held a compelling vision and was able to articulate an inviting and inspiring theory of change. Second, rather than investing solely in programs and initiatives, Catalyst Initiative also invested in the cultivation of conditions necessary to seed and spread healing and wellbeing. Third, within the context of these conditions, partners identified six core strategies used and promoted by Catalyst Initiative to weave a larger and stronger network of wellbeing. Finally, these combined conditions and strategies rippled throughout the network to generate overall impacts. The figure on the following page delineates the theory, conditions, strategies, and ripples that emerged from this work.



Theory

Catalyst Initiative's Theory of Change is less logic model and more DNA; less smart goals and more poetry; less return on investment calculations and more an **act of love**.

Conditions

No one person alone can create healing and wholeness in people and communities. But each of us can contribute to, and take responsibility for, **cultivating the right conditions**.

Strategies

There is no prescription, recipe, or silver bullet that will bring healing and wholeness to people and communities. But each of us can contribute to, and take responsibility for, **implementing strategies** that make these experiences possible.

Ripples

Taken together, these conditions and strategies ripple across the network, from node to node, cultivating **new and healthier conditions**, inspiring culturally-grounded adaptations and supporting health.

Theory of Change

While this isn't typical of an evaluation report, we decided to present the Theory of Change that emerged through the evaluation process as a poem. We hope you will carry the profound beauty, power, and poetry of this work with you as you read this report.

Catalyst Initiative: A Love Poem and Theory of Change

See the horizon, and
stay present in the right now.

In every moment,
know where your horizon is.

When the journey changes and the
trajectory shifts,
practice self-awareness.
Shift and pivot.

Pull forward strength from your ancestors.

Believe in and nurture your
human potential,
brilliance, and resilience.

Transform the darkness into light.

Plant seeds of hope and inspiration
for your descendants.

Stay focused on the horizon.
Align and re-align with your highest potential.
Believe and let go of expectations.

Conditions for Healing

To create and sustain Catalyst Initiative, space for healing had to be created and maintained. Healing doesn't happen just because people have been listened to, convened, or "invested" in with time, ideas, and money. Healing only happens when organizations and individuals intentionally cultivate and nurture the conditions that make healing possible.

Condition 1. Grace and forgiveness are given freely

Transforming networks from a dominant paradigm to one centered on wellbeing requires intention, commitment, perseverance, care, forgiveness, and grace for others and ourselves. It must allow for exploration without blame or shame:

"Youth need spaces where they can feel safe and supported to come fully into themselves—with all of the mistakes and stumbles that are necessary. I'm not assuming there is a utopia, but I do believe we can create a place where youth are held and respected, a place that doesn't throw them away for going through a human process."

- Catalyst Initiative Partner

Condition 2. Journeys of all kinds are welcome

Sometimes healing practices have been interrupted, stolen, and/or forgotten, and the healing work needs to begin with building, rebuilding, or repairing a foundation. Once on the healing path, people will take their own individual and collective journeys, at their own pace and in their own ways. Throughout the evaluation process, it was clear that personal journeys and growth were catalyzed through accompaniment. This means that Catalyst Initiative walked along on these journeys with acceptance, connection, healing, trust, leadership, and a sense of community.

Condition 3. Healing is treated as both an individual and a collective act

A premise of the Catalyst Initiative is that healing work requires ongoing, intentional, and culturally meaningful self-care, trauma-healing, and resilience-building at both individual and community levels. Participants we spoke with agreed. They shared that while the focus on the individual is important and appreciated, the focus on the collective is an equally important and often overlooked focus. As one person shared, *"It takes a collective to move forward—someone to believe when others aren't so sure."* Another shared: *"This program [for Somali women] goes beyond health and wellness and gives a safe place to process trauma, share what's in the heart, and begin to heal."*

Condition 4. Self-care and healing are culturally-rooted

Catalyst Initiative is a national resource that fosters culturally authentic self-care practices to advance health and wellbeing. The Initiative invested in adapting healing practices in culturally specific ways, making these practices more accessible and meaningful to people in their communities. The participants we spoke with agreed that culturally responsive/authentic support is essential to creating a network of wellbeing. For example, one partner shared:

“They could not believe there is a Muslim chaplain in the building that would actually come and pray with them and bless them. And it was amazing...he said that people actually needed it, and there was a lot of need and...we need the program. The community needs the help...they need to be included.” – Catalyst Initiative Partner

Condition 5. Wholeness is invited and celebrated

Participants expressed how important it was to invite wholeness into the healing process. This wholeness was expressed in many different ways. One person shared that they learned how important it is to be whole as an **individual**. This participant continually asks, “How do I take the time to make myself whole to bring all that I am to the work I am doing?” Another participant shared that they were healing **whole families**: “A whole family, an entire generation, is healing...I am interrupting historical trauma.” Yet another participant shared that for them, wholeness is a **congregation**: “Participants [in our congregation] witnessed powerful inter-generational connections and transformation.”

Condition 6. Believe in the human capacity to heal

A belief in the human capacity to heal allows people to imagine and move beyond simply surviving and step fully into thriving by nurturing their bodies, minds, and spirits. The movement out of hurt and fear and into hope and possibility creates new opportunities. One participant put it like this:

“When you have spaciousness and latitude you can do great things. But when you’re in survival mode all the time because of your own traumatic history, or because of the deep trauma...that is part of our environment right now, or a combination thereof, and you don’t have good practices and you don’t have good support networks, and you have...all the wounds that come from all that and we react from a place of hurt and fear.” – Catalyst Grantee



Strategies

Catalyst Initiative's goal at its inception in 2014 was to promote the need and value of self-care for non-profits, systems, and individuals, and to be a "go-to" place for tools, training, and connection about self-care and culturally-based healing.

Every grantee report we read, and every partner we talked to, described a process of learning and adaptation as they navigated changing environments and deepened their relationships and understanding of how to center self-care as primary care in culturally-rooted ways.

As we looked across the stories that were shared by evaluation participants (Catalyst Initiative funding partners), we saw patterns emerge. The results of the comprehensive qualitative data analysis outlined in this section provide valuable insights into these patterns, which are ripples that emanated from six core strategies used by Catalyst Initiative.

Strategy 1. Energize and resource community members to reach back and cast forward

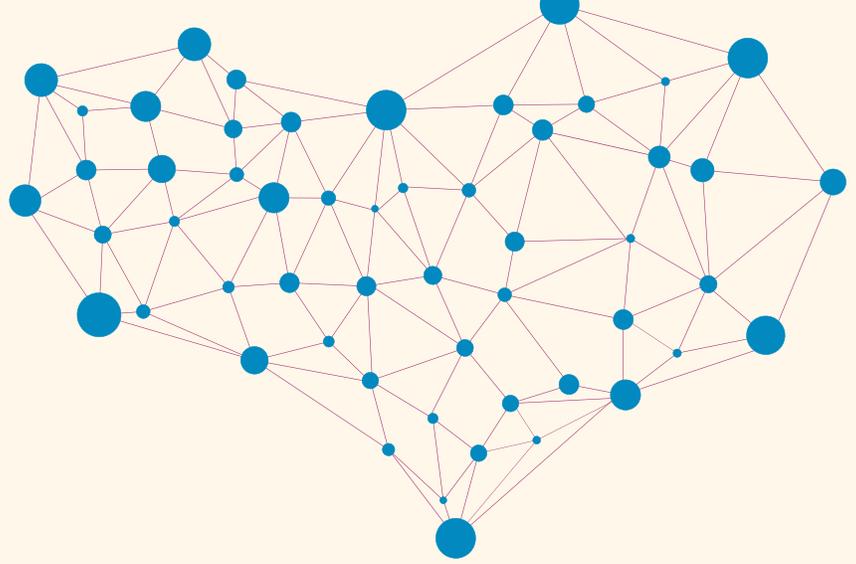
The Strategy: Catalyst Initiative is best thought of as a network of people attracted to culturally-rooted healing work rather than as a funder or a series of programs.

The Ripple: While people engage directly in Catalyst-led events, these events are always facilitated with the hope and intention that people will take what they have learned back to their communities to seed and spread the message. Catalyst Initiative does not "own" the concepts or process, but instead encourages ownership and adaptation by community members.

Strategy 2. See and believe in people and their vision

The Strategy: Suzanne Koepplinger co-created and sustained Catalyst Initiative by finding people she believed in, listening to them deeply, and encouraging them and their vision. This is the work of a network weaver. Effective network weavers expand and deepen relationships, build network leadership and a network mindset, and create and maintain a communication ecosystem.

The Ripple: In this case, people reported that Suzanne Koepplinger, director of Catalyst Initiative, listened deeply, saw the vision, and believed. This belief created opportunities for people to engage in a different way of being and working. People doing this "different" work are able to extend listening, seeing, and believing to other people, extending the impact of the work.



Strategy 3. Center on the lived realities of people and communities

The Strategy: While marginalized communities have been excluded from access to money and resources, they also have the most information and knowledge about their own lived experiences. Catalyst Initiative strives to include people in communities by contributing not only monetary resources, but the collective time, knowledge, skills, and access to the entire network.

The Ripple: Catalyst Initiative is clear and unapologetic about supporting communities “in greatest need.” Catalyst Initiative asked community members what they needed, and then offered opportunities that are specifically resonant with and relevant to these communities. As a result, partners created culturally meaningful self-care, trauma-healing, and resilience tools. Additionally, this support allowed organizations and initiatives to stabilize and/or grow as leaders emerged.

Strategy 4. Promote healing grounded in radical self-care.

The Strategy: Catalyst Initiative promoted strategies that helped partners and communities care for themselves and others.

The Ripple: Catalyst Initiative invests in healers, helping them to more deeply understand the relationship between their wellbeing and the work they do in the world. Healers made shifts to better align outer actions with inner wellbeing. As a result, healers in diverse roles reported being better prepared to sustain long-term healing work.

Strategy 5. Partner and innovate in relationship to change systems

The Strategy: While there are several models of successful networks, all of them require building and maintaining relationships and facilitating collaborations. Network weaving increases impact, scale, and reach by improving the ability of communities to collaborate on issues that affect them.

The Ripple: Catalyst Initiative began the funder-grantee partnership in relationship. Partners pursued multiple paths of engagement in their own networks and within the Catalyst Initiative network to increase systemic spread and adoption. Partnerships expanded and strengthened individual’s and organization’s spheres of influence, and allowed organizations to leverage additional resources. This resulted in the ability of many partners to impact entire systems (e.g., in healthcare and education).

Strategy 6. Bridge Western and Traditional ideas and ideals

The Strategy: Catalyst Initiative worked to bring philanthropy into closer alignment with traditional ideas and values, including time, spirit, and decision-making. They recognized that healing work takes place on a timeline from ancestors to descendants.

The Ripple: Catalyst Initiative supported work that honored the spirit of that which guides and connects us. Partners found new ways to weave together traditional and dominant-culture practices, and the language of the work changed to become more rooted and relevant.

Overall Ripples

Overall, participants told us in no uncertain terms that self-care and healing have ripple effects in the community. When we looked across the strategies and conditions, we found that they led to these overall network impacts:

- 1. Investment in healing work ripples in both space/place (community outward) and time (lifespan and generations). These ripples extend beyond the reach of this evaluation, both forward and backward in time.**
- 2. More people and communities see inner work and emotional healing of the self as foundational and not an afterthought.**
- 3. Healing work improves physical, social, mental, and emotional health (e.g., blood pressure, nutrition habits, and feeling more socially supported).**
- 4. Self-care and healing improves the capacity of people to meet the needs of those they work with and care for.**
- 5. Learning to self-regulate and identify/set boundaries positively benefits individuals, organizations, and interrelationships.**
- 6. The community owns the work.**

Conclusion

This evaluation found that Catalyst Initiative's approach is a meaningful and impactful alternative to more common approaches to philanthropy.

In doing their work, Catalyst Initiative understood that transformational change requires a full partnership with involved communities. In other words, community members must be full contributing partners on any project attempting transformative change. While this concept seems obvious, implementation is less so. Philanthropy and non-profits share a long history of “doing for” or “working on” certain communities or problems, including Indigenous and/or marginalized groups, and communities experiencing large amounts of conflict.

Successful transformative projects incorporate how people think, interact, and make meaning into the structure, activities, and goals of the network itself, including how individuals situate themselves within family, community, and culture. In light of this, Catalyst Initiative cultivated relationships within the context of the history and culture of communities. They adjusted to new ideas (ideas new to Catalyst Initiative), as well as the effects of oppression or alienation in its partners. This led to discussions not only about appropriate actions and resources, but on how existing attitudes might change over time.

Finally, the network evaluation was designed to answer practical questions, guide decision-making, and problem-solve. Partners joined together to retrospectively and visually map the chain of effects resulting from their partnership with Catalyst Initiative. This developmental evaluation reinforced the full partnership as it focused on the emergence of salient themes and ideas as well as how partners could actually utilize results in their continuing work.

Through robust partnerships, Catalyst Initiative transformed communities, organizations, and individuals into a strong and dynamic network that honors and fosters wellbeing and authentic self-care. Members of the network adapted and transmitted the ideas of Catalyst Initiative into new contexts and spaces. They moved beyond simply surviving to step fully into thriving: nurturing bodies, minds, and spirits.