Evaluating Progress in Policy Change

DRAFT 1
September 20, 2018

Social innovators interested in changing the systems underlying complex social, economic and environmental challenges often focus on changing public policies, regulations, and legislation. While policy change is not the only way to improve, reform, or even transform systems, it is almost always part of a systems change effort because it has the potential to have such widespread influence and impact.

Despite the central role of policy change in social change, innovators and evaluators often struggle to be clear about what "outcomes," "results," or "impacts" mean in policy change work. This makes it difficult to plan, communicate, and evaluate their efforts.

This document describes one way to organize the planning and assessment of results of a policy change effort. It is informed by the excellent resources produced by leading-edge institutions (Center for Disease Control, Center for Evaluation Innovation, Better Evaluation), and reflects some of the thinking of the teams at Here to There and Tamarack on the topic. The framework includes the following:

- five different types or domains of results,
- generic evaluative questions for each type of result,
- illustrative methods that might be used to assess type of result, and
- one or two key resources for evaluating each type result.

The framework is just that – a framework. Advocacy groups and their evaluators always need to put together results frameworks and evaluation designs that fit their own unique context. This document can, hopefully, provide them both with a good starting point.

Five Key Outcomes

There are (at least) five distinct but inter-related results or outcomes that policy advocates want to consider as they go about their work.

Level 1: Increased Capacity

The capacity of a group to organize, implement, and adapt a short-to-long-term effort to influence a policy. This often requires teams with good research skills and reputable partners. The more capacity a group has, the more likely that it will be able to influence policy.

Level 2: Improved Conditions

The innovators success in creating the conditions necessary for a change in policy. Some typical ones include increasing the awareness of the public, key influencers and policy makers of an issue, building strong coalitions amongst stakeholders, and strengthening relationships with civil servants. Stochowiak's (2013) summarizes 10 common pathways to policy change, each with their own unique set of outcomes and measures.

Level 3: Policy Change

Advocates have an opportunity to influence the policy process at (at least) five different stages:

- the development of a policy proposal or position,
- getting a policy question placed on the policy agenda,
- the adoption/blocking of a policy proposal,
- implementation and evaluation of a policy, and
- the maintenance and upgrading of the policy.

The Harvard Family Research Project's User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning (Coffan 2009) contains a more fulsome description of each stage.

Level 4: Behaviour Change

These are the changes in the actions and practices by system actors triggered by a change in policy. These can be changes in the general public (e.g., more people wearing seat belts), the private sector (e.g., providing extra safety training to workers on construction sites), public agencies (e.g., changing bus routes to make sure kids on the far side of the district get to school on time), or the community sector (e.g., more non-profit groups employing cultural interpreters in immigrant serving programs).
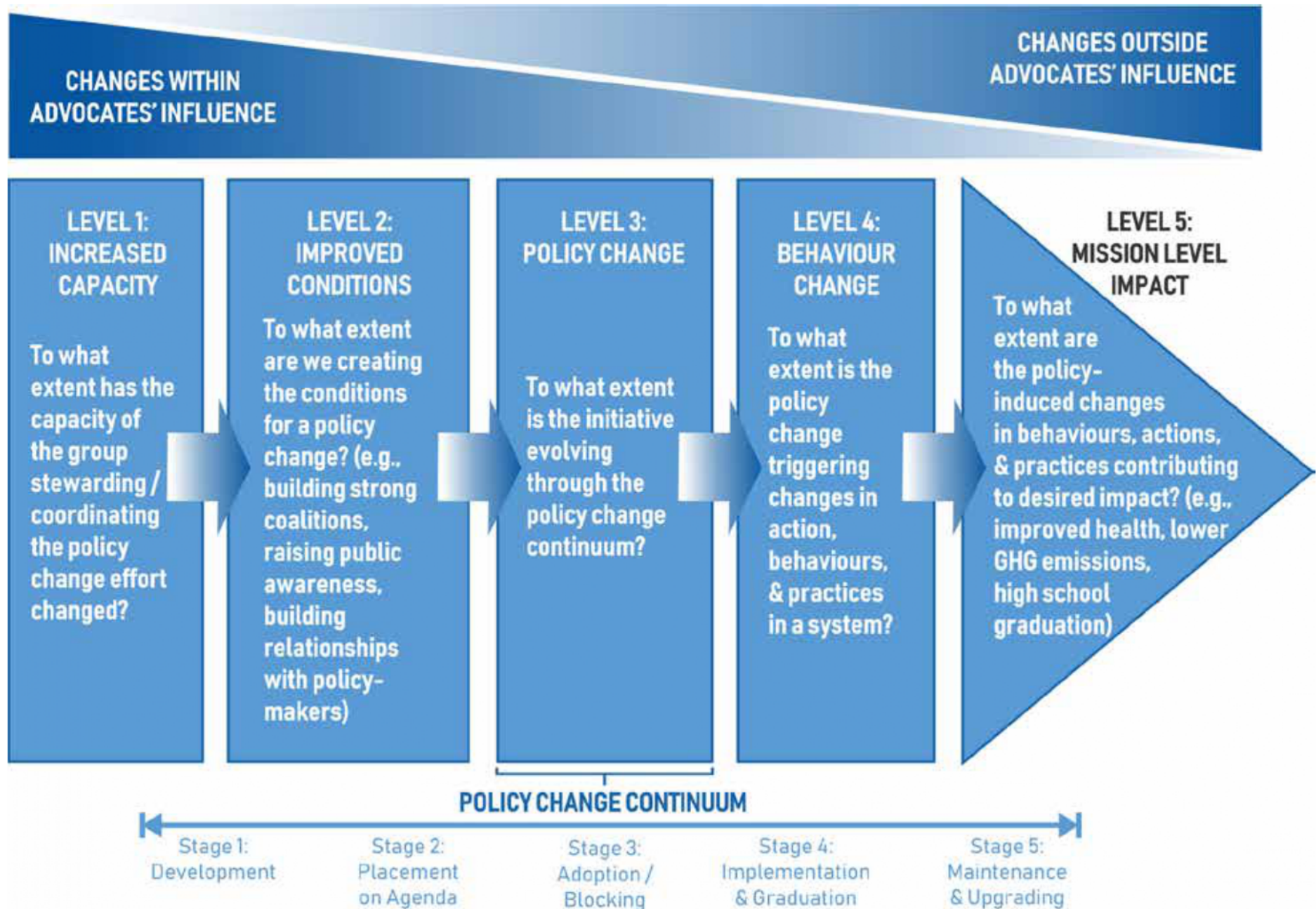
Level 5: Mission Level Impact

The tangible changes on the issue that policy advocates seek to address. These may anticipated and hoped for outcomes (e.g., improved mental health, lower GHG emissions, higher high school graduation rates) as well as unintended and/or negative consequences (e.g. a reduction in emergency room wait times is achieved, but results in poorer post-surgery patient outcomes because medical teams divert resources from post-surgery care).

While these results are presented in a sequential manner, in practice they unfold iteratively. A group begins with an initial level of capacity, makes some progress on creating the conditions for policy change, and succeeds in getting a policy changed. They then decide that they need to adjust their capacity and strategy in order to ensure that the policy is properly implemented.

Regardless of when they emerge, social innovators and evaluators will want to track their progress in all five outcomes as they judge the effectiveness of their work and decide how best to move forward.

Five Types of "Results" in Policy Change

CHANGES WITHIN ADVOCATES' INFLUENCE

CHANGES OUTSIDE ADVOCATES' INFLUENCE

LEVEL 1: INCREASED CAPACITY

To what extent has the capacity of the group stewarding / coordinating the policy change effort changed?

LEVEL 2: IMPROVED CONDITIONS

To what extent are we creating the conditions for a policy change? (e.g., building strong coalitions, raising public awareness, building relationships with policy-makers)

LEVEL 3: POLICY CHANGE

To what extent is the initiative evolving through the policy change continuum?

LEVEL 4: BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

To what extent is the policy change triggering changes in action, behaviours, & practices in a system?

LEVEL 5: MISSION LEVEL IMPACT

To what extent are the policy-induced changes in behaviours, actions, & practices contributing to desired impact? (e.g., improved health, lower GHG emissions, high school graduation)

POLICY CHANGE CONTINUUM

Stage 1: Development

Stage 2: Placement on Agenda

Stage 3: Adoption / Blocking

Stage 4: Implementation & Graduation

Stage 5: Maintenance & Upgrading

Questions, Methods and Resources

Outcome	Evaluation	Illustrative Methods	A Key Resource
Level 1: **Increased Capacity**	1. What are the strengths and limitations in our capacity to influence policy change? 2. How has our capacity changed over time? 3. What do we need to do to enhance our capacity moving forward?	**Participant Observation** Evaluator participation in advocacy meetings or events to gain first-hand experience and data. **Capacity Assessment Tools** Structured tools to assess a group's capacity in key areas.	Hoechstetter, Susan. 2011. From Assessment to Action: Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tools.
Level 2: **Improved Conditions**	1. To what extent are we making progress on the interim outcomes required to influence policy? 2. Where are making the most progress? Why? Least progress? Why? 3. What do we need to change in our strategy, implementation or capacity to make better progress?	**Stakeholder Surveys or Interviews** Print, telephone, or online questions to gather advocacy stakeholder perspective or feedback. **Focus Groups** Facilitated discussions with advocacy stakeholders (usually about 8-10 per group) to obtain their reactions, opinions, or ideas. **Media Tracking/ Media Content or Framing Analysis** Counts of an issue's coverage in the print, broadcast, or electronic media, as well as qualitative analysis of how the media write about and frame issues of interest. **Public Polling** Interviews (usually by telephone) with a random sample of advocacy stakeholders to gather data on their knowledge, attitudes or behaviours.	Coffman, Julia. 2009. A Users Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning. Stochowiak, Sarah. 2013. Pathways for Change: Ten Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts.
Level 3: **Policy Change**	1. At which stage in the process is our preferred policy? 2. What was the relative contribution of our efforts to get the policy to this stage? 3. What do we have to do to get the policy to the next stage?	**Policy-Maker Rating Scales** Gauging policy makers' level of support, influence and confidence in a policy proposal. **Bellwether Evaluation** Gauging how influential people are thinking about a policy. **Policy Tracking** Monitoring of an issue or bill's progress in the policy process.	
Level 4: **Behaviour Change**	1. To what extent did the policy trigger changes in behaviors, actions and practices in a 'system'? 2. To what extent do they changes contribute to our desired impact? 3. How deep, durable and valuable are these changes? 4. Were there any unintended consequence of the policy?	**Outcome Mapping** A systematic approach to planning and evaluating behavior changes by system actors, including policy-induced behavior change. **Outcome Harvesting** Tracking behavior changes by system actors retrospectively. **Most Significant Policy Improvement** Monitoring 'instances' of policy change with policy stakeholders.	Wilson-Grau, Ricardo. Outcome Harvesting.
Level 5: **Mission Level Impact**	1. To what extent did we see change in our impact of interest? 2. To what extent did the policy contribute to a change in the outcomes and impacts of interest? What was the influence of other contextual factors on the impact? 3. Were there any unintended consequence of the policy? 4. What was the economic impact of the policy (e.g. cost-effectiveness or benefit)?	**Contribution Analysis** Assessing the relatively contribution of a group's effort to an outcome or impact in comparison to other factors. **Randomized Controlled Trials** A sophisticated experimental approach to evaluation which compares the measurable results on one set of "subjects" with the results of groups not receiving the intervention. **Case Study** An indepth assessment of change, typically employing multiple methods.	Center for Disease Control & Prevention. Policy Evaluation: Six Briefs.

Additional Resources

The framework provides a broad outline for how to think about and assess policy change results. This section include a number of key resources referenced in the tables as well as three websites that have resources devoted solely to the topic of evaluating systems change.

References

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Three Key Websites

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/policy_influence_advocacy

http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/

https://www.cdc.gov/injury/about/evaluation.html

What we Know So Far is a series of documents that summarize some of the latest thinking or developments in the field of social innovation and community change. This particular document was developed in cooperation with Tamarack Institute as part of its efforts to build capacity for community change makers.

http://here2there.ca/

http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/