

Considering Evaluation:

Thoughts for Social Change and Movement-Building Groups



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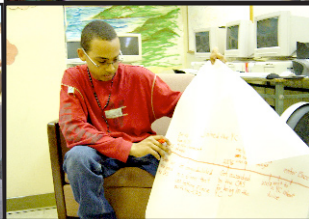


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About This Booklet

The aim of this guide is to present an easy-to-use resource for evaluation and assessments of social justice, social change and movement building work. It is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to evaluation, but rather goal is to share some of our tools, resources, and lessons learned in this area. This booklet is intended for practitioners working to build organizations, organize networks, alliances and movement building projects.

This report was originally part of a larger document, “Process is Powerful: Planning and Evaluation for Media Activists”, produced by the Center for International Media Action (CIMA). (Available here <http://mediaactioncenter.org/node/1433/>).

Given this, many of the examples and case studies come from work done in the Media Reform/Media Justice fields, however the lessons and models are applicable more broadly.



Reflections for social change and movement-building groups

The following sections are offered as a resource to social justice and social change groups interested in pursuing evaluation as a tool for building a more reflective, learning organization and using strong, knowledge-based advocacy and change strategies.

Part one (why): contains some background on the role of evaluation in social change work, and the opportunities provided through the use of evaluation itself as a strategy for achieving social justice.

Part two (how): provides an outline of concrete key features of social justice evaluation, to be used as a map to help groups develop their own approach.

Part three (tools): is an evaluation toolkit, with worksheets that you can use to develop an evaluation framework for your group or project

Some general thoughts on evaluation...

- ⇒ Understanding long-term goals and what interim steps are needed to get there is a key foundation for evaluating a project. We need to set measurable outcomes along the way that will lead towards longer-term goals.
- ⇒ Developing a Theory of Change or other strategic framework and logic as part of the planning is a way of building in evaluation from the beginning. As action research, this enables us to learn as we are moving, and not just in retrospect when a project is completed.
- ⇒ Being realistic about a group's capacity is key for setting objectives, though not always easy to predict, so it's important to check in about this at the beginning, but then revisit as the project develops.
- ⇒ Assessments and recommendations are most valuable when they can be incorporated into the planning and implementation of ongoing projects. To achieve this, produce useful project input early and do interim evaluations.

Suggestions:

- ⇒ Build in feedback and evaluation loops before, throughout and after projects. Include evaluation steps in project timelines.
- ⇒ Plan for and don't skip an evaluation stage after the initial activities of a project and one at the end of the first phase of work or completion of the project/event.
- ⇒ Realize that we may need to push back to funders when their outcome/evaluation measures don't meet ours or the groups we work with.
- ⇒ For major projects or events, let participants know they will be re-contacted after some time has passed for reflective assessment on whether and how the project/event was useful. Be sure to in fact do this follow-up.

PART ONE (Why): Evaluation and Social Justice

Often in a nonprofit and social justice context, “evaluation” may bring to mind bean-counters and power relationships in which those who control the resources get to decide if those who are doing the work are being cost-effective enough to be allowed to continue.

“Social justice,” on the other hand, usually implies transparency and fairness. It certainly assumes value has a more lofty measure than some numbers in a chart.

So, there is an apparent disconnect between the concept of evaluation and the concept of social justice. To those who have reconciled the two concepts, there remain **challenges in practice**, including:

- Determining goals for a social justice movement that can be achieved in the near future and within the current generation.
- Identifying smaller scale and detectable changes that are important and necessary for the ultimate social justice goal.
- Attributing outcomes to particular strategies and interventions – this is probably the biggest problem. Given the complexity of social justice work, if the intended improvements are in fact obtained, how can we know what strategies, actions or groups are responsible?

These just scratch the surface of practical problems in evaluating social justice movements and outcomes. However, although these challenges are serious, social justice movements and their effectiveness can be, and need to be, assessed.

There are no perfect solutions, but **the important thing is to be able to measure progress towards social justice goals**, not simply the end in itself. If social justice goals are met, they will, perhaps ironically, be easy to measure and evaluate – they will, by their very nature, be observable to all.

Before delving into the practical and conceptual steps to evaluating social justice, it is important to recognize that we cannot take the definition of social justice for granted. What it looks like to one may be the complete opposite of what it looks like to others, even if we all agree with abstract ideas of fairness, freedom, or opportunity.

It is surprising how difficult it is to assess whether progress towards social justice is being made if you lack a precise definition of what you are trying to achieve.

How does evaluation offer options for enhancing social justice?

There are two ways to think about evaluation of social justice work. One is to construct an evaluation that adds knowledge to the effort by measuring whether goals are met and strategies are working.

Another way is to think about the evaluation itself as enhancing the social justice effort. If done in ways that are participatory, include sharing knowledge and power, and help clarify what it takes to succeed, then evaluation becomes one more strategy that can change relationships of power and social inequity.

Some Benefits of Doing Evaluation in a Social Justice Context

Need for Critical Thinking and Analysis

While social change organizations are often very aware of the limitations of “traditional” approaches to evaluation, they may also feel frustrated with their inability to measure progress, capture success, and have their work benefit from a rigorous analytical process.

As one executive director recently told us, “I’m tired of people saying movement building work is too long-term and impossible to measure. I feel like it’s an excuse and I think we need to be accountable, to know if we’re making progress.”

Developing a Movement Knowledge Strategy

When evaluation is approached as a learning opportunity for an organization, it provides critical opportunities to develop a “knowledge strategy.” Knowledge is a critical piece of any social change strategy, and evaluation can be an opportunity to build organizations, collaborations, and strategies in a number of important ways.

Evaluation provides:

- An opportunity for groups to clarify and articulate for themselves how change happens.
- A much-needed space for reflection as a basis for strategic action.
- A system for tracking, measuring, and accounting for progress.
- A process for gathering and analyzing the key knowledge needed to inform planning.
- An opportunity to involve staff and other key stakeholders in a way that reflects social justice values.

“Analysis of real-life organizing experience is a vital source of new knowledge and ideas about social change processes. Talking about ideas and producing analysis together is action that produces social change: facilitating a conversation among a group of people about what change they seek and how they plan to achieve it is in itself a social change strategy.”

~ Molly Reilly, from “An Agenda for Change in the USA” (see resources section)

Documentation of New Models

Those of us involved in social change often feel there is little time for reflection and documentation of our learning, strategies, and models. The process of evaluation offers an important opportunity to document and disseminate information that can both inform other groups’ work and help make a case to funders and others about the nature and value of grassroots organizing and other social justice strategies. This documentation can include research and reporting on the work of other organizations as well, which can be used to inform and substantiate our own projects and campaigns.

Making the Case for Organizing and Movement-Building

A recent report by the Women’s Funding Network, “Measuring Social Change Investments,” formalized for funders what organizers already know: that social change investment needs to focus on a broader spectrum of efforts, beyond those that aim to directly affect public policy. The report found that change at the community level is important in driving what happens legislatively, and that the interplay between cultural shifts in the public sphere and action at the institutional level is core to the what makes change possible. As one long-term study of water policy-making found, focusing evaluation on shorter-term outcomes missed completely “the truly important results of these [collaborative] processes, including the building of social and political capital, the learning and change, the development of high quality information, new and innovative ideas, new institutions and practices that are adaptive and flexible, and the cascade of changes in attitudes, behaviors and actions.” (Sarah Connick and Judith E. Innes)

Developing evaluations to measure social justice progress on our own terms can help document and demonstrate the importance of community-based and movement-building work.

Evaluation Imposed from the Outside

Grassroots and social change nonprofits and foundations in the US often find evaluation an irrelevant task imposed upon them by funding agencies, and at best a task they know can be useful but are unsure how to pursue in a way that is appropriate for their strategies and values. This can be especially true for groups using movement-building and organizing approaches to achieve social justice goals.

In this context, evaluation is perceived often as a burdensome task unrelated to the core work of the organization, and even potentially harmful by pushing for inappropriate and ineffective “logic models” and “outcomes.” In addition, the pressure to state accomplishments and outcomes when seeking funding may even create divisiveness when groups are put in a position to claim “attribution” instead of “contribution” to social change work, which is by its nature a collective process.

The typical approach to evaluation, particularly in cases where the evaluator or evaluation process is beholden to a funder, can be problematic for a number of reasons:

- there is often an inherent power imbalance, with external evaluators coming in to assess the worth or merit of a program, and controlling the findings and final reporting;
- an external process is unlikely to be internalized by the organization;
- the building of organizational capacity and strategy requires an internal capacity to evaluate, analyze and reflect deeply on work, something more likely to be built through a collaborative or participatory approach to evaluation.

A Focus on Short-Term Gains Over Movement-Building

When evaluation is not grounded in a working conceptual model that includes the power relationships and changes in attitude, knowledge, and behavior that are needed for large-scale social change, then assessments may be driven by technical, apolitical thinking that affects the selection of evaluation goals and indicators of progress. In these cases, immediate policy impact is often prioritized, rather than the process and relationship-oriented goals that movement-building history and experience tell us are critical for sustainable social change.

While assessing advocacy work is an ongoing challenge and focus of much discussion by funders and evaluators alike, the dominant model for counting “success” still tends to be focused on constituency mobilization and short-term policy gains, generally orchestrated by professional national advocates, rather than ‘movement-building’ approaches which view short-term policy gains as just one strategy, along with broader efforts to build leadership infrastructure, collective power and citizen-centered efforts.

A change strategy of building critical consciousness and active citizenship through engaging people in analysis of issues and context and envisioning solutions requires a different sort of measurement and assessment. Rather than trying to fit social justice groups into a typical evaluation model, it can be much more powerful for groups to become involved in re-defining how evaluation works, in partnership with evaluators who share an understanding of social justice.

PART TWO (How): Key features of evaluation for social justice

The problems of evaluating long-term changes are not unknown. Several foundations have produced excellent papers on evaluation of policy and social change. Practitioners and activists have collaborated on evaluation, bringing key lessons to light.

Some key principles that have been outlined in these works:

1. The critical importance of knowing what social change is desired and having a plausible plan to achieve it. Then, evaluation tests whether or not the plan was executed as planned and if it worked as intended. In *The Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities: Strategies for a Prospective Evaluation Approach*, by Guthrie, Louie, David and Foster (2005), written for The California Endowment, the authors call this “prospective” evaluation:

“...a prospective evaluation sets out goals for a project at the outset and measures how well the project is moving toward those goals throughout the project’s life. Unlike retrospective evaluation, prospective evaluation can help a funder monitor the progress of a grant and allow the grantee to use evaluation information to make improvements in its program as the program is in progress. Like retrospective evaluation, prospective evaluation is useful for looking at efforts at the grantee, initiative or program level.”

2. The necessity of being clear and specific about long-term outcomes. You can’t plan to reach an outcome if you don’t really know what you mean; you can’t evaluate if you’ve achieved a goal without being clear about what the goal is.
3. Evaluation should model social justice principles by being transparent and democratic, with ownership of the research questions and methods by as many stakeholders as is practical.

Evaluation Lessons

- Know your goal and have a clear plan
- Be clear and specific about projected long-term outcomes
- Model social justice principles: be transparent, democratic, and attentive to power dynamics and the role of those most vulnerable and typically excluded

Essentials of Evaluation of Social Justice Initiatives

- Transparency
- Participation
- Explicitness of power relationships
- Conceptual framework (A Theory of Change)
- Ownership of the questions and the means
- Good working partnership with evaluators with research expertise; being open to bringing in people knowledgeable in any area that will help with the work

RECOMMENDATIONS

Frame evaluation as a tool for change

By redefining evaluation with an emphasis on the process of group learning we can deemphasize the sense of being “judged.” Evaluation can be seen as a way to facilitate thinking, provide data needed for planning, and help a group become a learning organization.

Plan when and how to use findings

Social justice groups generally feel that the worth of an evaluation is directly proportional to its ability to inform and strengthen their ongoing practice. Given this, it's essential to define from the beginning exactly when and how findings will be used, and plan for this in timelines. For example, findings might be used as the basis for an upcoming planning workshop or for a strategy discussion with partners, as well as for fundraising.

Consider how to build evaluation capacity with limited resources

Evaluation can be resource- and time-intensive. While the ideal situation might certainly be to have adequate funds dedicated to evaluation, we know that this isn't always the case. Even when it is, there is the risk that an evaluation team is brought in, delivers a report which then perhaps is incorporated into fundraising materials, but spends most of its time collecting dust on a shelf. We feel the goal for social justice organizations needs to be building internal capacity to evaluate and reflect.

⇒ **Make time for reflection:** This isn't a luxury, but an important social change strategy. It's essential to find time and space to bring staff and stakeholders together to ask:

- What worked best last year (or with a specific program)?
- What changes did we see?
- Why do we think we were effective?
- What didn't work so well?
- Why?
- What lessons are there to be learned, and what can we do differently?

This process might be best facilitated from the outside, but it's not mandatory. Documentation is important, though, so future conversations can be informed by this work.

⇒ **Get help with the plan:** Even if a group can't (or doesn't want to) hire an evaluator, an outside consultant can help set up an assessment and learning process. If not an evaluation consultant, a graduate student with some training or an ally from another group with evaluation experience might be a resource to help an organization develop a plan for internal data collection, analysis, discussion, and reporting.

An appropriate and relevant approach usually combines:

- Articulating a framework that establishes shared assumptions about how change happens.
- Defining the change you would like to see over the longer term, the steps you are taking to achieve changes, and the signs (indicators) that you are making progress.
- Looking for patterns of effectiveness and value as they emerge, and then incorporating them into the change model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Define success

An approach we have found effective is having a consultant or evaluator facilitate a process where groups self-define and articulate what they believe needs to happen to reach their larger goals, and then have them use their own standards (rather than ones imposed from the outside) to establish progress and accountability measures. The planning tools on p. 12 can help with this.

Participatory Evaluation: Include key people

Participation in evaluation is important for a number of reasons. First, including the perspectives of both those doing the work and those they aim to serve is essential for a democratic, social justice approach. Second, we know that research and analysis is strongest and most relevant when informed by a variety of viewpoints and perspectives.

Bringing in different perspectives is especially important in evaluating collaborative efforts and initiatives.

Participatory evaluation in this context means both centralizing the priorities and perspectives of the constituencies most affected and also integrating differing perspectives, values, and opinions.

A participatory evaluation may have staff, project participants, community members, and other stakeholders involved at several different stages:

1. Defining the purpose of the evaluation: What are the questions that participants want answered? How will the evaluation be used?
2. Articulating what “success” and “effectiveness” looks like from different perspectives, and what is needed to get there.
3. Helping determine and give feedback on the design of the evaluation.
4. Assisting with data collection
5. Participating in data analysis
6. Collaborating on final reporting
7. Determining how findings should be integrated into organizational planning and decision-making.

*As Lisa Veneklasen
and Valerie Miller
remind us,*

“Participation is
empowering only when
those who participate
make decisions and
choices.”

(from *A New Weave of
Power, People & Politics:
The Action Guide for
Advocacy and Citizen
Participation*)

Note

Including participants such as allies and community members in an evaluation process needs to be attentive to both the impositions on their time and also how to make it a worthwhile and valuable experience. This can be helped by providing both a learning opportunity in methods and tools, and also a means of giving people more of a shared leadership position.

Opportunities to shape the evaluation questions, define success, analyze the learning, and decide what to do with the findings can bring people into a more powerful role related to the work.

Evaluation Case Study: Participants Assess An Exploratory Program

The project: Evaluate a pilot program in progress: assess the new “Knowledge Exchange” program – bringing together community organizers and national advocates – in order to shape the development of this project and learn from it for future work.

The team: The program was a collaboration of Consumers Union and the Media Justice Fund of the Funding Exchange, which hired CIMA to do the assessment.

The challenge: The program was exploratory, planners didn’t know what the exact outcomes would be, and the goals were long-term and hard to measure (e.g.: improved relationships, a stronger media-change movement).

The Knowledge Exchange was developed by the Media Justice Fund of the Funding Exchange and Consumers Union as an experiment in bringing together DC-based national media policy advocates and local grassroots media organizers from around the country to share knowledge and build relationships. The pilot program was conducted in three rounds, a week-long meeting in the fall, another in the spring and again in the summer.

Because this was an exploratory program, CIMA developed a “learning assessment” that was based on listening to and reflecting back the participants’ experiences, rather than setting up a series of indicators and outcomes in advance and then seeking to measure if the program achieved those specific targets.

Surveys and interviews after each round were used to generate concrete recommendations for the evolving program and related future projects. The assessment was considered “formative,” in that the evaluation of each round of activities was used to improve the following round, and then there was a final assessment that looked at emerging outcomes from the model. The evaluator didn’t attend or observe the program activities, but rather played a role of synthesizing feedback, noting opportunities for improvement, highlighting patterns of effectiveness in the initiative, and making recommendations based on participant insights. Given the diverse backgrounds and change theories of the participants, developing an integrated assessment enabled CIMA to present both individual perspectives and common themes, to reflect back the questions that the planners and participants discussed and debated among themselves.

Time limitations

Often one of the biggest challenges of participatory processes is the reality of time limitations in writing up ideas, giving input, reviewing documents, and so on. While a facilitated discussion among all participants often might be ideal, time and resource constraints can make this difficult. What often works, and was the case in the Knowledge Exchange Assessment, is having the evaluator collect input from participants in a variety of ways that fit their availability (online surveys, phone interviews and email), then develop a draft that is then circulated for their review before a final draft is completed.

Dealing with power imbalances

Power imbalances can often be an obstacle in participatory processes, and so it’s important to consider this when structuring the process. The Knowledge Exchange involved national professional advocates, a funder, and grassroots organizers, so there were definitely issues of power that needed to be dealt with. The evaluator shared the draft with the grassroots organizers prior to sending to the advocates, so that the grassroots point of view was then formally established by their signing off on the document, prior to the national advocates having a chance to do the same.

Discovering outcomes

In this program the outcomes were “emergent” – that is, we learned through the assessment what to look for as indicators of success. As the program evolved, we looked for evidence of shifts in how grassroots organizers and national advocates understood the intricacies and dynamics of each other’s work. We also looked at the impact beyond the program, at the development of relationships and collaboration between local and national groups, shifts in resource allocation from national to local groups, and changes in decision-making in coalitions and projects.

For more about the Knowledge Exchange program, visit the Media Justice Fund at www.fex.org/mjfl.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop and document your theory of how change happens

As described in the section on planning (see p.12), developing a Theory of Change can be especially valuable for grassroots and social justice organizations – the thinking, conversations, and analysis that go into this work can themselves be considered a social change strategy.

Just as evaluation is most powerful when it is closely integrated with planning, developing a Theory of Change can be an indispensable foundation for evaluation. In an evaluation context, a Theory of Change process is particularly useful to:

- Help an organization or participants in an initiative or collaborative think about and define what they are trying to achieve.
- Establish the framework for the evaluation by helping to define what important questions need to be answered, why, and what information will help to answer them.
- Document how change happens, and how to share these new models and thinking.

A cautionary note

A full Theory of Change process, as often undertaken by foundations or larger, well-funded projects, can often be quite time and resource intensive. It often involves a degree of understanding and articulation of the broader forces at work, beyond the direct sphere of influence, leaving participants with more questions than answers. While we feel this work is essential, we've found that a Theory of Change "lite" is often the best approach. In this case a facilitator takes participants through a process where they identify:

1. the big changes they are working towards in the long-term (such as more equitable distribution of and access to resources)
2. what they are doing to reach these goals and why they believe these strategies will be effective
3. what they will see along the way that will let them know they are making progress.

See page 16 for more on developing a Theory of Change

Identify indicators of progress

When profound social change is the ultimate goal, it can be a challenge to pinpoint what the interim stages look like. A number of theories have looked to the conditions that history tells us likely need to be in place for the often serendipitous outcomes to be achieved. Building capacity for change can include:

- Political education of communities.
- Alliance building: increasing number of partners, levels of collaboration, breadth/diversity of partnership, improvements in alignment efforts.
- Increased levels of participation in decision-making.
- Informing, educating policy-makers.
- Building constituencies.
- Building and strengthening relationships with decision-makers.
- Skills built in navigating complex, judicial, legislative related-processes.
- Increased organizational capacity, including sharpened strategies, management abilities.
- Shift in social norms – aligning advocacy and policy goals with core social values and behaviors. Includes changes in awareness of an issue, problem definition, change in beliefs, attitudes, values, priorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dialogue with funders/donors

Funders are often unsure how to approach evaluation. They may press groups into a certain approach as they are unaware of other options to ensure accountability for their grantmaking. Quite often, a funder understands that evaluation is most effective when it is a learning tool, but it may be unclear what this looks like. Groups can work to establish a conversation about evaluation, which both recognizes and supports the needs of the grantmaker within the foundation, as well as meets the needs of the practitioner group. Groups can present a proposal to the funder, which includes accountability mechanisms (such as oversight and final reporting from an outside evaluator), along with the evaluation goals that the organization feels are important. Another effective strategy might be to partner with an ally evaluator and put together a proposal for evaluation, with the expectation that if funding is received, that evaluator would then work with the organization.

Use new models

There are some situations, such as choosing an external evaluator, drawing on existing publications as resources, or seeking funding for an evaluation program, where you may want to identify a particular evaluation method.

Note that much of the research on evaluation comes out of an academic framework or from within the funder world, and can be fairly technical and jargonistic. If you are looking into current forms of evaluation, here's some of the language you might encounter: "Complexity thinking" and "Systems change" frameworks look at such things as the creation of "social and political capital," innovation, building of relationships and networks, changes in attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Through a systems framework, an evaluation aims to capture effectiveness and value that arises from interventions, with the assumption that these outcomes might be much different than what was initially imagined. "Developmental evaluation" focuses on capturing what emerges from a program or initiative and feeding these findings back into the evolving initiative. "Outcome mapping" was developed to evaluate complex, collaborative development initiatives; it allows for capturing change happening in a direct sphere of influence.

Core Factors

In our experience, there are **three core factors** that contribute to the usefulness of evaluation for strengthening organizations and advancing a social change agenda:

1. when the evaluation is integrated with, and helps advance, political approaches to achieving social justice ends
2. effectiveness in analyzing and capturing change occurring in a complex environment
3. the ability of participants to insist on, and accept, the bad news with the good, to appreciate the importance of critique in learning

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation as a collaboration: The roles of “inside” and “outside” evaluators

Evaluations have traditionally been broken up into “insider” or “outsider” assessments, with each approach having its pros and cons. Insider evaluations, conducted by a group itself, benefit from an intimate understanding of the issues, dynamics, change theories, and values of the organizations or initiatives to be examined, and can help build internal evaluation and reflection capacity. An evaluation where staff and key stakeholders are actively engaged can help participants learn about the program, develop critical, evaluative thinking, and creates buy-in to the evaluation, increasing the likelihood that results will actually be used.

However, insiders may be less likely to question basic assumptions, and those evaluating from within the group may be – or may be perceived to be – more susceptible to bias. For an evaluation to provide the most relevant, pertinent information the process must be rigorous to a degree where “bad news” can be delivered and tough questions asked.

An outside evaluation can often bring a more objective lens, although an outside evaluator won’t necessarily share the values or theories of the organization. There is a risk that outside evaluators have a very different perspective on the value and impact of particular outcomes, as well as a different sense of how the values of the organization/initiative need to be integrated in the evaluation approach.

An external evaluator can often elicit feedback from staff, stakeholders, and constituents and other key informants in a way that might be difficult for an insider to do. Especially if it is determined that the findings will be anonymous, this process can provide important feedback.

We’ve found that a combined “insider-outsider” approach can be effective. These are often referred to as collaborative, participatory, empowerment, learning-oriented, or appreciative inquiry forms of evaluation. While these approaches differ slightly in the level of control ceded to the evaluator, they share in viewing the evaluator as a facilitator who creates a process and environment for learning and assessment. Overall, a collaborative evaluation approach tends to emphasize the use of findings for decision-making and action.

Ultimately, decisions about who will be involved in the evaluation, to what degree, and the balance of work between the evaluator and the rest of the evaluation team depends much on the purpose of the evaluation. For example, if the evaluation will be used for external accountability, as defined by a funder, than the evaluator might need to have a more dominant role. We recommend clarifying this in advance with the funder, to ensure that the process maintains the benefits of more participatory approaches.

Evaluation Case Study: An Inside-Outside Evaluation Team

The project: Evaluate the “Necessary Knowledge for a Democratic Public Sphere” (NK) program as a model of building activist-academic collaboration in order to understand and disseminate successful strategies and raise funds and support for this type of work

The team: The NK program was produced by the Social Science Research Council in collaboration with CIMA. As part of the core planning staff for the program, CIMA served as the internal evaluators, partnering with the social-change research organization ActKnowledge as the external evaluators.

The challenge: How to build-in evaluation as part of the program operations, but maintain objectivity so we could effectively learn what was and wasn't working, including the unexpected.

See the case study of the planning process for the NK program on p. 9

The Necessary Knowledge for a Democratic Public Sphere program was created to bring to together activists and academics to advance political change agendas involving the media and communications system. The evaluation, which was incorporated from the beginning as part of the program design phase, used an insider-outsider approach. In an “outsider” role, evaluators from ActKnowledge facilitated the project's theory of change process and provided oversight for the design of the evaluation and analysis of findings. The insider evaluation role played by CIMA was important in ensuring the findings were considered in planning and decision-making, while ActKnowledge as an outsider helped ensure rigor and guarded against bias.

A number of times we have found that doing research on effective practices of other organizations is valuable both for sharpening program strategies as well as clarifying and supporting evaluation frameworks. In this developmental evaluation – meaning that the evaluation was actively informing program development – an understanding of what value and impact other programs had experienced helped provide some indication of what evaluators should look for in their own assessment.

The Necessary Knowledge program ultimately aims at complex systems change, with the top level outcome in the Theory of Change stated as “a more open, participatory, informed public sphere.” In this case, program designers and evaluators were not testing a firm change theory, as much as seeing what emerged from the interactions between scholars, activists, and program staff. Some of the indicators included changes in learning and strategy formation within the activist organizations, as well as shifts in academic understanding of how social change happens, and what is needed to contribute to activist work.

To read more about the strategies, outcomes and evaluation data from the Necessary Knowledge program, see the reports at mediaresearchhub.ssrc.org/grants

PART THREE (Tools): Activities and Worksheets

The Resources section at the end of this guide lists several online and offline toolkits for evaluation and planning.

The “So That” Chain

In *A Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage In “Making Connections” Communities*, the Annie E. Casey Foundation offers the “so that” chain for grantees as a tool to building their conceptual model.

A “so that” chain can be a useful exercise to more explicitly show the short-, intermediate-, and long-term changes that will lead to lasting change. It is a tool for describing a strategy and how it links systemic change to positive impacts in people’s lives.

The concept can be used in a workshop or discussion setting, in a facilitated process, or among a group trying to articulate the logic of their plans.

Once a group describes a “so that” chain, it can be used as the basis for additional questions, such as WHY participants are sure one thing will lead to another and what the FACTORS are that can make that outcome more or less likely. It can also be a starting place to look for indicators, that is, how will the group know when a particular stage has been achieved.

A SAMPLE “SO THAT” CHAIN

We will (activity or strategy here):

Increase media coverage about the amount of money low-income families and individuals pay for cable and internet access and the implications of what happens when they have reduced access.

So That

Public awareness of this issue increases. [Influence Outcome]

So That

Policy-makers increase their knowledge of and interest in this issue. [Influence Outcome]

So That

Policies change to create options for cable and broadband more affordable rates. [Influence Outcome]

So That

New business models and requirements for industry are developed to provide more affordable TV and internet services. [Influence Outcome]

So That

Individuals and families have increased ability to make affordable choices for access to content and communication networks. [Impact Outcome]

So That

Low-income individuals and families are able to have full access to educational, informational, communication, and cultural benefits of the internet, the government, and other services that are increasingly online.

A Toolkit for Building Evaluation Capacity

This toolkit was prepared for an evaluation workshop that CIMA produced for media and communications activists and scholars, as part of the Necessary Knowledge Workshop on Collaborative Research and Advocacy in 2007. It was developed by Catherine Borgman-Arboleda for CIMA, with contributions from Felicia Sullivan and Dorothy Kidd. Graphic design by Marianna Trofimova.

This toolkit can be used for groups to conduct their own simple evaluation workshop, and as an aid to articulating and measuring change goals. The toolkit contains the following:

1. A brief guide to using the toolkit
2. Handout: "Impact on Our Terms"
3. Worksheets A & B: blank templates to write your "change map"
4. Worksheets C, D, E: examples

A Brief Guide to Using the Evaluation Toolkit:

I. A FEW QUICK POINTS ABOUT EVALUATION: (you can put the headings up on the board or easel)

⇒ WHEN DO YOU EVALUATE?

While evaluation usually happens at the end of a project, we've found that developing a change theory/evaluation framework is important to do at the beginning of a project, as a core part of strategic planning. This helps make sure all participants are on the same page about what the project aims to achieve and how you'll get there. Early thinking about evaluation helps surface assumptions that may or may not be shared, and ensures that you're able to set up processes for data collection early.

⇒ This process can also help you lay out your funding proposals; it's the kind of thinking that funders are looking for.

⇒ THINKING ABOUT EVALUATION AS A LEARNING/PLANNING TOOL

We wanted to point out the differences in how you might think about approaching evaluation. In the past, evaluation has often been seen as an outside "judgment" on how well or poorly something is doing. When working on complex social/structural change initiatives, we'd encourage you to think about this work as an assessment (or learning evaluation) that looks at measuring for the purpose of improving, rather than proving, and focuses on learning and building knowledge that can strengthen overall advocacy and organizing efforts.

⇒ CONTRIBUTION VS. ATTRIBUTION

Another important point: Look at contribution rather than attribution. You are interested in making systemic change, and this will be multidimensional rather than linear; so think in terms of contribution, rather than taking individual credit for change.

⇒ TAKE CONTROL:

Establish your own hypotheses about how change happens and the role your organization or project will play (rather than having funders do this for you, for example). This Theory of Change approach demonstrates how your strategies map to the outcomes you want to achieve, and why – i.e., what the underlying assumptions are.

⇒ There are ways to think about claiming/defining the impact of media projects that go beyond traditional metrics that are often imposed from the outside.

⇒ See the handout "Impact On Our Terms"

2. USING THE WORKSHEETS:

(Worksheets A & B are to be filled in; C, D, and E are for references and examples)

- ⇒ **Worksheet A:** this is where you will be recording your own change maps. The other pages are examples to help you fill this out.
- ⇒ **Outcome statements:** concrete measurable outcomes that you are trying to achieve, on the path to longer-term change goals.
 - Worksheet C has examples of types of change goals, and then examples of specific outcome statements.
- ⇒ **Strategies:** what you are actually doing to achieve your outcomes
- ⇒ **Assumptions:** why you think your strategies will lead to your outcome statements. What theories, evidence, research can you cite to back up your hypotheses?
 - Worksheet D has examples of outcome statements, strategies, and assumptions.
- ⇒ **Indicators:** what you will actually observe to let you know you are making progress towards your outcomes
 - Worksheet E shows examples of outcomes and indicators.
- ⇒ **Worksheet B:**
 - ⇒ Here you record your outcome statements, your indicators of progress (what you will actually be able to observe that will let you know you are making progress towards your outcomes) and data you will collect.
 - **Data collection:** Here you describe what information you will be collecting to track progress on indicators. This could be either qualitative (interviews, observations) or quantitative (number of people attending a meeting, new members, etc.), or a combination of both quantitative and qualitative measures.
- ⇒ **Worksheet C:**
 - ⇒ An example set of “change goals” – the types of change that groups have mentioned wanting to achieve, each mapped to examples of specific outcome statements or concrete, measurable outcomes that projects might aim to achieve.
- ⇒ **Worksheet D:**
 - ⇒ An example of how outcome statements (concrete, measurable) are grounded in strategies and the assumptions behind those strategies – such as: Why do you think your strategies will lead to your change goals? What theories, evidence, etc. can you cite to back up your hypotheses?
- ⇒ **Worksheet E:**
 - ⇒ An example of how outcome statements map to indicators: what you will actually observe to let you know you are making progress towards your outcome statements.

Impact on Our Own Terms

(a brief start to turn thinking around)

Often we are pressured to demonstrate impact in a manner that has been defined in the context of commercial and corporate media. Some of the traditional ways of measuring media impact are:

- ⇒ Number of viewers / listeners / readers / hits
- ⇒ Revenue from sponsorship / underwriting / advertising
- ⇒ Quality of the production
- ⇒ Amount of coverage in the mainstream press

Yet those of us working in non-commercial, community or alternative media don't always view these impacts as the most important. International development projects (i.e. UNESCO's Community Multimedia Center Programme) view successful media and communication projects as serving to alleviate poverty or providing greater social inclusion. New efforts around citizen journalism look to the level at which underserved communities, local voices, and civic dialogues are present. Many community-based media projects (i.e. youth media, ethnic media) seek to transform and empower the communities they work in. Here are alternative ways in which media impact can be measured:

Individual Impacts

- ⇒ Number of people who have been trained to create their own media
- ⇒ Increase in individual self-esteem and confidence about skills and abilities
- ⇒ Freedom of expression and creative expression
- ⇒ Improved outlook on future
- ⇒ Improved sense of well-being and belonging
- ⇒ Breaks down individual isolation
- ⇒ Helps individual participate in social or collective project
- ⇒ Increases media content (representation) of individual narratives of under-served and marginalized communities that are seldom represented
- ⇒ Increases skills in practices of deliberative and participatory democracy
- ⇒ Improves capacity to withstand other social problems, for eg. youth vis a vis addiction to drugs, risk of HIV, etc.

Organizational Impacts

- ⇒ Increase in the number of people who access the organization's resources
- ⇒ Improved communication tools
- ⇒ Stronger understanding of organizational mission (internally / externally)
- ⇒ New partnerships and collaborations
- ⇒ Stronger awareness amongst constituencies / stakeholders about key issues important to the organization
- ⇒ Increases media content (representation) of narratives of under-served and marginalized communities
- ⇒ Increase processes of democracy, ie media, of collective intelligence and participation by under-served and marginalized communities

Community Impacts

- ⇒ Number of groups who came together to work on a project
- ⇒ New connections formed between groups
- ⇒ Increase in volunteer efforts
- ⇒ New community-wide dialogues and debates
- ⇒ Increased awareness about important community-wide issues / problems
- ⇒ New means of sharing knowledge for a common purpose (techniques, issues, etc.)
- ⇒ Representation of counter public spheres raises new issues, and new perspectives about conditions, experiences, critiques and remedies (alternative policies) of particular populations which then circulate for social change
- ⇒ Lessons about alternative remedies (ie. practical case studies) which make practice more effective
- ⇒ All this adds to the creation of democratic alternatives

There are many, many more ways in which impact can and is reworked to meet the needs of our communities.

Compiled by Felicia Sullivan and Dorothy Kidd

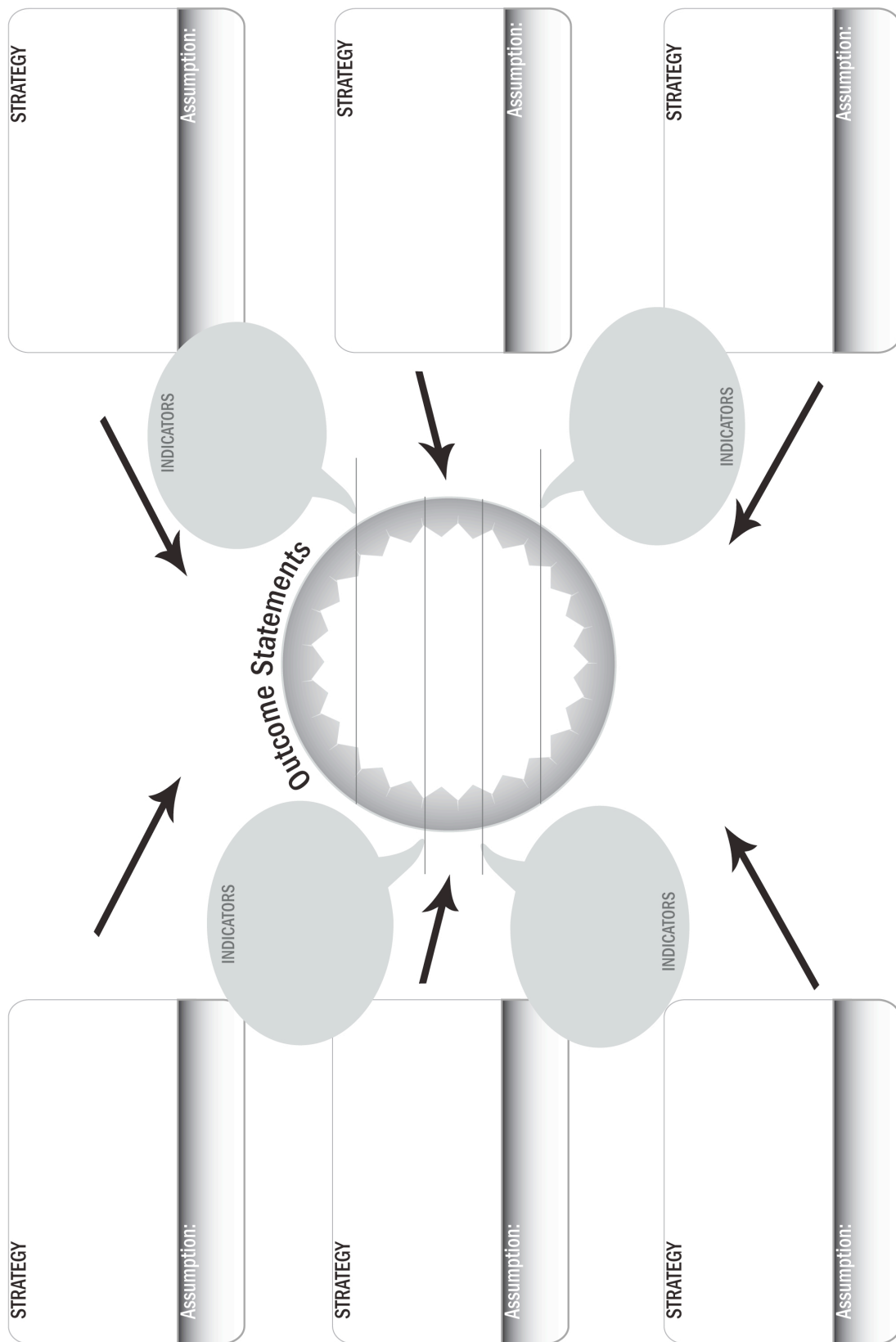
Evaluation Toolkit

Worksheet A

Or, how is the world going to be different because your research exists, and how will you know?

WORKSHEET A

















Project Name



Or, how is the world going to be different because your research exists, and how will you know?

WORKSHEET B

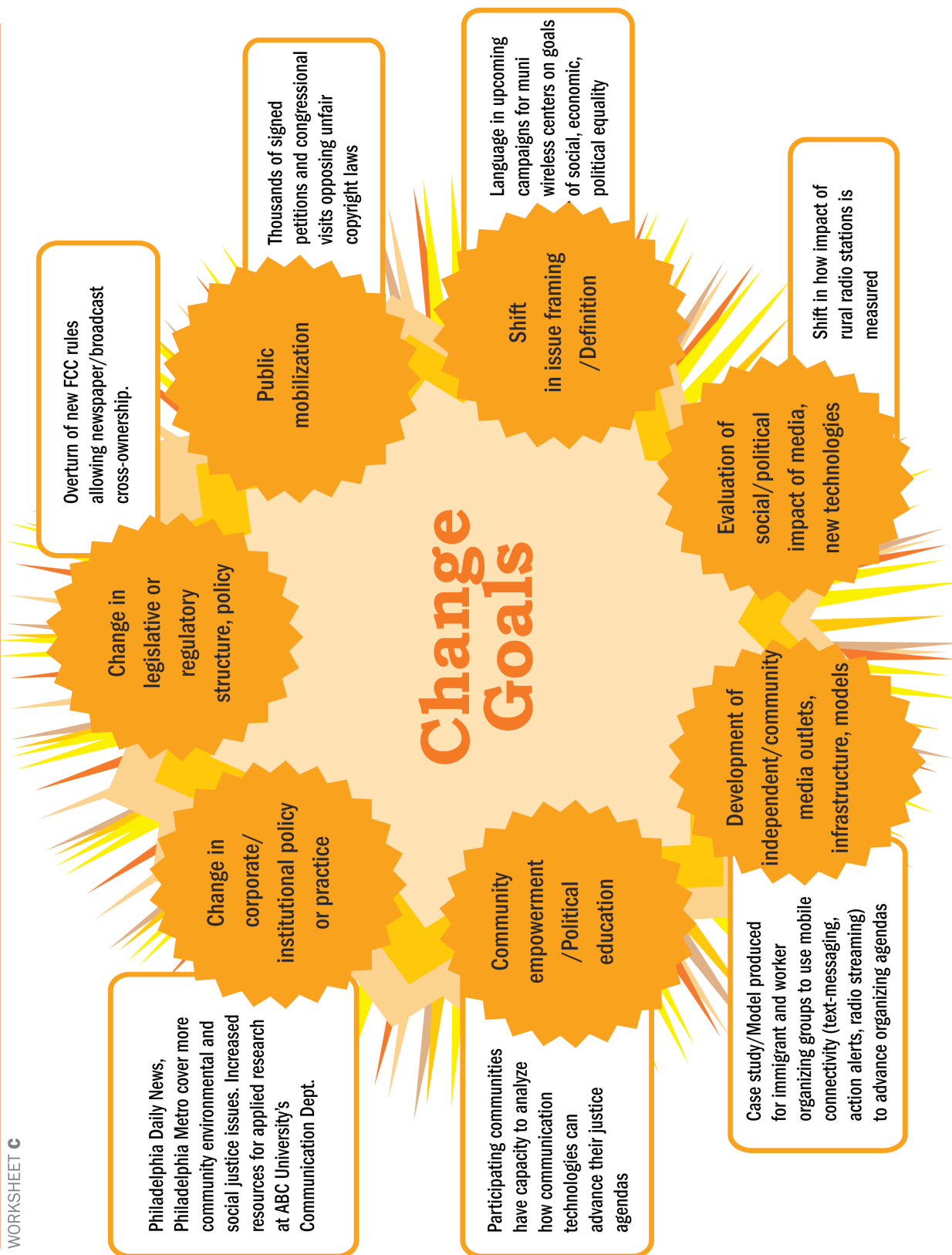
Project Name

Outcome Statements	Indicators What will be observable?	Data Collection What information do you need to get?
		
		
		
		
		
		
		
		

Change goals are examples of the types of change that grantees have mentioned wanting to achieve.

In orange are examples of **specific outcome statements** or concrete, *measurable* outcomes that projects might aim to achieve.

WORKSHEET C

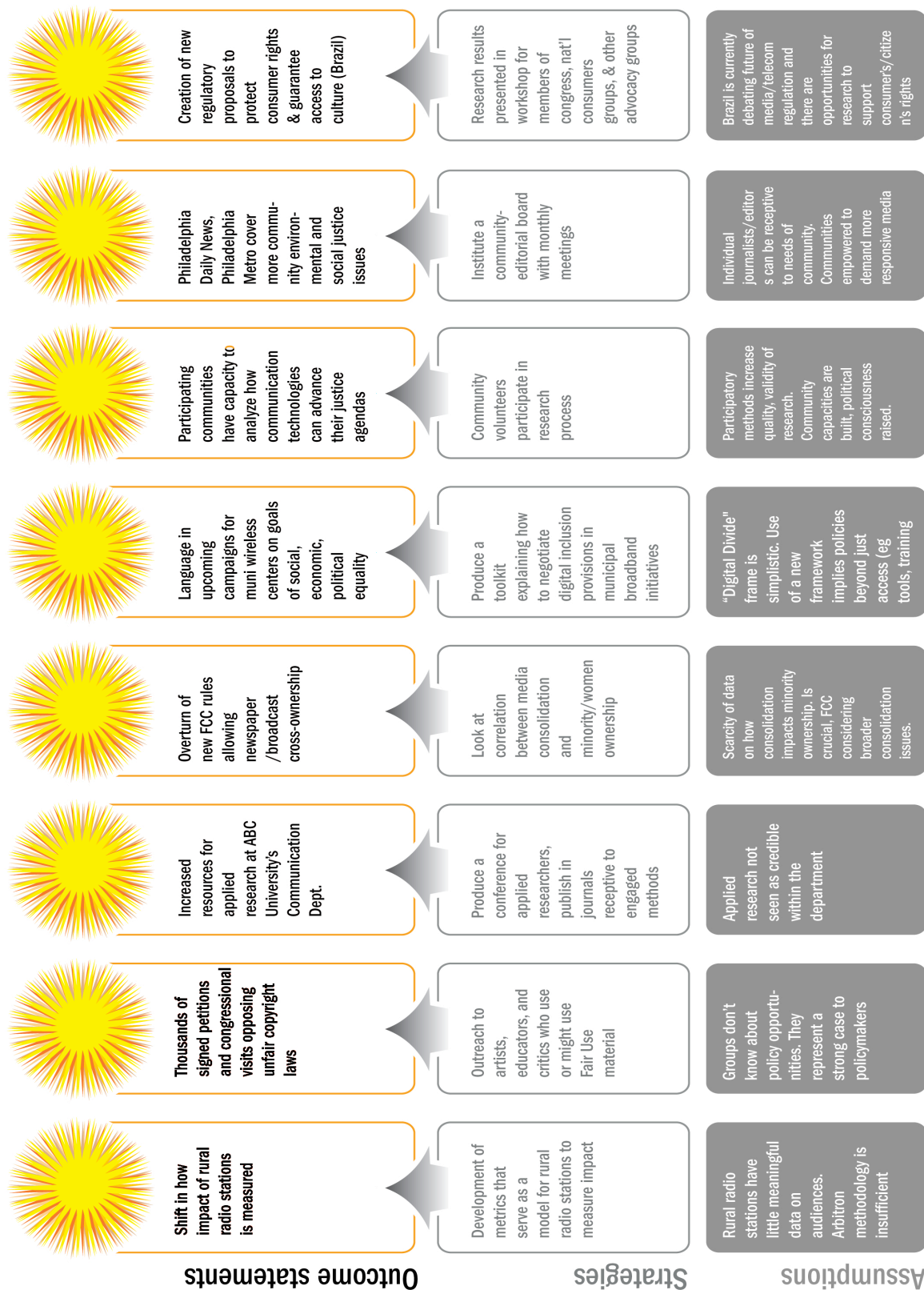


Outcome statements ~ Concrete, measurable outcomes that work aims for, on the way to larger change goals

Strategies ~ What you are actually doing to achieve your outcomes

Assumptions ~ Why do you think your strategies will lead to your change goals? What theories, evidence, etc. can you cite to back up your hypotheses?

WORKSHEET D



Evaluation Toolkit

Worksheet E

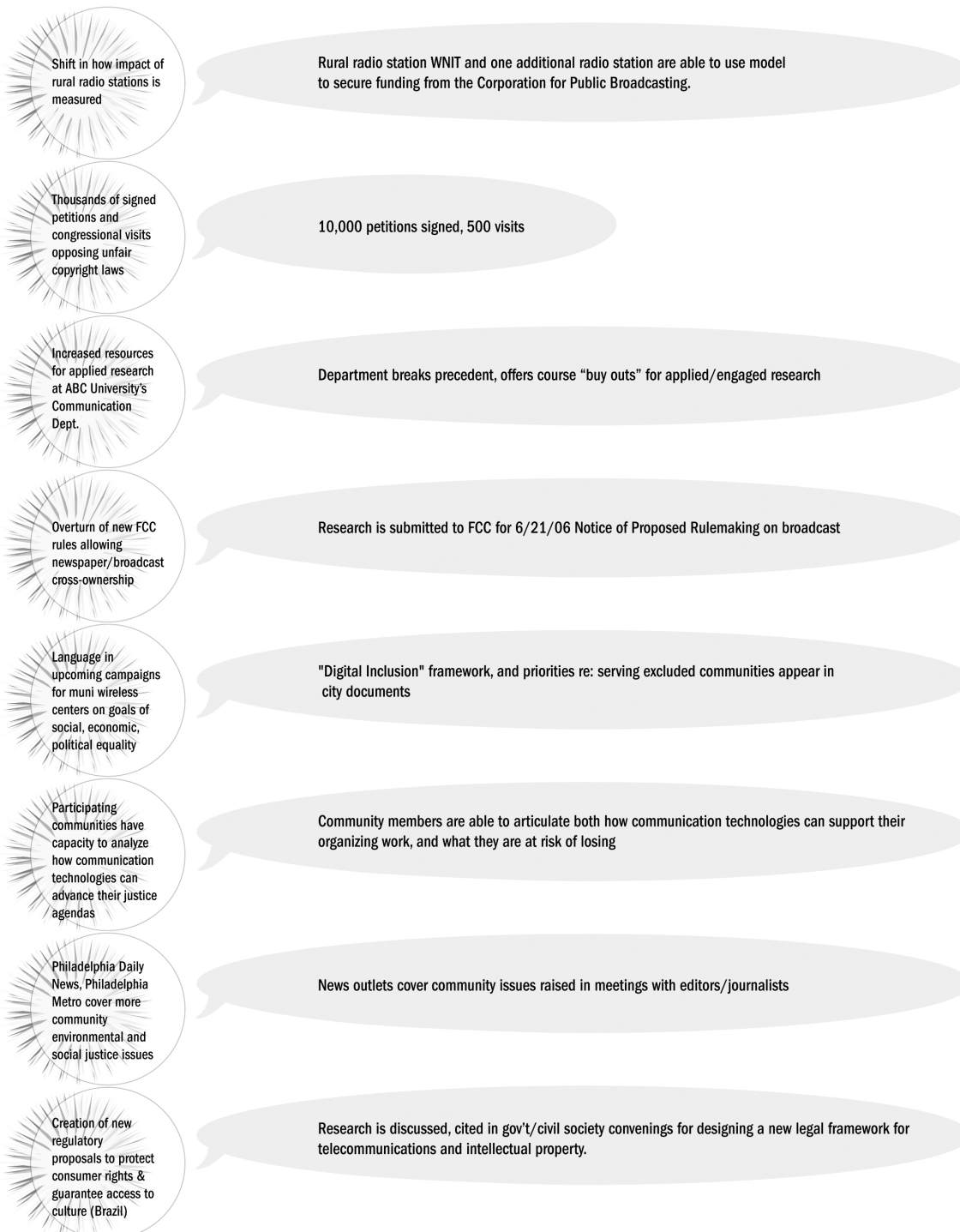
Outcome statements ~ Concrete, measurable outcomes that work aims for, on the way to larger change goals

Indicators ~ What you will actually observe to let you know you are making progress towards your outcome statements

WORKSHEET E

Outcome statements

Indicators



Resources

(this is just a partial list, these can lead you to many other excellent tools, readings and groups)

Planning & Evaluation Tools for Social Justice Work

Building collaborative strategic plans and collective power:

(all available free online except where otherwise noted)

“A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation,” guidebook on power & movement-building, from Just Associates

www.justassociates.org/ActionGuide.htm (some chapters online, book is worth buying)

“Counting Our Victories: Popular Education and Organizing,”

training guide and video for grassroots groups, from Repeal the Deal Productions

www.transformcommunities.org/resources/counting_vic.html (book and video to purchase)

“PowerTools: A Manual for Organizations Fighting for Justice,”

comprehensive social-change toolkit, from Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education

www.scopela.org to find out more (contact SCOPE to order the manual and CD-ROM kit)

“Re:Imagining Change – An Introduction to Story-based Strategy”

a manual for using stories to define struggles and shape campaigns, from SmartMeme

www.smartmeme.org/change (order the book, or download – for a donation if you can)

Strategy tools for collaborative planning, from the Community Problem-Solving Project at MIT

web.mit.edu/cpsproject/strategy_tools.html

Tools for planning and designing an advocacy campaign, from The Change Agency

www.thechangeagency.org/01_cms/details.asp?ID=57

Workshop activities for developing a strategy and strategic thinking, from Training for Change

www.trainingforchange.org/content/section/4/39/index.html#29

Coalition-building checklists, tools for facilitation, vision and more, from Hollyhock Leadership Institution

www.hollyhockleadership.org/resources

Comprehensive online toolkit - including planning, facilitation and evaluation, from Community Toolbox

ctb.ku.edu/en/dothework

An organized library of tools and links to resources, from the Center for Collaborative Planning

www.connectccp.org/resources/

Power Mapping: a tool for utilizing networks and relationships, from Idealist

www.idealists.org/ioc/learn/curriculum/pdf/Power-Mapping.pdf

Logic models, theory of change and evaluation guides and tools

An online visual “logic model” for planning advocacy and policy change, from Continuous Progress
www.planning.continuousprogress.org

Tools for assessment, building logic models and evaluation plans, from Innovation Network
www.innonet.org (free online tools with registration)

“The Community Builder’s Approach to Theory of Change,” from the Aspen Roundtable and ActKnowledge
theoryofchange.org/pdf/TOC_fac_guide.pdf (book free to download)

“Outcome Mapping” Toolkit (including karaoke!), from International Development Research Center
www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26586-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html (online guide and tools)

Advocacy Evaluation Toolkit from the Alliance for Social Justice
www.advocacyevaluation.org (tools for purchase by nonprofits or foundations)

“A Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage In ‘Making Connections’ Communities,”
from the Annie E. Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/cc2977k439.pdf (free)

“A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy,” from the Annie E. Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/DA3622H5000.pdf (free)

Groups Offering Training & Facilitation (U.S. based)

The authors of this guide may be available for consulting and facilitation in planning and evaluation, or can recommend others. All of us are familiar with Theory of Change work.

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Catherine Borgman-Arboleda (evaluation & research): cborgman.arboleda@gmail.com

Helène Clark (evaluation & research): hclark@actknowledge.org

Strategy development and movement-building workshops, consulting & facilitation:

Center for Collaborative Planning (California) - www.connectccp.org

Grassroots Policy Project (national) - www.grassrootspolicy.org

Movement Strategy Center (national) - www.movementstrategy.org
(also has a network of consultants and can provide recommendations)

Praxis Project (national) - www.thepraxisproject.org/

Project South (US South) - www.projectsouth.org

Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (California/national) - www.scopela.org

Theory of Change workshops, consulting & facilitation:

ActKnowledge, a New York City-based Social enterprise that connects social change with a rigorous study of how and why initiatives work - www.actknowledge.com

(also has trained TOC consultants and can provide recommendations)

Racial Equity Theory of Change training & facilitation:

Aspen Roundtable on Community Change (national) - www.aspenroundtable.org

Training in facilitation & how to facilitate strategy work:

Training for Change (US and Canada) - www.trainingforchange.org

Articles on Evaluation

Research articles on advocacy evaluation from Innovation Network

http://www.innonet.org/?section_id=3&content_id=601

Who Measures Change?: An Introduction to Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation of Communication for Social Change, from Communication For Social Change Consortium

www.communicationforsocialchange.org/pdf/who_measures_change.pdf

Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study, from Action Aid

www.actionaid.org/assets/pdf/Scoping%20advocacy%20paper%202001.pdf

Measuring Success: What's New, What's Next?, slide presentation from Just Associates

www.justassociates.org/index_files/ES_M&M.pdf

Making Change Happen: Concepts for Revisioning Power for Justice Equality and Peace, from Just Associates

www.justassociates.org/index_files/MCH3red.pdf

An Agenda For Change in the USA: Insights From a Conversation About Assessing Social Change in Washington, DC, from Just Associates

www.justassociates.org/index_files/agendaforchange.pdf

Outcomes of Collaborative Water Policy-Making: Applying Complexity Thinking to Evaluation, by Sarah Connick and Judith E. Innes

repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1017&context=iurd

Strengthening Social Change Through Assessment and Organizational Learning, from the Community Learning Project

comm-org.wisc.edu/papers2005/mott.htm

Evaluation of the oppressed: A social justice approach to program evaluation, by Mohamed Ismail Ibrahim

scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI3078693/

Measuring Social Change Investments, from the Women's Funding Network

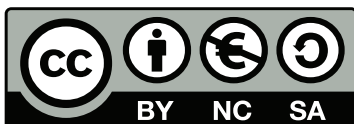
www.wfnet.org/resource/white-paper/measuring-social-change-investments

Books on Evaluation

Catsambas, Tessie Tzavaras & Preskill, Hallie. (2006) Reframing Evaluation Through Appreciative Inquiry. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications.

Patton, Michael Quinn. (2008). Utilization-Focused Evaluation, 4th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications.

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