

Not Always Movements

Multiple Approaches to Advance Large-Scale Social Change

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Introduction

It is part of the human condition to want to share our experiences with our fellow beings. In the past, this happened through postcards, slideshows, and letters. In the modern day, it means posting selfies on social media: photos that document our visits to amazing places and the interesting and novel things we do. But there's a risky side to the latest way of sharing our lives with others and our quests to get compelling shots that will garner attention in the noisy social media-sphere. An NPR story headlined "Hundreds Have Died in Selfie-Related Deaths Since 2011" noted this phenomenon and described the steps that state and federal parks, the Forest Service, and outdoor recreational organizations have been taking to reduce the risks: selfie warnings, safe selfie pledges, safe selfie brochures, safe selfie zones, and safe selfie days—an array of different approaches intended to raise awareness and change behaviors so people don't take

unnecessary risk and cause themselves harm. And then, during the NPR interview on this topic, the speaker mentioned how these efforts are all trying to "get people engaged in the *movement*."¹

A safe selfie *movement*? Driven by rangers and outdoor recreation organizations and agencies?

Maybe you've noticed it too. The term *movement* is increasingly being used to describe a wide variety of efforts intended to drive positive social change. For example, there's a group that seeks to build a movement of greater generosity by supporting and promoting nationwide giving days so that everyday people can support nonprofits and causes they care about and have an antidote to days more focused on materialism and consumerism, such as Black Friday or Cyber Monday.² Another laudable goal, but is it really a movement?

We believe there is value in the social sector being more crisp and accurate in the way funders, evaluators, and other social change agents talk about and understand their work: how they think change will happen and the expected sequence of changes on the way to a goal. And we think misuse of movement terminology leads to particular harms that can and should be avoided.

What's this brief about?

We believe there is value in the social sector being more crisp and accurate in the way funders, evaluators, and other social change agents talk about and understand their work: how they think change will happen and the expected sequence of changes on the way to a goal. And we think misuse of movement terminology leads to particular harms that can and should be avoided.

To that end, this brief compares and contrasts three large-scale social change approaches that we think can be conflated with movement language:

+ Field building;

+ Network development; and

+ Promoting uptake of practices by organizations.

These approaches for large-scale change have their own histories, theories of change, and distinctions and we believe clarifying these differences will promote better understanding and implementation of strategy, and better learning. For each social change approach, we provide definitions, key underlying theory, primary characteristics, and outcomes. We also explore ways that these approaches have overlaps, as well as thoughts on how philanthropy can consider their role and power

– even within approaches that don't explicitly address power. Finally, we present some key thoughts about learning and tracking progress.

In addition to providing an overview of how approaches compare and contrast, [we've created stand-alone pieces](#) with more details about each of the three social change approaches. These pieces outline key theories and frameworks, relevant strategies and outcomes, considerations regarding equity, and guidance on measurement and learning. We hope this information will help you to engage more deeply in content regarding approaches that are most relevant to your work.³

If you're engaged in social change work, we believe being clearer about how you think change will happen helps you and others to: better understand whether, how, and to what extent your efforts are yielding results; assess the external context and how it's evolving; and determine what needs to be adjusted to do better along the way. We hope that more clearly distinguishing between movements, fields, networks, large scale uptake, and intentionally contemplating power and learning in complex adaptive systems will make this more likely.

Note from the authors: throughout this piece, we seek to provide simple, straightforward information to help you better differentiate between social change approaches to achieve greater impact. At the same time, we acknowledge we are not and cannot be purveyors of neutral information. We believe all of us in the social sector need to do better and do more to seek equity and avoid harm to currently and historically marginalized people and places. You may notice that throughout this piece we provide a point of view about ways we think these aims can be better achieved. It is impossible to be neutral when it comes to power and equity, and our writing reflects this belief.

Why Should Social Movements be Distinct?

Unless an effort is long-term, driven by the priorities of the communities most affected by an issue, and seeks to realize fundamental changes in power and society, then it's probably not a movement.

To differentiate social change approaches from movements, we must first be clear about how we define social movements.

Many of us grew up learning about and being inspired by examples of movements and “people power.” There’s something undeniably profound and inspirational about ordinary people banding together and demanding large-scale change that fundamentally reshapes society. However, when we hear about so many different (fundamentally good and worthwhile) efforts being referred to as movements, we can’t help but pause.

Defining movements can be tricky, as movements can vary in their goals and scope: who or what the movement is hoping to change as well as the extent of change being sought.⁴ However, the description of movements offered by Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz has been commonly referenced by many who are currently engaged with social change strategies. Per Pastor and Ortiz, movements are “*sustained groupings that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, that maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and*

that build for a long-term transformation in power.”⁵ This description highlights some important and defining aspects of social movements, including the following:

- + **Long-term, sustained efforts**
- + **Deeply embedded in community and community priorities⁶**
- + **Building toward changes in power**
- + **Seeking transformational change, such as shifts in power, civic institutions, governance, or the social status quo; achieved and sustained through institutionalization of policies, programs, or projects and resources⁷**

Let’s go back to the safe selfie movement example. It doesn’t appear to be an effort that is long term. It sounds as though it is driven by organizations who care about their communities but not from the community itself, and it seeks to create individual behavior change rather than realize fundamental changes in power or society. It’s important to help people be safe and make good decisions, but this valuable effort certainly does not reflect the characteristics of a movement, as identified above.

Why is Movement Conflation Happening?

It's not surprising that "movement" ideas and language are of the moment. We think that the current usage of the term signals a variety of different intents and reasons. Examples include the following:

- + **Desire for different power dynamics:** current critiques of philanthropy and the degree to which the social sector is critically examining its complicity with white supremacy and systemic inequities mean that when philanthropic strategies are identified as *movements*, it could help to signal a different stance regarding traditional funder–grantee power dynamics or funders' relationships with communities.
- + **Desire for big goals:** we've observed that the term *movement* is used to describe any strategy aiming to do something big or achieve a large-scale, viral-type impact.
- + **Keeping up with the philanthropic field:** in a sector that's been known to wed itself to and promote certain-of-the-moment ideas or concepts, referring to efforts as *movements* may be a shrewd or naïve way to garner internal resources or strategy approval. This may be especially true because the idea of *movements* has a certain broad appeal and thus may be viewed as a valued, legitimate way to go about achieving ambitious aims.

We suspect movement is being used by philanthropy and others as a sort of short-hand term for any number of different types of efforts aimed at achieving broad social goals. In most cases, philanthropic staff may not really know what *movements* are and how they differ from other social change approaches.

Similarly, there are overlaps between social movements and other types of social change efforts which add to the confusion.

Different Social Change Approaches May Operate in Alignment Toward Similar Goals: Funders may support related efforts that help advance movement goals without funding a movement strategy, per se. Take, for example, climate change. There are many avenues for funders to advance goals related to slowing climate change—for example, by investing in "green" jobs, research, advocacy, or the uptake of "greener" practices by individuals or industries. All of these investments

might in some way reflect the goals of the Sunrise Movement, an "*an army of young people [working] to make climate change an urgent priority across America, end the corrupting influence of fossil fuel executives on our politics, and elect leaders who stand up for the health and wellbeing of all people.*"⁸ Yet, while funders addressing climate change may share the goals of the Sunrise Movement, their investments may not necessarily link to nor explicitly support that movement.

Social Change Efforts May Evolve Over Time: The intent and focus of social change efforts may evolve as they are implemented, and this evolution could ultimately spur or give rise to a movement. For example, an investment in leadership and advocacy for Boys and Men of Color helped to foster a broader network of hundreds of community-based organizations. As these organizations came together and the network grew and got stronger, external circumstances were changing as concerns about racial injustice were elevated nationally. The network evolved into a collective endeavor to advance racial and gender justice by transforming policies that are failing boys and men of color and their families, and creating communities full of opportunity. Under the umbrella of the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, organizations are now unified in their aims to shift and build power. By working across issues and communities, the Alliance seeks to create a stronger movement for racial and gender justice.⁹ The movement arose as both the external context and the network evolved. This type of evolution to movement may happen as individual stakeholders implementing a certain social change approach realize there is opportunity to challenge the status quo and seek broader, transformative social change. Movements may also "spin off" from discrete social change efforts supported by philanthropy, such as a racial justice movement spinning off efforts to promote the widespread uptake of restorative justice practices in prisons. In any of these evolutions, it's critical for funders and practitioners to be mindful of the risk of movement capture or gentrification—that is, the risk that a movement's leadership and decision-making shifts away from the people who are affected.

Why Does It Matter?

Some would say none of this matters and that worrying about whether certain efforts are truly movements or not over-intellectualizes social change work and privileges white dominant culture traits, like precision, either/or thinking, or objectivity.¹⁰ However, we think that if the term *movement* is misapplied, the potential for harm happens in two main ways:

1. **Risk of “capture” or “gentrification” of movements**, and
2. **Risk of misalignment** among those working toward social change.

Risk of Capture and Gentrification of Movements

Movements may be captured by philanthropy or other investors if funders mistakenly direct movements, through their support and priorities, as discrete strategies toward their own missions and aims rather than provide supports for movements that are primarily rooted in community priorities and grassroots power. In an example shared via a 2019 interview, Megan Ming Francis pointed to a foundation’s support of the NAACP’s civil rights strategies to illustrate how a funder, though well intentioned, can “capture a social movement and, in so doing, steer grassroots organizations and activists away from their original missions.”¹¹ In this case, the funder redirected organizations toward equity and education and in doing so, away from anti-lynching efforts. This well-intentioned effort by funders redirected time, energy, and attention from the NAACP’s priorities around ending mob violence toward people of color as the organization focused more exclusively on school segregation. While important systemic advances were made at that time through the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, these came at a cost.

Lives continued to be lost due to lynching, and black children who integrated white schools faced negative racial dynamics that went unaddressed. As Francis told Kelsey Piper of Vox, “I’m concerned that sometimes even with the best of intentions, the priorities of the poorest and marginalized get replaced by the priorities of the rich and powerful.”¹²

When neighborhoods that have been traditionally made up of communities of color because of policies like redlining get displaced as more materially well-off white people decide these neighborhoods are desirable, it’s called gentrification. Movements started by and for people of color can face similar gentrification. Funders and organizations who seek to engage with movements may get involved in these efforts without understanding the long-standing efforts of social justice organizations and what a community’s priorities really are. Desires to add new innovations, fund larger, often white-led intermediaries, or “go to scale” can disrupt and denigrate long-term efforts undertaken by people of color and miss the important reciprocal relationship between the ends and means of movement building. As shared by Vanessa Daniel in a blog on movement gentrification: “These movement gentrifiers [well-funded, white-led organizations entering these movement efforts] are essentially telling funders, ‘Everything that people of color-led organizations can do, we can do it better and . . . at scale. So don’t fund them. Fund us!’”¹³

When funders or other organizations jump into social movements with their own priorities, strategies, or leadership, they often displace community priorities and leadership by people of color. We would argue that using the term *movement* for social change approaches

It’s critical for funders and practitioners to be mindful of the risk of movement capture or gentrification—that is, the risk that a movement’s leadership and decision-making shifts away from the people who are affected.

that don't fully reflect movement characteristics can have similar repercussions. Calling efforts to protect people taking selfies a movement, for example, demonstrates appropriation of a term intended to be community owned and driven by those who seek to fundamentally change power dynamics. This exemplifies what Edgar Villanueva labels "colonizing behavior";¹⁴ if movements are captured or the term is misunderstood or misapplied—particularly in a philanthropic context—it has real implications for communities and the achievement of their goals. We also worry that overuse of the term could lead funders to later see movements as a passé approach, resulting in the risk of decreased support for important movement-building strategies. This could also have negative implications for communities that are working hard to pursue transformative change.

Risk of Misalignment

When funders and grantees have different understandings about movements, each risk facing impediments to advancing their desired goals. Lack of alignment across organizations can lead to confusion and disappointment but also to inefficiency, poor outcome progress, or the risk of movement capture. Imagine this scenario:

+ A nonprofit wants to organize low-wage workers and hears a local funder is interested in supporting movements. *The nonprofit spends precious time away from their organizing work to write a grant proposal consistent with their interpretation of the funder's intent. Their proposal asks for funding to cover staff time required to facilitate and support convenings of affected individuals so as to identify workers' common issues and concerns and a set of priorities on which to demand action. The grant would give the organization more bandwidth to provide adequate support to the community leaders helping to facilitate these conversations with a diverse group of workers. Funds sought could help the organization cover costs such as meeting room rentals and food, childcare, and transportation costs for those participating in the organizing effort. Funds could even support necessary self-care for some of the community leaders—for example, health or mental health services or support to address immigration status issues, thus ensuring that these individuals can continue to lead effectively.*

+ The local funder has publicly said they care about movements, though what this means to them is that they want to support organizations able to leverage their community connections and mobilize constituents around a core issue of concern. *While mobilizing and organizing low-wage workers would be a way of broadening and strengthening a coalition of concerned citizens, the foundation isn't specifically interested in the nonprofit's policy agenda. And the local funder's grants restrict how project funds can be used. For example, the funder couldn't justify use of grant money to support individual community members with their personal needs.*

If the grant isn't awarded, the nonprofit has lost time and resources in preparing a proposal that really didn't have a chance of being funded, in part because of fundamental differences in the understanding of what movement means. For the nonprofit, the lost time spent on a proposal may chip at or even significantly hamper its ability to fully implement its work. And if the funder and the nonprofit conceive of movements differently, there is a risk that even if the grant is awarded, the foundation might prioritize its own strategic interests ahead or instead of those that emerge from the affected workers or make grant funding contingent on the nonprofit implementing its efforts with the funder's priorities at the fore rather than workers' priorities, leading to potential movement capture.

Either way, misalignment about what is meant by a movement means the two groups are not on the same page. If nonprofits and funders think differently about the purpose and intent of grant funding, it is likely to lead to frustrations when nonprofits invest time pursuing funding that really is not of joint interest. And if program officers and other foundation staff aren't clear about what they are (or are not) doing, they can't adequately test their assumptions, assess their progress, make smart funding decisions, partner well with grantees and others in the field, or critically examine how they are thinking about power. Thus, misalignment or lack of clarity could reduce the potency of strategies and the potential for positive impact. And if foundation staff are not aligned around what it means to invest in a movement—either internally or with grantees—they risk accidentally leaning into harmful practices where grantees can become subject to movement capture.

Philanthropy and Movements

Movements can be powerful collective mechanisms for social change, and the quest for transformational change is inspirational, especially amid historic and contemporary racial and economic injustice, growing inequity, and unsettled politics. Besides the previously mentioned challenges regarding movement gentrification, capture, or colonization, we see other risks with heavy philanthropic reliance on social movements for strategy.

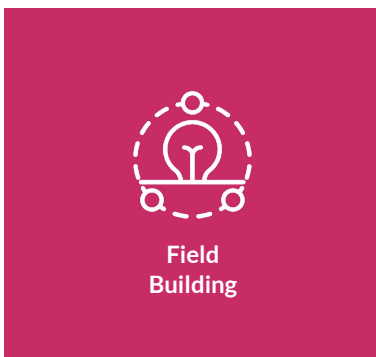
We're not arguing that philanthropy shouldn't support or engage in movements; there are certainly examples of successful philanthropic support for movements.¹⁵ That said, **we think there is room for greater intellectual honesty about when social movements are a cultural fit and what it means for funders to support this work**—and especially for funders to consider the ways in which the power relationships and expectations should be different when they support movements as a way of advancing their own goals versus when they support other types of strategic approaches.¹⁶

Results-focused strategic philanthropy orientation¹⁷—at least how it has typically been implemented—is particularly ill-suited for social movements because strategic philanthropy implicitly places the power to set goals and determine the best course to pursue them in the hands of the funder. Engagement with social movements requires that funders rethink how they decide on and pursue their goals and strategies. The democratic, grassroots nature of social movements requires large philanthropy to collectively and critically examine what Robert Reich has called their “plutocratic voice” and their exercise of power.¹⁸ Per the nature of social movements, foundations should not define movement outcomes or strategies; movement aims should be defined by affected communities based on their priorities. Funders also may not, inherently, “start” a movement; they can seed the ground, but, by definition, movement building must happen by and for those most affected by the issue. For some funders, the culture clash may be too great to appropriately cede control and power to avoid negative impacts like movement gentrification and capture.

However, there are meaningful ways for philanthropic funders to support movements. For example, foundations could usefully direct investments to support a community's capacity to develop and pursue high-priority, high-influence, or timely strategies or outcomes. For example, we know of one funder that supports intersectional movement leaders through flexible funding that may be utilized to cover costs associated with therapy, ensuring that leaders' mental health is not adversely affected by emotionally taxing organizing work; legal support so that the mostly immigrant leaders are better able to continue their work without disruptions related to addressing immigration status concerns; and salary support to give them organizational “homes” through which to work. **The bottom line is that to successfully engage in movements, funders must be willing and able to adjust and/or align their own goals with those of communities and find ways of supporting movements that avoid movement capture and gentrification.**¹⁹

Differentiating Between Social Change Approaches

We believe there is value in being more crisp and accurate in the way those in the social sector — funders, evaluators, and other social change agents — talk about and understand their work: specifically, how they think change will happen and the expected sequence of changes on the way to a goal. **In this section, we compare and contrast three large-scale social change approaches that we think can get conflated with movements:**



There are many ways to work toward the visions of change that exist in the social sector, and different actors bring different resources, values, strengths, and perspectives about how best to address current challenges and inequities—all of which are important. These approaches

for large-scale change have their own histories, theories of change, and distinctions that we want to lift up to promote better understanding and implementation of strategy, and better learning.

Definitions and Characteristics

Field building, network development/support, and the uptake and spread of organizational practices are all multidisciplinary, require multiple actors, and seek catalytic and broad social change. All of them could even work toward the same overarching goal (e.g., all children ready for school). However, the approaches also differ in important ways: specifically, each is associated with *meaningfully different underlying*

theories of change – that is, core activities, assumptions, and outcomes, for achieving their ultimate goals. As previously noted, these differences have important implications regarding the relevant strategies, actions, and tactics for each approach; stakeholders' roles and relationships; and the types or sequence of changes that would lead to ultimate goals. Table 1, following, provides an overview of the distinct features of each social change approach.

Table 1 – Social Change Approaches and Their Distinguishing Features



	Social Movement Support	Field Building	Network Development/ Support	Uptake of Practices by Organizations
Definition	<p>Movements are: “sustained [collective efforts] that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, that maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and that build for a long-term transformation in power”²⁰</p>	<p>A field is: “a community of organizations and individuals working together to solve a common set of problems, develop a common body of theory and knowledge, or advance and apply common practices”²¹</p>	<p>A network is: “a group of individuals or organizations connected through meaningful relationships, that have space for self organization and that leverage new technologies for visualization, connection, and collective action.”²² In the social change space, networks “provide the mechanism for like-minded groups and individuals to work together across a particular issue or constituency.”²³</p>	<p>Uptake is: the set of processes by which an idea or practice is “spread to and sustained in a larger context with renewable revenue sources over time”²⁴</p>
Underlying theory of change	<p><i>Toppling, transforming, and/or absorbing the institutional, cultural, and social pillars that prop up the status quo based on the needs of those most negatively affected by the current status quo²⁵ will result in meaningful, large scale change</i></p>	<p><i>Development, reorientation, or prioritization of ideas, methods, tools, and practices that are added to and renewed over time and used by actors who see themselves as connected to a group via a shared identity or goal will result in meaningful, large scale change</i></p>	<p><i>Development or strengthening of connections and solidarity among groups that are “bound” by a common concern, interest, or goal will result in meaningful, large scale change</i></p>	<p><i>Large-scale, institutionalized, and sustained use of practices by organizations over time will result in meaningful, large scale change</i></p>



	Social Movement Support	Field Building	Network Development/ Support	Uptake of Practices by Organizations
Key Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a broad alliance of actors who are connected by their experiences and/or their shared interest in a social change • Developing leadership that rests within a grassroots base of people who are negatively affected by the current status quo • Pursuing results that reflect the interests and priorities of communities most affected and that may evolve and shift over time • Building formal or informal mechanisms through which actors are able to deploy efforts that challenge the current status quo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing relevant body of research and evidence • Enhancing organizational and professional development systems • Establishing common vocabulary, new shared norms and narrative, proof points, and promising practices • Fostering alignment among a wide spectrum of actors (including researchers, advocates, communications professionals, practitioners, policymakers, funders, and others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing the means and motivation for individuals and organizations to connect • Establishing or illuminating shared/complementary interests, activities, or agendas • Establishing mechanisms for managing relationships and information exchange • Building/harnessing capacity of those in the network to interact with one another and spread information or ideas to others outside the network • Building/expanding the infrastructure to sustain and grow connections and communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting an innovative organizational approach or practice for addressing an issue or driving change • Establishing mechanisms to disseminate information and technical assistance • Building infrastructure for new sites of uptake • Creating a strong enabling environment to support uptake
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of restorative justice philosophy and approaches in criminal justice reform • Collective efforts against violence and systemic racism toward black people (#BlackLivesMatter) • Collective efforts to shift norms and policies about sexual harassment in the workplace (#MeToo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to improve, standardize, coordinate, and align efforts in a particular area of work—for example, early childhood/early learning or end-of-life care • Efforts to take up or strengthen evidence-based medicine • Use of constituent feedback to inform, adjust, and improve institutional practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network of practitioners working together to ensure an equitable, high-quality, public education system • Network of gender data specialists seeking to surface/overcome limitations of certain data sets • Network of funders and evaluators working together to ensure high-quality, meaningful evaluation supports philanthropic learning and strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to help people become better producers and users of scientific evidence • Efforts to encourage businesses to take up practices that will have a positive impact on workers, communities, and the environment • Efforts to help more early childhood educators use practices that promote school readiness, including social and emotional development

Understanding What Types of Changes to Expect

Different social change approaches have *meaningfully different underlying theories of change for achieving their ultimate goals*. Therefore, they may also manifest meaningfully different outcomes—or sequences of outcomes—along the way to realizing a desired goal. Understanding the kinds of change you can reasonably expect in the near and longer term can be a way to usefully differentiate between whether you are truly supporting the building of a field versus supporting a social movement, for example. Table 3, following, describes some of the short-term and longer-term outcomes that could be expected as a result of supporting different social change strategies and approaches.

It is important to note that these social change approaches are not typically direct services. Rather, they encompass activities that focus on capacity building, practice changes, how individuals or groups relate to one another, policy changes, resource allocation, and the like. The outcomes most relevant to these types of activities occur at the systems level. Systems-level changes can be hard to name, and they tend to be overlooked in favor of more relatable longer-term changes—often identified as changes

among populations or communities—and systems-level changes are frequently discounted as too “process-y.” Yet systems changes are significant, often hard won, and reflect the critical enabling conditions for advancing durable longer-term social change.²⁶ In any social change effort, it’s important to clarify and ensure understanding about expected systems-level changes, as well as how these are the most relevant outcomes of planned strategies.

As social change efforts progress and important systems-level changes are realized, the focus on population- or community-level change is more reasonable and outcomes such as change in a given population’s health, economic, or educational outcomes may become more relevant and useful.²⁷ While changes among people or places may be easier to count and easier to grasp, it is important to name and track intermediate systems-level outcomes to understand whether and how social change strategies are directly contributing to population or community changes by fostering systems-level conditions that are necessary to attain longer-term impact.

Systems changes are significant, often hard won, and reflect the critical enabling conditions for advancing durable longer-term social change.

Table 2 – Comparison of Outcomes Across Social Change Approaches



	Social Movement Support	Field Building	Network Development/ Support	Promoting Uptake of Practices by Organizations
Definition	<p>Movements are: “Sustained groupings that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, that maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and that build for a long-term transformation in power.”²⁸</p>	<p>A field is: “a community of organizations and individuals working together to solve a common set of problems, develop a common body of theory and knowledge, or advance and apply common practices.”²⁹</p>	<p>A network is: “a group of individuals or organizations connected through meaningful relationships, that have space for self-organization, and that leverage new technologies for visualization, connection, and collective action.”³⁰ In the social change space, networks “provide the mechanism for like-minded groups and individuals to work together across a particular issue or constituency.”³¹</p>	<p>Uptake is: A process by which an idea or practice is “spread to and sustained in a larger context with renewable revenue sources over time.”³²</p>
Key Short-Term Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened internal movement capacity (e.g., story, strategy, structure) • Strengthened people power (e.g., grassroots base, general public) • Changes in network power • Changes in institutional power • Changes in narrative power³³ 	<p>Changes among field actors (includes individuals, groups, or organizations):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of and access to relevant data and research • Increased technical skills • Increased commitment to do/ sustain what’s needed to ensure the strength of a field • Greater agreement among field actors re: a shared agenda and goals • Increased coordination and alignment – e.g., regular and/ or strategic information sharing among field actors, cross-fertilization of field actors’ insights and knowledge, aligned/ mutually reinforcing actions or practice across actors in the field 	<p>Changes in network actors’ capacity and ability to usefully participate in the network’s purpose (includes individuals, groups, or organizations):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased capacity to engage in network functions • Increased capacity to advance network goals • Increased access to information, knowledge, and resources <p>Changes in network characteristics: identity, operations, form, or ability to adapt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members demonstrate increased shared identity/ purpose/ goals • Increased connectivity between members 	<p>Changes among stakeholders expected to take up new practices (primarily organizations):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness or knowledge about new/enhanced practice among key stakeholders and what it takes to implement • Increased buy-in and support for uptake of new/enhanced practice among organizational leaders and decision makers • Increased stakeholder capacity and resources to engage in new/ enhanced practices • Increased supports necessary to promote or maintain uptake or spread of practice – e.g., processes to test and refine practice, technologies, training/ technical assistance

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number and diversity of stakeholders who participate in or contribute to the field, including those affected by the field's issue(s) • Increased utility of the knowledge base • Established field leadership that includes representation of communities most affected by issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size and structure of network increasingly matches and is driving network purpose/goals • Network structure supports increased/optimized transfer of information, knowledge, and resources within the network • Increased participation/ leadership by those most affected by the network's issue • Network structure allows for useful/necessary adaptation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in internal resource allocation to support desired practices • Increased/broader demonstration of new/enhanced practice – e.g., increased uptake of practices across multiple organizations
<p>Key Longer-Term Outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased political rights • Shifts in power • Improvements in conditions within communities, habitats, or ecosystems, as defined by the people effected by the issue 	<p>Field-level changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norms, standards, and practices are increasingly adopted, upheld, and adapted by relevant actors/ sectors • Increased/maintained nimbleness of a field to usefully evolve and adapt over time • Enhanced/maintained field support structures, e.g., information clearinghouses, professional development organizations • Increased effectiveness of a field in advancing ultimate aims <p>Systems-level changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption/implementation of policies that support a field's operating environment • Sustained public/private supports that ensure the field's ongoing strength and effectiveness of a field, e.g., resource commitments, defenders/champions 	<p>Changes that reflect advancement of a network's intent and purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater innovation or greater capacity within a particular system or sphere of work • Evidence of a new "brand" or way of describing a particular practice or a group • Increased effectiveness of a network in advancing ultimate aims 	<p>Systems-level changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased codification of useful new practices • Changes in norms regarding expected practice across multiple organizations, networks, or systems • Increased and broadened transfer of knowledge that informs new/enhanced practice across networks or sectors • Increased infrastructure to support uptake and spread of practices, e.g., policies, organizational structures, resources • Changes that reflect advancement of social impact: • Widespread uptake of practices is advancing large-scale population or environmental changes

Exploring Overlaps

We are the first to admit it: distinguishing between various social change approaches is an inherently messy business. This is primarily because social change approaches do *overlap* with one another in ways that can blur distinctions. **We see two key types of overlap:**

- 1. Social change approaches can be aligned or simultaneously working toward shared goals.**
- 2. There are similar activities and short-term outcomes across different approaches.**

We think it is precisely because of their “soft” edges that social change approaches can be so easily conflated and why differentiating between approaches can feel challenging. We describe each of these “overlaps” in more detail below.

Social Change Approaches Can Be Aligned or Simultaneously Working Toward Shared Goals

Many of the problems that funders and other social change leaders seek to address are large scale and deeply entrenched—and are therefore likely to require a range of different types of resources, interventions, and approaches in order to be ameliorated and, ultimately, resolved. And, as social issues continuously evolve in response to a plethora of interventions, external dynamics, or other facets of the complex adaptive systems in which they occur, different resources, interventions, or approaches – or combinations of these – may be optimal at different points in time. As such, multiple social change approaches seeking to advance similar goals may be implemented in alignment or in parallel to respond to particular external dynamics. Take, for example, the goal that more children demonstrate readiness for school via strong social and emotional development. A field-building effort in a particular state may be responsive to the need to deliver training and support to early childhood educators to enhance their capacity to implement promising new curricula, and build teaching practices that foster social-emotional development and positive relationships. Simultaneously, there could be efforts to promote the uptake and spread of the promising curricula and teaching practices more broadly via engagement with national early education professional associations who can then endorse and encourage these practices among their members.

These efforts can usefully intersect and align around the specific outcome of practice change and ideally accelerate change. In this case, promoting the uptake and spread of practice could be implemented in alignment with or parallel to field-building efforts to pursue a shared outcome of changes in early childhood instructional practice, albeit via different underlying theories of change.

Social Change Approaches Have Similar and Short-Term Outcomes

Another point of potential confusion is the fact that different social change approaches encompass some similar activities and short-term outcomes. For example, activities to build connections among individuals and organizations are common to multiple social change approaches. The network development approach explicitly seeks changes in the ways that individuals and/or organizations connect to one another; this is fundamental to network development’s theory of change, i.e., connections between individuals or organizations are believed to be the primary way to advance a certain goal. At times, implementation of a network development approach may focus on creating connections where they don’t yet exist. Other social change approaches may also seek to create connections between people as a way to achieve their specific aims:

- + Fields typically build connections between groups to either develop or advance ideas and practices.
- + Those supporting uptake of practices might promote greater connections between individuals or organizations to drive the practice changes they seek to promote.

Social change approaches may also undertake activities aimed at similar kinds of outcomes—for example, widespread changes in practice. The “promoting uptake” approach explicitly focuses on practice change, though movements might also seek practice change—for example, the widespread changes in policing sought by #BlackLivesMatter advocates. Or field-building efforts may encompass a desire for change among member nonprofit organizations’ listening and responsiveness to their constituents’ feedback. Not surprisingly, similarities in activities and outcomes can lead to conflation

between approaches, though there are key differences underlying the approaches of promoting practice uptake, movements, and fields.

Table 3, following, is intended to illustrate overlap among different social change approaches. Reading across the

rows, you can see how particular approaches might have similar activities. Reading down the columns, you can see how one type of approach might be implemented in alignment with or parallel to other social change approaches to advance similar or shared goals.

Table 3 – Overlap Across Social Change Approaches

	Field Building Strategy	Network Development	Promote the Uptake of Practices among Organizations
Underlying Theory of Change	<i>Well-established and commonly held ideas, methods, tools, and practices are added to and renewed over time and used by actors who see themselves as connected via a shared identity.</i>	<i>An interconnected group is “bound” by a common concern, interest, or social goal.</i>	<i>Organizations sustain the use of large-scale, institutionalized practices over time.</i>
Implementing a field building may include ...		Building or activating connections among key stakeholders to quickly and efficiently spread ideas or research, strengthen the shared identity among a group or constituency that would be part of a field, and/or increase awareness of and support for shared practices that advance a field’s development or maturation.	Promoting field organizations’ willingness to take up standards of practices or implementation of shared methods, tools, and practices so as to advance or strengthen a field’s development or achievement of its goals.
Using a network approach may include ...	Deepening connections among those within and across fields to enhance groups’ sense that they are “bound” by common concerns and/or the degree of connectedness across adjacent groups with shared goals.		Developing/enhancing existing connections among individuals or groups in order to efficiently diffuse ideas and practices or promote the uptake and spread of new/desired practices across a wide array of organizations.
Promoting uptake/spread of ideas or practices may include ...	Reinforcing ideas or knowledge being developed or spread through field-building efforts or influencing cultivation of new knowledge or norms that would influence the uptake of new practices.	Utilizing or strengthening networks through which information about desirable ideas or practices are spread and through which support for uptake and implementation can be provided.	

If you have become clearer on which approach you are using and want to dig in deeper on key frameworks and measurement considerations, you can check out the specific guidance we have developed for each of these in [our accompanying modules](#).

The fluid and dynamic nature of seeking large-scale positive changes means that overlaps across social

change approaches are inevitable. While this inevitability can complicate the work, we believe that being clear about your *primary intent*—the goals being sought and the particular pathway(s) to advance goals—promotes clarity regarding a strategy’s key components as well as expectations for change. This clarity provides maximum potential to contribute to positive change in the world.

Considering Power and Control

Funders are not disinterested parties to the change they seek; foundations typically create strategies that reflect their own strengths, worldview, types of expertise, personal experiences, and levels of risk tolerance. Some of these reflect a foundation’s history, the interests of its founders, or the interests of trustees who may represent the companies or corporations from which a foundation’s wealth was generated. Using a foundation’s orientations and resources as a guide, staff are typically pressed to develop and advance clear strategies via funding envelopes that cover a few years’ time and defined milestones that signal progress along the way.

While considering power and relationship to affected communities is imperative to movement support work, we think funders have opportunities to reflect on their power and priorities relative to any large-scale social change effort, not just social movements. While field building, network development, and efforts to promote the uptake of practices by organizations do not inherently require community-driven priorities, we believe there are opportunities for funders to support social change efforts in ways that more consistently reflect principles of equity. Signals that equity is manifest in social change efforts include the following:³⁴

- + Affected populations and communities have voice and power in determining social change strategies and outcomes.
- + Strategies and activities are informed by diverse perspectives that reflect multiple disciplines, beliefs, and types of personal, interpersonal, and technical expertise.
- + Strategies are culturally appropriate.
- + There is transparency and recognition of structural and systems-level drivers of historic and current inequity.

- + Strategies and desired outcomes address, disrupt, and overcome inherent inequity, including that which has been perpetuated by social systems, structures, and policies.

For any social change strategy, funders can consider the following questions in terms of how their approaches and efforts actively promote equity and work to disrupt inequitable systems:

- + Who is defining the issue toward which social change efforts are being made, and who is identifying ways it can or should be addressed? To what degree does this include those most affected by the issue?
- + Who is engaged and included in efforts to understand the existing landscape or context? How have historic and structural factors been considered?
- + Who has a seat at the table when it comes to defining a common agenda or set of shared values? Who is missing?
- + Who is funding being directed to? To what degree do these organizations and individuals bring personal expertise in the topic or issue at hand? To what degree is a funder preferring to work with organizations that “look and feel” like their own, versus being willing to be uncomfortable and/or have their own perceived expertise de-centered?
- + If efforts involve network or coalition building, who is part of those networks and coalitions and do all members have the opportunity to participate fully and authentically?
- + If efforts involve research or knowledge generation, do they explicitly address issues of equity?
 - » Who is being funded for research?

- » How is expertise being defined, and who is considered an “expert”? Which sources of knowledge are being drawn upon?
- » How accessible is knowledge to diverse audiences?
- + If efforts involve capacity and leadership development, who has access to those opportunities?
 - » Do certain organizations require additional supports and capacities?
 - » Do products, materials, and trainings explicitly address issues of race and equity?
 - » Are they accessible to all audiences?
- + Are there barriers for certain groups to participating? How do efforts attempt to ameliorate these barriers?
- + Is your foundation undergoing its own deep reflection at the personal, staff and trustee level about equity, privilege, and your own best role as a funder?

These are just a few considerations for funders to consider in order to build in equity from the beginning, rather than having to retrofit away from a white dominant approach over time.

Learning and Tracking Progress

Although this work takes place in complex, dynamic contexts where it can be hard to see progress, there are still ways to implement measurement and learning along the way.

Regardless of approach, all of the social change approaches we have described ultimately seek positive change for large numbers of people, communities, species, and ecosystems. But because these approaches also seek changes in organizations, practices, and/or policies to achieve impact at scale, measuring progress within social change approaches is different than understanding progress in a program that seeks impact by

providing direct services. Additionally, because changes in organizations, practices, and policies occur in dynamic contexts, building in ways to learn and adapt along the way can strengthen the likelihood of success by surfacing necessary or promising adaptations. Here we lay out a few key considerations for how to effectively learn along the way and track progress when implementing any of the social change approaches.³⁵

Embrace Systems Thinking

Like *movement*, the term *systems* is used in different ways. Sometimes the term describes the unit of change for social interventions—for example, organizations, social beliefs and norms, or policy are all types of systems-level changes. Other times it refers to the world's inherent complexity and stands as an acknowledgement that we all operate in interrelated landscapes, surrounded by elements that interact, sometimes unpredictably, to achieve an inherent or ascribed purpose.³⁶ We spoke to the former when describing important interim outcomes and foci of social change approaches; here, we are referring to the latter. When you embrace *systems thinking*, you are accepting that social change happens within systems that are beyond our direct control, and you must make decisions about how to navigate and operate within that complexity.

If you embrace systems thinking and complexity, there are a few ways to bring that to bear for the purposes of learning and tracking progress:³⁷

- + Learning and evaluating efforts must thoughtfully and explicitly consider the inter-relationships that exist between the parts of a system, the perspectives represented within the system, and the boundaries that are drawn for a particular effort. In other words, you can't understand how to make large-scale social change without understanding how a wide array of factors and stakeholders currently and historically relate to each other.
- + Systems adapt and respond to changes in context, whether these are external factors beyond an organization's control or the very efforts it supports. Systems are dynamic; therefore, employing ways to sense and gather

more real-time intelligence about what is happening along the way is important. Applying data to answer questions about strategies, their implementation, and the ways in which factors in the external environment are facilitating or impeding progress can help organizations more powerfully adapt their approaches and more successfully advance their aims.³⁸ It's useful to reflect on data, not just at the end of an effort but early on and at regular intervals throughout the implementation.

- + Because systems are often shaped by inherent racial, cultural, gender, socioeconomic, or other biases, it's critical to explicitly ask who or what might be overlooked, who benefits or is harmed, who has and does not have power, and what are the historical and contemporary forms of oppression or inequities that affect how the system behaves.

While you ultimately seek positive change for people, species, communities, and ecosystems at a large scale, social change happens within dynamic systems, and learning and measurement processes that don't adequately consider these factors will be less helpful in advancing progress.

One helpful analogy that captures the essence of complexity and systems thinking is the comparison of "finite" and "infinite" games.³⁹ Finite games like soccer, basketball, or hockey are bounded by playing fields, distinct teams, time limits, and rules. The rules are enforced, and there are clear winners and losers. We might argue that philanthropy's tendency is to operate with assumptions about success that reflect a finite game: investment and activities happen within a bounded "playing field," and a clear win can be achieved within a certain timeframe. In an infinite game, the playing field and the rules are undefined, unclear, and may change along the way. You don't know who is on your team, how much time you have to pursue

the game or achieve a goal, or what the signals are that you have "won" or "lost." This type of game mirrors the complex systems that constitute real life.

Infinite game seems like the right frame through which to view large-scale social change work. In a large-scale social change effort, no single grant or set of activities is certain to be the "right" way to achieve success, and timelines for success may be affected by factors that are unknown or unpredicted when grants or activities are decided upon. In this type of context, it's important to pause at intervals to better understand how implementation is going in relation to the playing field, what the signals of progress are, how the context may be evolving (or not) in important ways, what's possible to achieve given the external context, and what your next set of opportunities appear to be. This systems mindset is incredibly important to identifying and advancing powerful social change strategies, and in order to effectively learn and track progress, you also need complementary measurement, learning, and evaluation approaches that are responsive to an infinite game reality.

Specific methods and approaches that can help with this kind of more regular, ongoing learning can include before and after action reviews that facilitate intentional reflection and documentation of insights before and after important actions or events,⁴⁰ timely and strategic debriefs that follow an intense period of action or a specific data collection effort, systems mapping approaches (e.g., soft systems mapping), or facilitated reflection approaches that allow multiple, diverse perspectives about the landscape and the status of certain conditions or outcomes to emerge—for example, "data parties."⁴¹ There is also a growing body of literature devoted to evaluating systems and systems change efforts⁴², including those embedding equity.⁴³

Be Broad-Minded about What “Progress” Looks Like

While we all typically think of “progress” as a positive, directionally upward change (e.g., more children ready for school, more communities are food secure), in actuality progress can take different forms, depending on the existing status quo and the context within which the work is happening.⁴⁴ Beyond a positive upward trend connected to efforts you might be supporting, progress can also include the following:

- + Preventing setbacks when the status quo changes suddenly
- + “Holding the line” and maintaining desired conditions when the status quo is deteriorating
- + Decreasing change that is directionally negative but nonetheless palliative compared to a status quo that is deteriorating profoundly or rapidly

Beyond being mindful of the path progress might take (e.g., maintenance or lessened negative effect in addition to positive advancements), it’s important to consider what timelines for change are realistic given the scope of the work and change sought. In addition, this work occurs

in dynamic systems contexts, where multiple forces are at play, including those within and outside of actors’ direct influence. As we have all seen with COVID-19, external factors have tremendous implications for the pace of progress, and those dynamics are not static. While fostering necessary systems change can take time, social change efforts can also leverage sudden moments of opportunity to realize large gains more immediately.

When measuring and tracking progress it is important to do more than just note that “context matters.” While shifts in context can indeed affect the likelihood, pace, or extent of progress in a given time period, you can still measure achievement of expected short-term outcomes, including desired systems changes, outcomes that may reflect maintenance of a state or things that were stopped or avoided, as well as emergent outcomes that couldn’t have been or weren’t previously named or expected. In addition, it is useful to fully and adequately monitor and document changing contexts so it’s possible to more fully understand how context may be influencing results.

Consider a Range of Types of Contribution

Operating within systems and complexity means you probably can’t and shouldn’t expect to see linear positive progress that is fully attributable to any one actor or set of strategies. In a number of areas, such as advocacy and policy change, the fields of philanthropy and evaluation have therefore focused more on understanding the ways that different funders, grantees, or sets of actors help contribute to a particular change achieved rather than seeking to establish attributable change—that is, that change can wholly and only be tied to a particular set of activities or efforts. However, as Rhonda Schlangen and Jim Coe posited in their recent publication *No Royal Road*:

Finding and following the natural pathways in advocacy evaluation,⁴⁵ there are still ways we can get smarter about how to think about contribution. As they write, we need to think about contribution not as singular and additive (i.e., my grantees contributed to change, and we contributed to 80% of it) but rather combinational and dispositional (i.e., there are many actors contributing, and different actors contribute in different ways). While they are talking specifically about advocacy, we think this same mindset applies to these other social change approaches. They lay out a typology of contribution that can be useful regardless of the social change approach being implemented:

Typology of Possible Contribution	Description
Sole Actor	The sole actor calling for the change.
Primary Actor	The actor that coordinated the approach, corraling and organizing others.
Lead Contributor	An actor that made a leading contribution, was prominent throughout, stayed the course, and made a number of significant interventions.
Important Contributor	An actor that played an important role but may not have been vital to the result. There may be a case that the outcome would have happened anyway.
Seed Sower	The actor that initiated the campaign and sowed the seeds, which then took a life of their own. This makes their fingerprints on the final result difficult to see (but in a good way because of the momentum it generated).
Team Contributor	An actor that worked as part of a team, among whom it's difficult to disentangle who achieved what. Isolating the factors may not be possible and is probably not that helpful: it's the combinational effect that is key.
Over-the-Line Getter	An actor that made a discrete or niche, but undeniably vital, contribution.
Key Role Play	One of a small number of main players, each fulfilling a particular role. Each actor adds value; each is vital.

Source: Coe, J. & Schlagen, R. (2019). No Royal Road: Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation

Considering this set of contribution roles can help you have a broader and more holistic way of understanding how different stakeholders and organizations may play a role in large-scale social change efforts. Additionally, there are growing practices to support assessment of

contribution within complex, large-scale efforts, such as process tracing⁴⁶ and contribution analysis⁴⁷ which usefully expand the ways in which contribution can be understood and meaningfully evaluated.

Remember: Nothing Is Neutral

It can be too easy—even when embracing systems thinking and complexity—to view any effort to make change within the world as inherently good if we don't explicitly consider power, race, and other facets of oppression as well as questions about who is being oppressed or harmed and who is benefiting. These questions are equally relevant in choices and decisions about strategy as they are in choices about how to learn and track progress.

For any evaluation or learning effort, it is important to think about where power sits. Who is learning? Who are consumers of learning? Who is getting to select the questions being answered? Whose capacity is being

strengthened or supported, and whose is not? In what ways are principles of culturally responsive evaluation and equitable evaluation being brought to bear?

Culturally responsive evaluation “fully takes into account the culture of the program that is being evaluated. In other words, the evaluation is based on an examination of impacts through lenses in which the culture of the participants is considered an important factor, thus rejecting the notion that assessments must be objective and culture free, if they are to be unbiased. Moreover, a culturally responsive evaluation attempts to fully describe and explain the context of the program or project being evaluated. Culturally responsive

*evaluators honor the cultural context in which an evaluation takes place by bringing needed, shared life experience and understandings to the evaluation tasks at hand.*⁴⁸

Equitable evaluation has three principles:⁴⁹

1. Evaluation and evaluative work should be in service to equity.
2. Evaluative work can and should answer critical questions related to the following: ways in which historical and structural decisions have contributed to the condition to be addressed, the effect of a strategy on different populations, effects of a strategy on the

underlying systemic drivers of inequity, and the ways in which cultural context is tangled up in both the structural conditions and the change initiative itself.

3. Evaluative work should be designed and implemented commensurate with the values underlying equity work, including being multiculturally valid and oriented toward participant ownership.

Helping to keep these questions on the table and taking them into consideration for learning and measurement purposes will support work that could drive equitable social change.

Consider a Range of Types of Accountability

It is all true: social change efforts happen in complex systems, progress can look many different ways, equity should be baked into strategy and learning, and contribution can take different forms. These factors challenge our ability to be certain about whether, what, or how much action or change will happen, and when. Yet, expectations regarding the quantity or quality of action or change based on the resources provided are often the fundamental basis for accountability. And, you likely have the real need to think about accountability—to your strategy, program, or institution. It is reasonable to seek some accountability for resources provided. But as we highlighted a broader perspective around progress and contribution, we wonder if there is, in fact, a broader way to think about accountability, too:

- + How can you/your partners be accountable to the people you/they seek to help? To what degree are you and partners listening and responding to the real needs of their constituents?
- + How can organizations hold themselves accountable to equitable progress, not progress absent a focus on potential disparities among different populations? How can you build accountability around ensuring social change approaches don't ignore or intensify inequities?
- + How can organizations uphold accountability for effectively adapting when working in spaces that are dynamic and complex? How are organizations sensing,

responding to, or otherwise enhancing their work in the face of changing contexts? How are they practicing powerful learning and sharing that learning with others? How are theories of change getting sharper based on learning, or hypotheses becoming stronger and better supported?

- + How can organizations consider accountability to progress toward the ultimate goals rather than to specific, static short-term outcomes? While all of us operate with some implicit ways in which we think change will happen, how can we make decisions that will ultimately support progress toward the goal than move forward in lock-step with a plan, even if it is no longer optimal as conditions change?

These types of accountability do not align neatly with quantitative metrics or dashboards but exploring, establishing, and building upon these kinds of mindsets regarding accountability could ultimately foster greater impact.

For more advice on specific measurement considerations for field building, network development, or uptake of practices, see the [stand-alone modules](#) for each approach.⁵⁰

Concluding Thoughts

We believe that being clear about your primary intent—the goals being sought and the particular pathway(s) to advance goals—promotes clarity regarding a strategy's key components as well as expectations for change.

This piece came to be because we couldn't continue to hear phrases like "safe selfie movement" and not fear the myriad of negative impacts that might occur when funders or practitioners aren't clear, crisp, and intentional about what's meant by movement. Negative impacts include potential movement capture or gentrification as well as inefficiencies and misalignment between funders, organizations, and evaluators, and—most importantly—the risk that more people and places are worse off, inequitably, for longer. There's risk that this paper could be viewed as an academic exercise to define terminology; however, we wrote it because we don't want to see the many important, ongoing efforts to improve society and people's lives falter, fumble, or spin without realizing results.

We're aware that achieving meaningful and equitable social change is not a purely scientific undertaking. Regardless of the approach taken, social change approaches often overlap, and maintaining too big a focus on striving for crisp lines in the midst of false dichotomies can be unhelpful. As funders and practitioners seek to achieve a better world for all, there is certainly room—and necessity—for emergence, innovation, trials, and testing of new ideas or ways of working. And to truly embrace systems thinking, there is a need to consider strategies in relationship to their contexts and to be responsive to the system as it changes and responds in kind. All of these things can make it hard

to clarify an intentional and strategic course of action.

But we have been in this work long enough to know that sometimes things are fuzzy, not because work is emergent or there is a desire for greater responsiveness but because there is truly a lack of clear thinking. Sometimes, that's because those involved in social change say one thing but actually mean something else, and different stakeholders in a social change effort ascribe yet another meaning to what's said—thus stakeholders end up working at cross-purposes or working inefficiently because they are unable to align and get on the same page. And, ultimately, this means that these stakeholders fail to make progress toward the goals they seek. While maybe this is just inconvenient or unfortunate, real people's lives are impacted through inaction or poorly designed efforts—and that's hard for us to live with.

We know we don't have all the answers, and this paper won't do everything needed for more large-scale social change strategies to have strong designs, strong systems responses, and effective ways to learn and measure progress. We hope that this piece may inspire others to identify important gaps in understanding of these strategies, others we didn't or couldn't tackle, and their unique needs for measurement and learning. We believe that doing so will help a variety of approaches achieve and sustain meaningful, equitable change.

So Now What? Going Deeper on Approaches to Advance Large-Scale Social Change



Field Building

Maybe you've finished reading the brief and gotten clarity about the social change approach you are undertaking. Maybe you've realized that what you've been calling a movement isn't really a movement. Maybe you are more certain that what you are really doing to advance social change is building a network or a field. If that's the case, we want to give you a few more tools specific to these approaches in hopes of strengthening positive change that could result from the work.

We've created stand-alone "modules" to provide more specific, useful information for each of the social change approaches we identified as often conflated with movement language:

+ Field building

+ Network development

+ Promoting uptake of practices by large numbers of organizations

These pieces can be read in different ways, depending on what's most meaningful to you: as a continuation of the overall piece, as a set, or individually as stand-alone resources that delve

deeper into each social change approach. Each section includes the following:

1. A description of the approach and its assumptions
2. Key concepts and frameworks that we think can help funders develop and implement stronger strategies and activities
3. Suggestions for how equitable principles can be intentionally addressed and incorporated into strategies and activities
4. An overview of how the approach relates to other social change approaches
5. Key outcomes to look for
6. Insights to aid ongoing measurement and learning

While these can't and won't address every question you may have about these approaches, we do hope they will give you a taste of some of the key things to know and point you toward more resources that may be useful to building and supporting impactful social change work.



Network Development



Promoting Uptake of Practices by large numbers of organizations

Endnotes

- ¹ Shapiro, Ari. 2019. "Hundreds Have Died In Selfie-Related Deaths Since 2011." NPR, May 6. <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/06/720800572/hundreds-have-died-in-selfie-related-deaths-since-2011>.
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- ⁴ See David Aberle's four types of social movements in Aberle, David. 1966. *The Peyote Religion among the Navaho*. Chicago: Aldine.
- ⁵ Pastor, Manuel and Rhonda Ortiz. 2009. "Making Change: How Social Movements Work and How to Support Them." Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, University of Southern California. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/pastorortiz.pdf>
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