Is it practical to use the social movements stages to guide the evaluation of social movements? Why or why not? How is it useful? How is it not useful?

**Movement Stages**

The New World Foundation, a national community foundation working from the bottom up to build coalitions and create local alliances, identifies four stages of movement and movement building (The New World Foundation, 2003). These stages were built on to provide stage-specific evaluation guidance by Barbara Masters and Torie Osborn (2010).

- **Stage 1**: Building Movement Infrastructure – Organizing centers, anchor institutions, and networks mobilize new constituencies or a broad base of activists with the most at stake.
- **Stage 2**: Building Identity and Intention – The vision is developed, which gives urgency and guides and deepens participation. This is not a laundry list of demands, but an aspirational social agenda.
- **Stage 3**: Social Combustion: The “Movement Moment” – Transformative and collective, this highly visible time produces a profound shift in moral legitimacy and expands democratic terrain.
- **Stage 4**: Consolidation or Desipation – Movements flow and ebb, and the fruits of change become incorporated into society as policies and new attitudes, or the movement dissipates.

**The Movement Cycle**

The movement cycle was created by the Movement NetLab, “a practice-centered ‘think-make-and-do tank’” that is “comprised of movement-based activists, organizers, and researchers whose goal is to help develop powerful conceptual and practical tools that help facilitate the growth and effectiveness of social movements.”
Stages, Movement Building Elements, and Sample Benchmarks

This is an excerpt of a table that provides sample benchmarks for movement building elements in each of the four stages (Building Movement Infrastructure, Building Identity and Intention, The Movement Moment, and Consolidation or Dissipation) (Masters and Osborn, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Movement</th>
<th>MOVEMENT BUILDING ELEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base Building Sample Benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Infrastructure Building</td>
<td>Participation and membership of both paid and volunteer leaders increase in base-building organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection time and assessment are built into movement activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources


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Contemporary scholarship on the structure of social movements has focused on the primacy of networks over organizations. And yet, many practical constraints—such as philanthropic funding and evaluation—focus on the organization as the unit of analysis. How should evaluators approach this dilemma? What can be learned by focusing the evaluation on the organization? Or on the network? Or both?

**What’s the difference between organizations and networks?**

**Social Movement Organizations (SMOs):**
- Professionalized, independent entities with distinct claims, tactics, constituencies, and alliances.
- Historically, the social movement literature has focused on SMOs as the primary vehicle for collective action—intentional actions carried out with some degree of coordination among a group of people who share common concerns, identities, core values or goals.

**Networks**
- Networks are not static entities but are dynamic, complex, and evolving.
- Network structure tends to be informal and made up of a diverse range of SMOs.
- Their characteristics, structure, or strategies may change depending on movement needs.

**Why are networks essential to social movements?**

There is increasing acceptance that networks are foundational to social movements and critically important to movement success. Networks provide a mechanism for individuals and organizations from across issue areas and constituencies to communicate, coordinate, and collaborate. They also facilitate the diffusion of information throughout movements—specifically tactics, strategies, events, and framing—and help scale and sustain movements. Alternatively, individual organizations often operate in siloes or in competition with one another for resources, which restricts their ability to work together, build long-term power, and scale up efforts. Bridging these siloes and pooling wisdom, assets, and resources is key to building power for social movements.
What’s the problem with focusing on networks?

Traditional funding and evaluation approaches have frequently focused on organizations as the primary unit of analysis. Funding practices often require potential grantees to demonstrate their uniqueness and expertise on increasingly narrow niches, whereas movements depend on collaboration and a sense of the collective. Similarly, existing approaches to evaluating policy change advocacy do not adequately capture the development of movements into powerful social forces, the organic and exponential engagement that can occur at later stages of movements, the broader societal changes that movements can catalyze, or the complicated dynamics within movements of movement building organizations and other actors.

So, what should we do? How should evaluators approach this dilemma? What can be learned by focusing the evaluation on the organization? Or on the network? Or both?

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Given your background or experience in evaluation, what other tools or approaches could be used for evaluating movements? What would be some limitations in evaluating social movements?

Why are movements hard to measure?

- They are amorphous and continually changing
- They are larger than organizations
- They encompass diverse actors and actions
- They lack accepted metrics of success to show progress

What are the existing evaluation approaches?

A shared common language


This paper suggests a framework of metrics for base-building strategies and provides a good argument for why metrics are important in social movements. It distinguishes between measuring process (e.g., inputs and activities) vs. progress (e.g., indicators, measures, benchmarks) and defines transactions (quantifiable markers) and transformations (changes effected in people, organizations, and movements, sometimes invisible).

Movement building benchmarks tied to the stages of a movement


Five core elements of movement building are identified: organizing an authentic base, leadership, vision and ideas, alliances, and advocacy infrastructure. The authors propose a framework for evaluating movement building which can help funders identify outcomes and track progress throughout a movement’s stages.
Movement capacity assessment


This tool is designed to be used as a planning and tracking tool for social movements. It is also intended to help facilitate conversations about which stage of development a movement is at, identify areas that need to be strengthened and think through how to strengthen those areas. This tool uses a rating system but it is not intended for comparing social movements since each is very context dependent.

Discussion/reflection guide


The tool asks guiding questions about the process and outcomes of the four areas of movement building: policy change, leadership development, communications, and relationship building. These indicators were developed with reproductive justice organizations, social justice organizations doing reproductive justice work, and individuals and groups engaged in organizing and advocacy using the reproductive justice framework in mind. It is meant to be modified for individual use.

Evaluation tools/guidance that can be drawn from related sub-fields like organizing, policy change, leadership development, etc.

What are some limitations to consider?

- Definitions of social movements are contested.
- What it means to fund/support social movements is contested.
- Assessment approaches may be specific to a movement or issue area and may not be developed to be generalizable across movements.

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